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Gearin, Alex K., Calavia Sáez, Oscar, Chaumeil, Jean-Pierre, Erikson, Philippe, Howes, David, Peluso, Daniela M., Shepard Jr, Glenn H, Pirjo Kristiina, Virtanen, Gearin, Alex K and Calavia Sáez, Oscar (2021) Senses of Self, Society, and Cosmos. *Current Anthropology*, 62 (2). pp. 138-163. ISSN 0011-3204.

DOI

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Altered Vision

Ayahuasca Shamanism and Sensory Individualism

Alex K. Gearin and Oscar Calavia Sáez

Notions of visualism and individualism have long been employed to elucidate the contours of Western subjectivity. It is therefore not surprising to find the indigenous Amazonian shamanic brew ayahuasca being adopted by Australian neoshamanic practitioners as a medicine that provides personalized visions delivering unambiguous moral import. While this adoption represents a radically new style of its practice, ayahuasca drinking emerged from indigenous societies characterized by robust forms of individualism and visualism of a different kind. Indigenous approaches to ayahuasca drinking have emphasized synesthetic and socially partible configurations of personhood while entangling the visionary content of inebriation in a morally ambiguous field of everyday life. In this article, we argue that the individual of ayahuasca neoshamanism reproduces European Enlightenment modes of property ownership by integrating visions into the self as inalienable objects of healing. The article illustrates how ayahuasca vision is a marker of divergent forms of individualism among indigenous Amazonian and Australian neoshamanic groups.

A psychedelic strand of neoshamanism proliferated during the early twenty-first century with the global dissemination of the potent Amazonian brew ayahuasca.¹ Despite featuring in *The Yage Letters*, published in 1963 by influential beat writers William S. Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg, ayahuasca drinking was not adopted by the large psychedelic counterculture of 1960s North America and Europe. Psychedelic enthusiasts of this milieu were more interested in consuming LSD in California (Lee and Shlain 2001), traveling to Huautla, Mexico, for Mazatecan psilocybin mushrooms (Feinberg 2003:152), or, to a much lesser extent, smoking synthetic DMT (St. John 2015), a potent molecule found in most ayahuasca brews. Decades before the counterculture, syncretic and urbanized ayahuasca churches centered on the consumption of ayahuasca had been developing in Acre, west Brazil. Mixing elements of Christianity, European spiritism, West African animism, and Amazonian shamanism, the churches expanded to middle-class metropolitan contexts across Brazil, particularly since the 1970s, and then throughout North America, Europe, and various other Western locales, particularly since the 1990s (Labate and MacRae 2010). Spirituality groups from the United States began traveling to Peru for shamanic tourism and ayahuasca ceremonies during the early 1980s (Joralemon 1990; Ott 1993:224), representing the incipient elements of ayahuasca neoshamanism, which began to develop rapidly after around 2005 (Fotiou 2016:160).² Accelerated by celebrity endorsements on popular

media channels and the publicizing of scientific research that suggests potential mental health benefits, ayahuasca drinking has become probably the largest neoshamanic phenomenon in Western societies. Against doubts from within anthropology over whether neoshamanism would still exist today (Atkinson 1992:323), the global popularity of ayahuasca suggests that it is thriving. Iquitos, a remote city in northern Peru, is the ayahuasca neoshamanic mecca. International visitors embark on pilgrimages in search of authentic ayahuasca healing and shamanic experiences (de Rios 2008; Fotiou 2014; Peluso 2016; Winkelman 2005). The development of ayahuasca neoshamanism may be attributed to how it renders an experiential mysticism via the broader reinvention and commodification of

tices to indigenous spirituality, neoshamanism foregrounds altered states of consciousness as modes of personal empowerment (Wallis 1999:42) that privilege individual experiences. Ayahuasca neoshamanism is linked to the shamanic tourism contexts of remote Peru and elsewhere (Fotiou 2010; Sharrock 2017; Winkelman 2005) where ayahuasca apprentices from North America, Europe, Australia, and other Western locales train with indigenous or urbanized “mestizo” *vegetalista* specialists and then return home to provide ceremonial services. The study of ayahuasca neoshamanism in this article draws primarily from Gearin’s fieldwork among Australian ayahuasca circles, yet it likely has explanatory purchase elsewhere given these global networks and the frequent participation of Australian ceremony specialists in Europe and North America. Emerging somewhat from “psychonautic” social contexts (Tupper 2008:299) and incorporating an individualist eclecticism reminiscent of New Age spiritualities (Heelas 1996) yet with a nature or “plant spirit” bent, ayahuasca neoshamanism has expanded rapidly during the previous two decades and generally represents a different social category from those of the Brazil ayahuasca churches (e.g., Santo Daime and União do Vegetal) with regard to social, cosmological, and ritual formations.

1. The globally popular ayahuasca brew is typically made by boiling the liana *Banisteriopsis caapi* and the shrub *Psychotria viridis*.

2. By neoshamanism, we refer to what Jane Atkinson (1992) termed the “new shamanism” (322), which emerged in the counterculture of North America and Europe during the 1960s. While tracing its beliefs and prac-

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indigenous Amazonian rituals (Calavia Sáez 2004), whereby the attitudes and beliefs of the global market inform styles of indigenous authenticity.

Outside the Amazon rain forest yet connected to it through flows of people, ideas, and capital, there are interconnected networks of ayahuasca groups established in Western locales near Ibiza (Spain), Los Angeles (United States), and Byron Bay (Australia), to name a few, that have each hosted thousands of ayahuasca ceremonies during the past 20 years. We emphasize that these sites are operating “near” cities because, unlike other cosmopolitan forms of neoshamanism located in metropolitan and urban settings (Humphrey 1999; Lindquist 1997), a majority of these ayahuasca ceremonies are intentionally conducted in natural environments away from densely populated human settlements. A distinction between sacred nature and toxic society and the valorization of categories of the organic appear to permeate conceptions of well-being and illness among neoshamanic ayahuasca drinkers. In this social milieu, descriptions of the causes of illness and disease often concern a separation of the psyche from nature. Industrialized society and anthropogenic activity are often positioned as sources of spiritual malaise and health problems (Fotiou 2010; Gearin 2017). Ayahuasca works to heal the spiritual lacuna of society by helping the individual reconnect to vitalizing natural energies that empower personalized spiritual visions.

In the context of the global circulation of ayahuasca, romantic descriptions of ancient and wise shamans living deep in the Amazon rain forest tend to define who is the most authentic, real, and powerful healer. Indigenous shamans are framed as holders of natural wisdom and ancient techniques of plant-spirit healing. It is not without irony that Amazonian indigenous and mestizo people have frequently equated ayahuasca to the latest white man’s technology they have come to know: ayahuasca is the forest cinema (Gow 1995) or the Indian’s TV (Calavia Sáez 2006:154); drinking it gives access to futurist underwater cities filled with skyscrapers where shamans obtain their powers (see Arévalo Varela 1986) and to a vast array of tools like X-ray machines, large bright surgical lights, hypodermic needles (Brown 1988; Chaumeil 1992:109; Greene 1998), and jet fighters and flying saucers (see Luna and Amaringo 1999:34–35; worth seeing also the paintings by Pablo Amaringo on pp. 83, 121).

According to popular Western representations, ayahuasca comes from thousands of years of indigenous tradition and is the “master healing plant” of the Amazonian tribes.³ Many indigenous groups, however, appear to have adopted ayahuasca very recently. The notorious rubber-tapping industries

in nineteenth-century Brazil, Peru, and Colombia radically transformed indigenous societies. Through mestizo labor networks, ayahuasca appears to have been widely disseminated among indigenous settlements (Brabec de Mori 2011; Gow 1996). Many indigenous groups plainly state that they received ayahuasca fairly recently from Indian, mestizo, and even white neighbors. For example, this is the case for the Yanesha (Santos-Granero 1991:117), the Cashibo (Frank 1994:181), and the Kulina, who received ayahuasca from the Kanamari, who received it from the Kaxinawá (Lorrain 1994:132). In his pioneering ethnography on the Kaxinawá—nowadays prominent specialists in ayahuasca—Capistrano de Abreu (1941 [1914]) does not even mention ayahuasca, even though he describes a shamanic session that used samaúma bark and various palm fruits (172–175). It seems fair to say that ayahuasca was but one psychoactive agent among many others that are reputed to be more powerful, such as datura or yowi (samaúma sap). Until their recent contact with Quechua-speaking colonials, the Huaorani (Miller-Weisberger 2000:75) did not know of the vision-producing ayahuasca recipe, but they knew the ayahuasca vine *Banisteriopsis caapi*, which they used in entirely other ways. Similarly, the Matsigenka, who have long used the ayahuasca vine, learned of and began using it with the *Psychotria* vision-inducing plants only in recent decades (Shepard 2005:201–203). While global ayahuasca networks are quick to adopt and circulate information about the medical benefits of ayahuasca from scientific studies, the “almost heretical” suggestion coming from anthropology (Shepard 2014:16) that much indigenous ayahuasca use is quite recent has not been adopted. This reluctance is accompanied by the fact that ayahuasca was largely introduced to beatnik and New Age networks of Western societies through urbanized healers embedded in a “colossal mixing” zone of histories (Chaumeil 1992:101) that includes influences from Christianity and Western esoteric traditions. Ayahuasca neoshamanism, very fond of using scientific vocabulary, strongly rejects any ties with popular religion, drawing its origins from a sacred naturalism embodied in but not authored by Amazonian Indians.

Ayahuasca neoshamanism represents such a modification of Amazonian shamanism that analytic distinctions made for elucidating the latter may be applied to the former only in a heuristic sense. Yet such attempts, we suggest, can help illustrate the moral and social configurations of ayahuasca drinking in neoshamanic circles. Stephen Hugh-Jones (1996) pursued an analytic distinction between “horizontal” and “vertical” axes of Amazonian shamanism, roughly delineated along the lines of “shaman” and “priest.” On the one hand, shaman priests enjoy prestige and high status along a vertical axis wherein a morally unambiguous domain of esoteric knowledge contributes to social reproduction (Hugh-Jones 1996:33) through, for instance, the mastering of chants for initiation, birthing, and naming ceremonies that inform a hierarchy of generations through the powers of godlike figures or mythic ancestors (Hill 1993:79, 161). On the other hand, horizontal shamans are ambiguous figures practicing a cosmology of reciprocal exchange that is particularly important in mediating with

3. Ayahuasca was first described as a diabolic potion in writing by Jesuit missionaries in the late sixteenth century (Chantre y Herrera 1901 [1675]:80). No strong evidence of the ancient use of ayahuasca has emerged (Torres 2018:239), but the ceremonial use of similar tryptamine-rich psychoactive snuffs dating back 4,000 years has been found in the Andes and was reported across the Amazon Basin by explorers and missionaries from the mid-1600s on (Torres and Repke 2006:35, 61).

outsiders—whether human or nonhuman—that share a similar ontological level. This distinction is easily perceptible in the Rio Negro region of northwestern Amazonia, where different terms such as *yai* and *kumu* designate horizontal and vertical shamans. However, in most cases, the categories of vertical and horizontal are so blurred that Viveiros de Castro (2014:151–158) proposes instead an encompassing notion of “transversal” shamanism, built principally after the horizontal (unmarked, default) form. Our argument about indigenous Amazonian modes of altered vision is based, primarily, on that unmarked and default form, to be found among Native groups hardly interested in consistent social hierarchies, such as those of Panoan (Kaxinawá, Shipibo, Marubo), Arawakan (Matsigenka, Ashéninka, Piro), and Jivaroan (Shuar, Achuar, Awajun) language groups. In these cases, the ayahuasca drinker’s direct experience has a core value: the shaman learns much more from his visions than from an established hierarchy of knowledge. The horizontal forms extend themselves over the very region where recent hypotheses (Brabec de Mori 2011) situate the origins of current ayahuasca practices. The *vegetalismo* style of ayahuasca use emerged in this same region among descendants of the rubber and related industries. It pursued and developed a horizontal form of shamanism in which healers and spirits are ambiguous and potentially dangerous agents of sorcery (de Rios 1972; Gow 2001:139; Luna 1986). In recent decades, from this context emerged the nascent ayahuasca tourism industry and global ayahuasca neoshamanism networks where, as we argue in this paper, we find a novel vertical style of shamanism. A priestly shamanism, of course, fits the neoshamanic schema better. The Western spiritual quest involves the seeking of a Native strain of institutional authority that in most places never existed or that was eroded by previous waves of colonization. Neoshamanic ayahuasca drinkers in Australia perceive and interact with a benevolent, unambiguous being often termed “Mother Ayahuasca,” from which multiplicities of esoteric knowledge are articulated in social and metaphysical domains buffered from notions of sorcery and a cosmology of reciprocal exchange. Ayahuasca vision, in this new context, foregrounds the individual along personalized paths of healing and moral development.

Once translated into the new social and cultural contexts of Western societies, ayahuasca drinking has taken on manifold alterations and produced abundant equivocations. In this article, we focus on one significant domain of equivocation—possibly the main one—by examining the grounds of different cultural theories of ayahuasca vision while searching not for faithful translations in the neoshamanic adoptions of Amazonian shamanisms but for gaps and inconsistencies among modes of appropriation. Indigenous and nonindigenous ayahuasca drinkers may agree that the visions or the radical phenomenology that ayahuasca may facilitate can be ultimately ineffable or highly problematic for language (Rubenstein 2012; Shanon 2002). It is therefore no wonder that ayahuasca visions are the site of potent equivocations. How the equivocations of ayahuasca vision are shaped, dealt with, or socially produced in

different approaches reveals how different theories of ayahuasca vision are veritable theories of sociality. To this end, we first analyze sensory configurations and a moral sociality associated with ayahuasca use in indigenous Amazonia and then provide an ethnographic case study of the senses and moral sociality among ayahuasca neoshamanism circles in Australia.⁴ The article finishes with a discussion of how ayahuasca vision has helped configure different types of individualism among indigenous Amazonian and Western neoshamanic groups.

Ayahuasca and Social Topologies of the Sensorium

The existence of a pervasive ocular valorization in the sensorium of Western subjects has been proposed by twentieth-century historians, philosophers, and anthropologists (see Classen 1997a; Porcello et al. 2010:53–57). The association of ocularism with Western societies parallels seminal ethnographies on alternate modes of sensory configuration in different cultures around the world, where, for example, hearing, smelling, or balancing may be attributed greater cultural significance than seeing (Classen 1997b; Geurts 2002; Howes 1991). For Tim Ingold (2000), the visualism of Western societies emerges through a co-opting of vision in the service of objectivism and a transcended subject that constructs objects, such as natural things, through what he terms a “building perspective” (253). His research resonates with experimental studies that suggest that Westerners perceive the world in an analytic fashion, as populated by discrete objects as opposed to substantive relations in contexts (Nisbett and Miyamoto 2006). By not assuming a hard cultural determinism on the senses, Ingold’s theory can accommodate the ethnographic evidence of culturally unique types of visualism among indigenous societies, such as in indigenous Amazonia (Viveiros

4. Gearin conducted 24 months of intermittent ethnographic fieldwork on ayahuasca neoshamanic ceremonies and related social events in various locations on the east coast of Australia from 2011 to 2014. This included 30 retreat ceremonies, 40 unstructured interviews, and 105 qualitative responses to an Australia-wide email questionnaire. His research focused primarily on the oldest and largest network of neoshamanic ayahuasca drinkers in Australia and also included attending five alternate retreats, each conducted by different ritual specialists. Drinkers were predominantly of Anglo-Celtic and European descent; the average age was 35–45 (range, 18–76). Thirty-two percent of participants were therapists or healers or in health-related services, the dominant occupations, and 17% were artists or musicians; 28% were self-employed. The participants attended ayahuasca ceremonies, on average, once every three months. Two night retreats cost between AUD\$320 and AUD\$550. Given that the drinking of ayahuasca is currently criminalized in Australia, no informants or locations have been named. Calavia Sáez’s fieldwork among the Yaminawa (1992–1994) and Yawanawa (1998), both Panoan-speaking groups, was very instrumental to his understanding of the social contexts of ayahuasca practices. However, the shamanic discourse on vision was not his original main interest during fieldwork. The works of Lagrou and Deshayes on the Kaxinawá, Gow on Piro, Cesarino on Marubo, Chaumeil on Yagua, and Taylor on Achuar are nonetheless read here from his own field experience.

de Castro 2007:162), where the environment is perceived not in an objectivist fashion but relationally, as pregnant with nonhuman personhood.

Yet Amerindian cultures cannot be easily homogenized as ocularcentric. Although in many cases “Amerindian cultures evince a strong visual bias of their own [whereby] vision is often the model of perception and knowledge” (Viveiros de Castro 2007:162), in many other cases Amerindian people “attribute greater significance to hearing than to sight” (Santos-Granero 2006:62). The diverse sensory landscape of indigenous Amazonia can be observed in the variety of ways ayahuasca—the so-called vision-inducing potion—has been practiced and codified. Patrick Deshayes (2002) put it plainly: *l'ayahuasca n'est pas un hallucinogène*. Let us reword it: indigenous ayahuasca does not forcefully provide visions. Indeed, most indigenous languages name the beverage after the name of its nonvisionary ingredient, and when variants of ayahuasca without the “light” or vision-producing *Psychotria viridis* plant are used, it is only by very experienced shamans. The tendency of ayahuasca to induce vomiting and sweating—interoceptive, thermoceptive, and tactile sensations—appears to be more generally representative of its use among many but certainly not all indigenous Amazonian settlements. For the Matsigenka, the term for ayahuasca is *kamarampi*, literally meaning “vomiting medicine” (Shepard 2014:22). The urbanized *vegetalismo* shamans that use ayahuasca in remote Peruvian cities, including Iquitos and Pucallpa, are locally referred to with the term *purgueros*, emphasizing the purgative effects of the drink (de Rios 1972; Luna 1986:4).

Cultivating mental imagery is an important technique practiced across Amazonian shamanism, but it certainly does not define it.⁵ The visual elements exist within a synesthetic complex of potential bodily capacities and adjustments. This invariably renders Noll's (1985) claim that “the essence of shamanism is vision cultivation” (449) as an exclusive goal, an untenable and intrinsically Eurocentric one. In the unified Western concept of the self, the five senses are different parts making up the cognitive whole. Each sense has a domain neatly demarcated from the others and a set of values attributed to it. Synesthesia is therefore a somewhat surprising or poetic blurring of these boundaries (consider descriptions such as deaf-

5. For Amazonians, shamanic vision frequently encompasses the prestige that Old World traditions give to verbum, the word. Amerindian systems of writing and Amerindian reactions to Western alphabetical writing (Déléage 2017) are iconic. Kaxinawá ayahuasca imaginaries are “read” rather than seen (Deshayes 2000:28). To concentrate one's mind on a myth is the correct way to prepare for visions (Lagrou 2000:32–33), as myth is spoken drawing (*antsa kene*; Deshayes 2000:190). *Kene*, the geometrical pattern ubiquitous in Panoan arts and crafts, has a sign-like status superior to that of *dami*, which are figurative, transformative, and maybe deceptive images (Lagrou 2007:108–136). It unifies, in the same code, body painting, animal skins, visions, and graphism among the Panoan (Lagrou 2007:107–121) as among the Yekuana (Guss 1989:102–103, 109–110). Ayahuasca allows Siona initiates to learn all the medical recipes annotated in a book in the house of God (Langdon 1992:47).

ening brightness, fetid words, or blue smells). Amazonian ideas about the self, on the contrary, point to multiplicity: the self is composed by a number of elements, each one having, say, both “spiritual” and “corporal” ingredients. The Panoan notion of a *weroyoshi* spirit that has his own body—a tiny, invisible, but perfect body—points to, namely, a fractal configuration. The subject is divided not in a functional but in a fractal way. Accordingly, in the world of indigenous ayahuasca, synesthesia is constitutional because every bit of the partible subject carries a whole set of sensory potencies.

Amazonian spirits associated with illness may harbor noxious smells that are combated by healers with pleasant aromas and the singing of “fragrant songs” (Shepard 2004; Townsley 1993). The idea of a fragrant song lends itself to ayahuasca use given the pronounced synesthetic effects of the brew. Experiences of seeing sound, smelling vision, or any other labile combination of the senses may occur during intense psychedelic experiences (Sinke et al. 2012). The tendency of indole hallucinogens like ayahuasca to elicit variations of synesthesia complicates the notion of a pharmacological dominant sensory mode, or “sensory ratio” (Howes 1991)—such as vision—attributed to ayahuasca drinking and other strands of psychedelic shamanism. It also suggests that different cultural configurations of sensory organization may be absorbed or accentuated by the psychosomatic effects of ayahuasca and similar substances.

Among the uses of ayahuasca by Yaminawa shamans examined by Townsley (1993), there does not appear to be a valorization of the visual beyond other sensory modes, but there is an integration of a synesthetic configuration that draws on auditory, olfactory, and tactile senses cultivated within forest environments. Visions are important elements for the Yaminawa in the practice of drinking ayahuasca, yet more significant is the use of song and auditory expression. The songs inform not only visionary experiences but also the general “pharmacologically enhanced conditions of the body and perception” that ayahuasca occasions (456). Forest paths, myths, and shamanic songs share one word in Yaminawa, *wei*, and this association complex is key to shamanism. Similar to shamans navigating ayahuasca songs, hunters in search of game tend to rely on animal tracks, droppings, the remains of eaten fruits, smells, and sounds (454). Although Yaminawa shamans report having direct contact with various spirits while drinking ayahuasca, they also hone the ability to interpret all aspects of their ayahuasca songs—including movement, color, smell, and formal distortion—as potential indirect and coded communication (454). This is because the practice of drinking ayahuasca involves communicating with beings whose definite nature is never clear. They are always “like something but different,” an uncertainty that reflects a broader complex of moral ambiguity—the shamanic powers to heal may also be used to harm—that permeates Amazonian shamanism (Whitehead and Wright 2004).

The ability to willfully transform into jaguars, anacondas, and other beings and to see from the other's perspective is significantly characteristic of Amazonian shamanism (Rivière 1994).

Ayahuasca drinking brings to the body and perception a relatively controlled environment for the drinker to change such perspectives, and this may be socially dangerous and productive:

If the mirror returns us, inverted, our own image, ayahuasca opens the door to a universe in which the same images are presented with their signs reversed; in which the anaconda, which sees itself as human, also drinks ayahuasca and for its turn may see us—who knows—in the shape of anacondas. It is an inversion not of images but of points of view, which can help us understand others, be they spirits, dead people, or foreigners. (Calavia Sáez 2007:21)

Perspectivism or multinaturalism (Viveiros de Castro 1998) finds a crystalline illustration in ayahuasca visions, but it does not depend on them. The visions reveal a world of nonhuman subjects burgeoning out of the apparently inert or unconscious, but the same notions of a human soul animating different bodies—animal, vegetal, or artifact bodies—are to be found among peoples who do not use any visionary inebriates. Calavia Sáez (2006:332–336) has suggested two different renditions of perspectivism: an “eye” one and a “skin” one. The shifting from, say, the “true human” perspective to jaguar, anaconda, or peccary perspectives can be achieved by visual twists like those provided by ayahuasca and also by some collyria that improve or change eyesight or, conversely, by an alteration of the whole body—achieved by body painting, masks, or attire, by the imbibing of other psychoactive preparations, or merely by changing diet or habits (everyone who eats alone or who eats raw meat, e.g., can become a jaguar). This alternative is to be found not only among peoples who use or do not use visionary drugs. At the very core of the so-called original ayahuasca users, the Kaxinawá and Yaminawa are good examples of how a different emphasis may be placed on ocular or bodily transmutation. However, this difference can be of minor metonymical signification. If we are told that eyesight and hunting skills can be enhanced by a bodily purge (using the kambo frog exudation, e.g.), this is because, conversely, any ocular shifting is worth an entire body change. If people see differently, it is because they became different.

In the metamorphic domain that jaguars and Amazonian shamans allegedly know so well, powers of healing and sorcery are attained and employed in ways that mediate worldly and political affairs. The ambivalent nature of spirits and shamans and their healing and sorcery capacities inevitably entangle the social complexities of human and nonhuman activities. Amazonian shamanism is intimately connected to everyday or worldly issues that may index “very real micro-conflicts among neighbors, kin, and rivals over knowledge, power, and economic resources” (Calavia Sáez 2014:xx). As Lenaerts (2006) explained with regard to Amazonian ethnomedicine, “Health is not an individual, strictly physical and biomedical issue, but also a social, relational one” (12). Similarly, Alexiades (1999) explained how “health and well being, and its counterparts sickness and death are ultimately seen as forms of exchange between the Ese Eja and surrounding social spaces in a multi-layered and in-

terdependent universe” (26). Healing acts of Amazonian shamanism are embedded in a uniquely relationalist mode of being that is reflected linguistically in indigenous notions of shamans. Rouse (1978:121) noted that the terms that approximate “shaman” among northwest Amazonian societies (*pariekoku*, *kumu*, *ye’e*, *paye*) are less nouns than relational positions, akin to terms such as “brother” or “cousin.” The relational qualities of Amazonian shamanism may work to mediate and constitute interpersonal ties and social groups. Virtanen (2014) explained how multiethnic ayahuasca healing rituals in Acre “materialize alliances” (67) between particular individuals, spirits, and ethnic groups through the interplay of the visible and the invisible. The collective drinking of ayahuasca and chanting provide spaces in which humans and spirits may swap and see different perspectives, learn or revise knowledge, and make or alter interethnic relations (Virtanen 2014:67).

If we were to define—a merely methodological comparative device, of course—an Amerindian theory of vision, we should combine with our prior remarks a sociological and moral topology. The otherness that indigenous ayahuasca makes explicit is not beyond but between. In other words, it lives next door. Of course, indigenous eye spirits can travel—that is what happens in dreams, for instance—but indigenous ayahuasca visions are mainly crafted after the most common pattern of indigenous rituals (Calavia Sáez and Arisi 2013), that is, as visits from strangers and guests. Arrival motifs such as “it come” or “they come” are ubiquitous in Yaminawa ayahuasca songs. Vision is not the travelogue of a searching spirit but the making explicit of multiple presences from “out there” or from beyond. These presences do not belong to a transcendent world but are the very, if invisible, components of this one. As kin, they would be visible to us if they would share our body. If invisible, they are perhaps allies, affines, or enemies. What we see in ayahuasca visions is true but not necessarily trustworthy. The ayahuasca world is potentially dangerous—indeed, group sessions of drinking ayahuasca are narrated by Yaminawa as dramatic occasions of conflicts and ambushes where visible and invisible aggressions may intertwine and interact. Ayahuasca may also be at the core of sorcery, the dark side of shamanism (Whitehead and Wright 2004). All of this social and moral topology is of course wiped out with neoshamanic ayahuasca assumptions. For the Westerner, ayahuasca inebriation brings contact with a visionary world largely detached from or impotent in directly affecting earthly relations and worries. It discloses where wise and mainly heavenly or otherworldly entities are to be found.

In the reimagining of ayahuasca shamanism among Australian neoshamanic groups, a hypervalorization of seeing has emerged. Ayahuasca drinkers, in these contexts, attribute significant value to the experience and contents of ayahuasca visions. The qualia of their visions—which may include geometric patterns, animal and plant spirits, gods from diverse pantheons, technological universes, and ineffable apparitions—represent the most meaningful elements on the individual’s path of healing and spiritual illumination. Ayahuasca is consumed during

healing retreats where attendees refer to each other casually as “vision seekers” and express disappointment if they do not experience vivid mental imagery during an ayahuasca ceremony. A fascination with vision exists at the very beginning of ayahuasca’s journey to the Western sensorium. In 1852, the English botanist and explorer Richard Spruce (1908) drank ayahuasca in the Vaupés region of the Upper Amazon and described beautiful and terrifying visions. He stated in his travel notes of the same period:

White men who have partaken in caapi [ayahuasca] in the proper way concur in the account of their sensations under its influence. They feel alternations of cold and heat, fear and boldness. The sight is disturbed, and visions pass rapidly before the eyes, wherein everything gorgeous and magnificent they have heard or read seems combined; and presently the scene changes to things uncouth and horrible. (Spruce 1908:420)

More than a century later, Terence McKenna, an independent researcher and psychedelic activist from the United States, significantly popularized ayahuasca in Western societies while emphasizing its visual elements. During the 1980s and 1990s, he traveled on international speaking tours and advocated for individuals to consume large doses of psychedelic substances in complete darkness and silence to encounter what he deemed perennial spiritual visions. In the 1970s, as a precursor to ayahuasca’s internationalization, McKenna traveled in search of ayahuasca in the Putumayo region of the Colombian Amazon—an area known to many indigenous Amazonians as containing the most talented ayahuasca shamans (Chaumeil 1992:108; Tausig 1987:398) and to anthropologists as the probable origin of ayahuasca use (Brabec de Mori 2011). McKenna (1989) failed to find what he deemed to be satisfiable “strong” ayahuasca concoctions. The strength that McKenna was searching for was precisely a psychedelic dose that would enable vivid mental imagery.

In resonance with Mircea Eliade’s iconic depictions in *Techniques of Ecstasy*, McKenna foregrounded the shaman as a specialist who has visionary access to an acultural, universal experience. His philosophy of shamanism highlighted the bodily and epistemological significance of psychedelic inebriation while injecting it with a culturally critical sensibility. Despite being a polymath and lyrical virtuoso, McKenna’s depictions of Amazonian shamans generally reproduced noble savage stereotypes of a wise and benevolent specialist living in harmony with the natural world. These types of stereotypes permeate contemporary portrayals of ayahuasca in the shamanic tourism milieu of Peru. Evgenia Fotiou (2016) notes that by avoiding topics of sorcery, dark shamanism, and economic and cultural challenges, the romantic stereotyping of ayahuasca shamanism erases indigenous people’s history and the “injustices that they have experienced and continue to experience” (151). By framing Amazonian shamanism in such ways, modes of indigenous shamanic historicism (Wright and Hill 1986) are circumvented by romanticized portrayals of a timeless Amazonian shaman

who satiates a thirst for the vision-inducing potions of the ayahuasca tourism economy.

The tourist stress on mystical visions has altered the shamanic landscapes of the Upper Amazon. Ayahuasca recipes historically included a large variety of possible plants, yet the brew is becoming increasingly standardized into an ocular-rich potion given that *vegetalismo* use has been declining (Luna 1986:163) and international “tourists expect to have visions” (Freedman 2014:143). Although McKenna struggled to find strong vision-inducing ayahuasca brews in the northwest Amazon region in the 1970s, with the global ayahuasca tourism industry as it is today, it is not difficult to do so. In popular Western culture, ayahuasca inebriation has become virtually synonymous with shamanic visions, with a plethora of animators, artists, and wordsmiths attempting to represent their ayahuasca visions in videos, paintings, and texts (Peluso 2016).

The eye has long dominated the hierarchy of the senses in Western history (Classen 1997a), being placed above the ear and at a great distance from the other lower senses, to which an animal character has often been attributed. The terminology of knowledge has been largely ocular, whether etymologically (eidōs) or metaphorically (worldview, insight, enlightenment), and literacy manages to transform language from an auditive into a visual matter. By extension, “Sight, as the most detailed sense (by Western standards), provides the model for modern bureaucratic society” (Classen, Howes, and Synnott 1994:5). But such sensory power is not given without provoking a proportional distrust, which represents something that we could term an epistemological pathos. The eye, this supreme organ of knowledge, is also supremely gullible, if not a trickster in itself. The platonic myth of the cavern sets the paradigm of visual appearance as a mistake or a theater of shadows that can be transcended only by a super eye, a mind’s eye, or, maybe, a God’s eye that humans could borrow by means of reason. A humbler, even animal sense such as smelling can be more attached to the truth: we see surfaces, but we smell essences arising from the interior of things (Classen, Howes, and Synnott 1994:4). The idea of deception is not absent from the Amazonian world (Rivière 1994), but in this case what is at stake is not a difference between shallow and deep knowledge but the switching or metamorphic nature of the real. Westerners fear eye illusions and long for a sight that would work like smell or go beyond surfaces and perceive essences.

A quest to see beyond the pale of the ordinary to an ultimate truth or hidden reality motivates ayahuasca neoshamanic practitioners (Fotiou 2010:16; Gearin 2015:6; Sharrock 2017:169). They arrive to ceremonies with a skeptical or unfaithful eye that is, in a sense, a lonely eye, given that they are at odds with living together with a multiplicity of eyes. Thus, their favorite way of seeing otherness is to wander outside or to trip. Many great visionaries of Western traditions relate travels when they were taken to heaven, hell, or some other strange realm far away from home. Neoshamanic ayahuasca drinkers venture to visionary realms beyond society and the human and in doing so penetrate an ecological realm that they have associated with indigenous

masters or shamans, to the extent of ontologically conflating them with nature and the powers of the beyond.

Perhaps the starkest contrast between indigenous and neoshamanic depictions of ayahuasca inebriation concerns the potential of bodily perceptual transformation. Nonhuman shape-shifting, or what Rivière (1994) termed the “highly transformational world” (256) of Amazonian cosmology, appears to have hardly been adopted in the westernization of ayahuasca drinking. For the neoshamanic drinkers studied by Gearin in Australia, nonhuman metamorphosis is very rare, relatively insignificant, or nonexistent. The drinkers describe a large variety of ayahuasca visions, with the ultimate goal of inebriation being a type of “ego death” wherein the soul becomes all nature or the universe in a kind of mystical union. The visions find their apotheosis in an extension, dissolution, or vibration into the all. Why this has become an emblematic phenomenological goal is not fully clear. The beverage may help cultivate a variety of modes of *ekstasis* or becoming other, depending on the psychological and cultural priming of the drinker. During the 1950s, experimental psychiatrists in North America and Europe administered thousands of strong doses of LSD—a psychedelic alkaloid that resembles a key alkaloid in ayahuasca brews—to mental health patients and healthy individuals (Dyck 2008). The researchers discovered many apparently “absurd somatic experiences” among research participants, including “metamorphosis of limbs or the whole body into other parts or animals, fusion with the hallucinated object, and more” (Hintzen and Passie 2010:131). It appears that the synesthetic effects of classic psychedelic substances can reach a threshold whereby proprioception and body image are radically transformed in what feels like a very physical sense of becoming another person, species, or life-form. Lenaerts describes ayahuasca-induced metamorphoses within Ashéninka shamanic practice:

What is at stake here is a temporary *bodily* process, whereby a human being assumes the embodied point of view of another species. . . . There is no need to appeal to any metaphoric sense here. A literal interpretation of this process of disembodiment/re-embodiment is absolutely consistent with all what an Ashéninka knows and directly *feels* during this experience, in a quite physical sense. (Lenaerts 2006:13)

The curious absence of human-to-animal or animal-to-human metamorphosis and nondifferentiation in Australian ayahuasca neoshamanism challenges notions of pharmacological determinism and highlights the profound influence culture can have on the senses. Among neoshamanic circles, the absence of animal metamorphosis, along with the emphasis on a kind of mystical union with the universe, lends a special primacy to the human and to the individual that resonates with the early Christian origins of Western individualism proposed by Dumont (1986).

We guess that there is always some hint of mistranslation in each statement that refers to ayahuasca as access to the true dimensions of the world. The epistemological pathos referred

to above would be unlikely to disturb indigenous Amazonian thinkers. There is no suspicion against appearance or devotion to sole appearance. Quotidian perceptions and ayahuasca visions are equally true in the sense that none are false. On the one hand, visions can be truer insofar as they are enhanced, brighter, more powerful. On the other hand, the other worlds that ayahuasca opens to shamans and common drinkers can also be very mundane (Cesarino 2011:105–106),⁶ even identical to that of sober perception. Magnificent or commonplace, all that ayahuasca enables us to perceive is real, and what ayahuasca offers is the possibility, even the danger, of dealing with the real. Indigenous ayahuasca use aims at relation, not at revelation.

Ayahuasca Neoshamanism Ceremonies in Australia

Emerging through and somewhat against New Age spirituality networks (Hanegraaff 1996), ayahuasca neoshamanism has attempted to bring ideas and techniques associated with indigenous Amazonian shamanism into a highly relativistic arena of spiritual belief. The ability of New Age proponents to speak of Jesus, aliens, Aztec high priestesses, and technological utopias in one coherent sentence stems from a widely inclusive and reductive cosmology. Spiritual visions, or the opportunity to vividly see mental vistas, may be the main contribution that ayahuasca neoshamanism brings to the New Age catalogue, and this ocular contribution is clearly grounded in the relativism of its cultural surroundings. Visions of plant spirits and Mother Nature archetypes enjoy a dominant currency in ayahuasca neoshamanism (Fotiou 2010:142–149), but these visions may be colored by a diversity of New Age narratives. An influential ayahuasca specialist in Australia told Gearin that he gives ayahuasca to “20 different people and receives 20 different reports.” This wide scope of visionary content is important for theorizing the ayahuasca vision of the neoshamanic drinker. What ayahuasca ceremonies provide for the drinker, in this context, is the disclosure of an inner visualization of nature that is both absolute and personal in ways that absolutize the personal. To help elucidate the sociality of what it means for neoshamanic participants to see ayahuasca visions, in the following section we consider the ritual structure, collective sensory profile of inebriation, and metaphysics of belief among ayahuasca ceremonies studied by Gearin in Australia.

Ayahuasca ceremonies in Australia are part of a global network connected to groups in many parts of Europe and to selected Peruvian ayahuasca tourist retreats. The most active ritual specialist in Australia has conducted approximately 1,500 ayahuasca ceremonies in Australia, Europe, and other Western contexts since the early 2000s. While sometimes held in five-day retreats or packages, the ceremonies typically occur during weekends when drinkers participate in two evenings of

6. For the Marubo (Cesarino 2011:124), the visionary experience as such has no great signification: ayahuasca mainly serves to fix memory.

taking the brew. In the days leading up to an ayahuasca retreat, the ritual attendees follow strict dietary and ascetic practices that initiate a period of separation from ordinary life.⁷ They commute beyond the metropolis into natural environments, undergo experiences of visions and purging, verbally share their personal experiences together during sober narrative rituals, and then return back to ordinary urban life on Sunday afternoon. The narrative rituals are termed the “sharing round” or “sharing circle” and provide a formalized space for attendees to pursue what is perhaps the central ideal of ayahuasca neoshamanism: the task of “integrating” insights elicited by the visionary experiences into daily life in the hope of attaining personal healing.

While the accounts of ayahuasca visions in this context vary considerably, there are trends in how individuals relate to the visionary contents. The immediate and moral encounter with the visual terrain is not turned outward across a profane or everyday world of ambiguous agents—whether human or non-human—but is detached and turned inward across a landscape of self-learning. Drinkers are encouraged to encounter all visions without judgment and to simply “surrender” and “witness” what ayahuasca “brings into the light of awareness.” After the experience, attendees can or should make moral sense of their life events by integrating esoteric insights derived from the visions. But the inebriated experience itself is approached as beyond morality. Australia’s most active ceremony specialist explained to Gearin:

The light and dark realms [of ayahuasca visions] are not good or bad. Those concepts only exist in our own psychology. Let me stress this. There is just learning and diving deeply into oneself, because in truth we are a universe unto ourselves and we each contain all things, all the polarities, all the possibilities of human experience. It is in embracing the totality that we become whole. It’s not about saying this is good and this is bad. Yes, some things are more pleasant to experience than others, but I’ve learnt more from my unpleasant experience than my pleasant and beautiful ayahuasca experiences.

Approaching ayahuasca visions as beyond moral judgment is seemingly balanced by the sharing round ceremony’s emphasis on integrating visions through narration. Similar to the “problem of generalization” in psychotherapy, psychedelic integration represents the attempt to generalize the insights of the visionary experience within the everyday (Walsh 2012:25). During sharing round ceremonies, one at a time, individuals share accounts of the previous night’s ayahuasca visions in the form of speech acts, not dialogues. The ceremonies refract a New Age catalogue of beliefs—often mixing an ecological emphasis and an implicit cultural critique of “mainstream society” (Gearin 2017) with the drinkers’ personal moral concerns. Narrating ayahuasca visions is a sacred act that summons each participant

to “hold space.” This means that they should remain silent and simply listen to each other during the sharing round. Inside and outside the ritual space, it can be inappropriate or rude to interpret another person’s ayahuasca experience for them. Sharing round discourse involves the individual describing personal visions and the significance of the visions. It may include descriptions of emotional and spiritual purification, orations on how to better interpret or intervene in the actions of family members or friends, insights about career decisions and other life choices, knowledge about the structures or meaning of the cosmos, and revelations about the sources of illness and disease. In the form of self-healing narratives, ayahuasca vision provides resources for personal moral development.

Similar to that of mystical experiences, the phenomenology of ayahuasca experiences can be very difficult to pin down, which is reflected in its ineffability across cultural contexts (Rubenstein 2012; Shanon 2002). As noted by psychologist Benny Shanon (2002:333), ayahuasca inebriation tends to involve enhanced sensations of meaningfulness. Taylor (1993) used the phrase “existential amplifier” to describe how for the Jivaro, ayahuasca “gives not just life, but, more importantly, life with direction or quality, life linked to a certain set of values” (666). Marlene Dobkin de Rios (2008) suggests that psychoactive substances such as ayahuasca can produce a “hyper-suggestibility” (16) useful for shaping and enhancing the inculcation of values and beliefs. Ayahuasca excites meaningfulness and suggestibility (see also Hartogsohn 2018), but the meanings that neoshamanic practitioners attain hardly partake in the perspectives key to Amazonian shamanism, such as animal metamorphosis or using sorcery to affect tensions among kin, neighbors, and strangers. Instead, ayahuasca visions are “gifts” or “downloads” from a sacred plane, or the deep unconscious, beyond everyday space and time. The visions, along with the indigenous originators of ayahuasca use, are posited in a space of radical otherness that needs to be creatively integrated through formalized and ongoing narrative and ritual acts.

Examining notions of doubt and truth within accounts of Australian neoshamanic ayahuasca visions illustrates a particular sociality of inebriation. Robbins (2007:14) notes that the verb “to believe” embodies a level of doubt or problematization that is not forthcoming in the verb “to know.” These two verbs conflate in the cosmology of ayahuasca neoshamanism in Australia, where “my truth” and “my belief” may be different from “your truth” or “her truth” yet are equally authentic and real. Aligned with the epistemological pathos noted above, some drinkers passionately exclaimed their skepticism of ordinary sight and their conviction that ayahuasca visions display an essential hidden reality. Others perceive the visions and ordinary sights as a mixture of real and unreal domains that require decoding whereby dreams, ayahuasca visions, films, and auspicious events or “synchronicities” mediate deeper truths for those cultivated enough to interpret them. Many drinkers are uncertain about the reality of the visions and use qualifiers such as “maybe,” “perhaps,” or “I guess so.” In several circumstances, drinkers hoped that Gearin, as an anthropologist, would

7. What has come to be known as the “ayahuasca diet” in neoshamanic circles represents an appropriation of dietary practices associated with indigenous Amazonian food shamanism (Gearin and Labate 2018).

be able to clarify whether the visions are actually real. A pervasive sense of relativism here supports a general social acceptance of divergent beliefs, truths, certainties, and uncertainties about ayahuasca visions.

Whether ayahuasca visions are described as true or untrue or both true and untrue, the ideal of ayahuasca integration and the sharing round ceremony that formally encourages it set up a distinction between ordinary visions and ayahuasca visions that hierarchizes the latter as above and beyond the former. The drinker's goal is to incorporate the insights, affective states, or "higher vibrations" of the sacred visions into the ordinary plane of verbal language and everyday action to help actualize healing and personal development. Healing, therefore, is premised on relieving the epistemological pathos that we mentioned above. Individuals are disconnected from natural energies, lost personal memories, and the light of higher consciousness and must work to anchor, integrate, and bring back these ayahuasca visions into the more rigid realms of ordinary consciousness and everyday life.

There is also a great diversity and legitimation of contradictory metaphysical perspectives across the narratives of ayahuasca visions. Responding to and helping to reproduce this diversity, Australia's most active ceremony specialist described to Gearin his duties in conducting ceremonies, commonly known as the task of "holding space." He highlighted the lack of the need to mediate and authorize beliefs. He stated that the spirit of ayahuasca told him:

I only require a few things, that the circle [ceremony] is held well and is safe, that there is a focus and people are available, and that there is an element of trust in the room of good energy, and she said whatever you want to believe on top of that is your business, I just need those conditions to work.

Ceremony specialists hold space for attendees to experience visions that do not need to be assigned to any belief schemas, be they of the ceremony specialist or other attendees. The specialists sometimes specifically describe themselves not as shamans but as "facilitators." Their perceived role is to facilitate the diverse visionary experiences of the attendees and to create a "container" for the attendees to discuss their experiences without the risks of religious dogma or direct external codification. These conventions combine to make individuals uniquely autonomous when they embark on visionary ayahuasca journeys and later narrate the journeys to each other. Nonetheless, at times metaphysical debates do occur among drinkers outside sharing round ceremonies. A relatively common question that circulates is whether the spirits or figures perceived in ayahuasca visions are independent agents from a cosmological stratum that is separate from the individual's mind or are simply aspects mirroring the psychological interior of the individual. Examining a social example of this question can illustrate how commonly shared metaphysical principles associated with ayahuasca vision are employed to relativize, encompass, and concomitantly ignore competing truth claims—placing the individual in his or her personal universe.

During a weekend ayahuasca retreat on the east coast of Australia, participants had just arrived to the opulent rain forest property and were informally drinking herbal tea and talking in anticipation of the evening ceremony. While discussing the ayahuasca visions he had experienced, one drinker said that he does not believe in spirits or gods and argued that the content of ayahuasca visions is shaped by an individual's unconscious. Another member interjected, stating that "spirit beings are real" and that the individual's unconscious determines the types of spirits he or she will attract in visions. The competing perspectives, or "beliefs" or "truths," then found a profound agreement when one drinker stated—and the others agreed—that "we are all one." Representing an absolute equivocation, such a phrase works to simultaneously absorb and relativize all contradiction by referring to contrary experiences as fundamentally homogeneous. This impressive feat is empowered by the phrase's association with the apotheosis of neoshamanic ayahuasca vision, when the drinker temporarily experiences ego death and a visionary dissolution into everything and when they "become one," regardless of whether this "one" corresponds to the psychological interior of the individual or to a monistic ontology that transcends the individual and pulses through the universe.

This psychedelic goal of "oneness" can be traced to the perennialist philosophies of twentieth-century Western spiritualists and authors—such as Aldous Huxley, Ram Dass, and Ralph Waldo Emerson—who placed it at the core of all religions (Langlitz 2013:7). Yet such mystical heights are certainly unique across global religious experience diversity and would likely not make much sense to an indigenous ayahuasca specialist. As alluded to above, this psychedelic goal resembles the Christian doctrine of union with God that Dumont (1986) situates at the origins of modern individualism, and it empowers a particular discursive individualism among ayahuasca neoshamanism circles. The ecstatic oneness hides varied ambiguities, contradictions, and tensions among drinkers by virtue of a mystical experience deemed ultimately ineffable or beyond what drinkers sometimes term the "monkey mind" of humans. This notion of "we are all one" brings to an interpersonal level what Viveiros de Castro (2004) described as "silencing the Other by presuming a univocality—the essential similarity—between what the Other and We are saying" (10). It is an example of the broader New Age movement's "remarkable ability to fashion contradictory ideas into an overarching vision that still privileges individual experience" (Brown 2002:120). The atomizing of ayahuasca vision into extensions of the individual situates the neoshamanic practice among other examples of "self-spirituality" (Heelas 1996:2) that encourage individualistic versions of religious truth. Partridge (2018) highlights how contemporary Western psychedelic use amplifies a modern subjective turn in religiosity given its "increasing reliance on the authority of personal experience accompanied by a conspicuous lack of critical distance regarding the information garnered from such experiences" (218). When Gearin asked a prominent Australian ayahuasca specialist how he responds to the contradiction between animistic beliefs and secular psychological beliefs

among drinkers, he replied that he uses “a combination of the two because on a higher lever we are all one vibration.”

This discursive relativism of oneness is tied to the phenomenological effects of ayahuasca. The synesthesia of mild to moderate ayahuasca inebriation may include “vibratory” visual-auditory patterns—such as intertwining designs and echoes of image sound. The monistic notion of everything being vibration or one is explained by neoshamanic drinkers with reference to sensory experiences blending, fading, or reducing the opacity of discrete objects. The discrete objects and truths of sober reality are shown to be fundamentally united by a typically invisible and less opaque dimension that encompasses an equivocation of truth claims and lends individual drinkers the personal responsibility for their own version of truth unfolding. There is a pressure of autonomy implied in the notion that truth is the product of personal vision—particularly when varied beliefs are seen in visions and routinely articulated in sharing round narratives.

The healing narratives are woven from personalized ayahuasca visions that are treated as the sacred contents of the individual. These narratives—along with the specific acts of the spirits or figures disclosed during the visions—are not subject to being openly criticized or transacted from one person to the next because of the ritual conventions of holding space and a wide relativism of belief. Therefore, they enjoy a kind of inalienable status. One of the key problems with objectivism, writes Hornborg (2006), is “the notion of a ‘knowledge’ that is not situated as part of a relation” (27), resulting in ideologies of social disembeddedness (28). This issue flares up in the subjectivism of ayahuasca neoshamanic vision. The drinkers certainly impute agency to trees, nature, or “Gaia,” and in this sense they embody a kind of neoanimistic perspective. Yet their special mode of encountering nonhuman persons in ayahuasca visions is buffered from everyday relational fields by, on the one hand, the radical relativism of beliefs supported by the ceremony conventions of holding space and, on the other hand, a relativizing metaphysics of mystical union and vibratory oneness. A dichotomy between mind and nature is achieved less through association with objectivism than through a hyper-subjectivism. Animistic-style knowledge and all knowledge from visions become disembedded or easily alienated from the social domain. The dangers of social alienation are seemingly compensated for by the uncanny and the pharmacological or the ability of ayahuasca to evoke a deep sense of meaning and purpose in drinkers, seemingly without the need for social relations. For individuals who are dislodged from the realities of their meaningful social relations, this scenario may exacerbate narcissism or related problems of the self, an issue that Rodd (2018) highlights from a different perspective.

In the context of ayahuasca neoshamanism in Australia, where the emergence of healing and mystical truth is concerned, the qualia of visions and their narrative articulation hold more currency than a shared landscape of belief. The more the visions move the individual, the realer they are and the greater the conviction of healing for the individual. Shared

belief schemas are not necessary for grounding or legitimizing mystic truth and healing. The problem of reason is important but secondary. It is transcended by the aesthetics and visionary exaltation of experience and the creative articulation of experiences in ritual contexts of narration and integration. While secular humanism rejects religious reason by ascribing to it a materialist objectivism, ayahuasca drinkers reject shared religious reason through ritual conventions that privilege individualized inner vision and a spiritualist subjectivism. In a religious space where shared spiritual beliefs not only are unnecessary but also are challenged by an expressive individualism that values difference as healing and spiritually mature, salvation finds its resolution in the actualization of a metaphysically bounded self. If religion is the glue that binds the social—in a classic Durkheimian sense—then the relative absence of a binding agent has become that which unites the participants of ayahuasca neoshamanism as vision seekers and “medicine brothers and sisters.” Social alliance is not based on individuals sharing belief construals but on the creative and varied expression of visionary experiences. There is one vibration but many visions.

Ayahuasca, Property, and Individualisms

The culture of ayahuasca neoshamanism is certainly unique in the brew’s history. When explaining how ayahuasca drinking may help shape the individual in Euro-American and indigenous contexts, we cannot entertain a simple binary of modern individualism and nonmodern collectivism or holism—as the work of Louis Dumont (1986) and others may suggest—given the robustly individualistic forms of social organization among indigenous Amazonian settlements (for a seminal work, see Rivière 1984). One significant way of understanding the differences between Australian neoshamanic and indigenous Amazonian ayahuasca use is by considering notions of property ownership and personhood. Property is fundamental to European Enlightenment theories of subjectivity, according to which material possession constitutes the possibility and expression of being an autonomous individual. In John Locke’s (1988 [1689]) influential writings on the moral right to property, he proposes that “every man has a property in his own person” (II, para. 27). By contrast, in indigenous societies where “objects” such as stones, trees, and monkeys are animated with personhood, understandings that approximate ownership or material property may mediate relations among humans and nonhumans along subject-subject, not subject-object, lines. Yet within such a relational cosmos, animistic societies can still, of course, be robustly individualistic.

Among Jivaroan settlements, which are known for being profoundly individualistic (Taylor 2018), visions induced by ayahuasca and other shamanic plants are principal means of generating the types of knowledge and power that help impute and maintain individual autonomy. Through visions derived from shamanic plants, Shuar acquire and tame *arutam* spirits

in their body. The spirits are believed to “promote almost all the valued aspects of character, including honesty, inclination to work, and intelligence” (Harner 1984:91) along with a sense of power and invincibility in warfare (Rubenstein 2012:49). The arutam are ambivalent volitional spirits that must be persuaded or convinced to remain in the human body. Rubenstein (2012) explained that they “inhabited people but did not belong to them,” and while one could harness the circulation of the spirits, one could never “control it absolutely or permanently” (49). Quests to consume shamanic plants and persuade powerful spirits to become allies have been described as formative acts of Jivaroan individuation (Rubenstein 2012; Taylor 2018). Given their independent and volitional character, the arutam are certainly not the property of humans—like the status of pets or automobiles in Western judicial systems—but subjects that require negotiation on their own terms. Anne-Christine Taylor (2018) distinguishes between indigenous Amazonian individualism and Western individualism along these lines by highlighting the ambivalent quality of property and exchange relations in Amazonian societies. She claims:

The emphasis is not on property as the fruit of labor but on the capacity to generate human and artifactual virtual persons who remain attached to their creator only if and as long as he can cause them to attach themselves to their maker. . . . Property is an unstable relation between subjects, and not an externality that can be detached from its producer or user. (Taylor 2018: time stamp, 41:30)

Jivaroan individuation, Taylor illustrates, begins with a statutory equivalence or equality between persons—whether humans, animals, spirits, friends, or enemies—that is challenged through competitive acts aimed at producing inequalities. Echoing Rubenstein’s observation about the detachability of arutam and their powers, Taylor (2018) explained that the competitive process “is always in play and can never solidify into fixed positions of dominance” and that “achieved eminence automatically breeds challenge, and thus carries with it the seeds of its erosion” (time stamp, 44:50). If we read Taylor’s theorization correctly, Jivaroan individualism is an agonistic, competitive, and epic individualism that contrasts with the mainly jural and ownership-driven individualism of Western societies.

Notions of ownership and subjectivism can help elucidate an individualism of ayahuasca neoshamanism in Australia. Ayahuasca neoshamanic drinkers are on a spiritual quest for “personal growth” that appears to reproduce classic Western notions of material possession in the form of ecstatic experience. Put simply, the individuals (not relations, other persons, or a social whole) are the center of growth, which they develop by appropriating a visionary environment into themselves. Individuals own their visions in the sense that they are a part of the whole self: an unconscious part, like an object forgotten in the attic that is still their property in any case. The individual eye is an owner eye. It appropriates all that it sees, turning the qualia

of ayahuasca vision into once-lost memories (such as representations of trauma) or personal inner knowledge. The individual’s eye, through visions, is able to integrate the fragments of a disintegrated self, which is captured in expressions such as “Now I see who I really am!” Ayahuasca brings a shadowy past into the light of consciousness in the form of visions that are materialized in narrative and behavioral acts whereby the drinker attempts to integrate, download, and “own” past or inner truths. Expressions such as “I now own that part of myself” typically refer to the individual accepting moral faults or lost memories made known during ayahuasca visions.

Through the labor of ayahuasca dieting, visionary journeys, and integration practices, neoshamanic ayahuasca drinkers aim to develop into better people, the transcendental fulfillment of which they are held fully responsible for. It is thus not the ayahuasca ceremony specialist or the ayahuasca spirit that ultimately heals them. They are responsible for domesticating the spiritual ultimately visions and for healing themselves, owning their past or truth, and becoming their true or higher selves. There is no fundamental spiritual debt to ayahuasca, the ceremony specialist, or any other being. The visionary cosmos is not a scarce domain mediated by competing and volitional agents but an absolute source of personal inspiration. It is a kind of spiritual nature that exists outside society, providing the individual with resources for constructing personalized moral development without reciprocal exchange relations with human and nonhuman persons but from potentially infinite visionary environments outside the everyday relational field. This dichotomy of society and nature and the privileged receptacle of the individual in domesticating or integrating the spiritual reservoir of nature resonate with John Locke’s theory of property and the self. He writes:

[Whatever the individual] removes out of the State that Nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his Labour with, and joyned to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his Property. It being by him removed from the common state Nature placed it in, it hath by this labour something annexed to it, that excludes the common right of other Men. (Locke 1988 [1689]:II, para. 27)

A moral individualism of ayahuasca neoshamanism, therefore, can be seen as expressing a Lockean political philosophy on the level of ecstatic vision, where the inscription of healing vistas reproduces a unique autonomy of consciousness and morality. To use emic phrases, healing is supported by the individual “doing the work” of drinking ayahuasca and owning a past or truth often described as hard to accept. This owning act signifies the stabilizing of a self, bounded by a ceremonial relativism that mediates neoshamanic ayahuasca vision and its healing currency. An approach of my body, my visions, and my rules atomizes the cosmos and the moral architecture of everyday life.

The Amazonian ayahuasca drinker, on the contrary, does not own what he sees, even if it is “his” double and “his” shadow

(i.e., his partible self's constitution).⁸ They are—like all the other spirits he deals with—real, independent, and substantial beings and not the mere projections, vistas, or adventures of a relativist self. Other humans deal or could equally deal with the same persons or spirits of the perceptually altered terrain. For instance, Cesarino (2011:398–402) learns through a Marubo shaman the song of his own double. He knows of this double by means of the shaman, which makes him question the authorship and ownership of the song. Indeed, we will better understand this lack of ownership if we consider that the ayahuasca experience gives rise to outstanding types of attributes or properties that apply, for instance, to the songs known during the visions. These properties, however, are not understood as the result of the experience. They must be mediated by some type of social transaction, such as through convincing, seducing, or taming spirits or even bartering with them (Chaumeil 2012:457). The interests and the risks of visionary experience are that it is not a mere vector of eye subject to vision object but a whole social experience. He does not simply see what he sees but discloses possibilities to establish alliances with what he sees. There is a risk of being captured by vision. He is seen by the thing he sees, which is a subject, just as he is a subject. As Taylor (1993) noted, Jivaroan “shamans are considered experts in the manipulation of certain kinds of relations rather than holders of specialized knowledge” (658). Ayahuasca vision is tied to a relational mode of shamanic epistemology that emphasizes “ways of knowing rather than a system of things known” (Townsend 1993:449). The visionary perception is social and thus approached as socially consequential regardless of whether it is “integrated” by the ayahuasca drinker after the experience. We could say that the epistemological pathos of the Western ayahuasca eye is, at last, a hierarchical engine, a search for a field of safe domesticated visions under the rule of some higher entity (such as God, nature, or Mother Ayahuasca).

Conclusions: Vertical Ayahuasca Neoshamanism

The different sensory equivocations of ayahuasca inebriation that we have tracked in this paper correspond to different social and moral configurations. In a seminal work on the cultural determinants of the phenomenology of ayahuasca experiences, Langdon (1979) explained in “Yagé among the Siona: Cultural Patterns in Visions” how the indigenous ayahuasca novice “strives to see culturally expected visions”—such as the beautiful Jaguar Mother—and that terrifying and grotesque ayahuasca visions are typically “blamed on sorcery” (77) or the psychic actions of human or nonhuman others. In this context, the visionary terrain makes visible an immediate domain of social relatedness. By contrast, neoshamanic drinkers in Aus-

tralia typically attribute such afflictive perceptual and affective qualia to the psychological and spiritual development of the drinkers—to their personal psychic “signature”—which the spirit of ayahuasca makes visible and helps to purify and heal. The contrasting of the perspectival ontology and morally ambiguous nature of humans and nonhumans in Amazonian ayahuasca use with the interiorized cosmology of ayahuasca neoshamanism in Australia suggests that the senses are a “fundamental domain of cultural expression, the medium through which the values and practices of society are enacted” (Howes 2003:1). We suggest that the lack of metamorphosis between humans and nonhumans and the cultivation of ayahuasca inebriation primarily in terms of personal vision in the neoshamanic context are not cultural accidents. As Amazonian “jaguar-shamans” contrast with “shaman-priests” by practicing a morally ambiguous horizontal shamanism that emphasizes “doing” over “saying” (Hugh-Jones 1996:33), in neoshamanic circles a vertical axis encourages individualized orations of esoteric knowledge that codify personal encounters with unambiguous and benevolent spirits—Mother Ayahuasca, Mother Nature, or “Pachamama.” Ceremony specialists or facilitators who conduct ayahuasca ceremonies in Australia are buffered from the complicated space of the ritual participants’ moral universe. Their role is to hold space for attendees on the edges of society, to journey into and then domesticate a personalized, otherworldly vertical realm of vision associated with nature. Ayahuasca neoshamanism, as examined in this paper, sanctifies personal vision and the word as a socially discrete domain of esoteric knowledge production. With ayahuasca vision providing resources for the multiplication of unambiguous esoteric knowledge, we find a vertical style of shamanism not being employed by high-status social elites for the reproduction of society but democratized and individualized for patients embarking on visionary journeys of self-healing and personal moral development. Echoing processes of secularization in European history that pushed ritual and spiritual consciousness into the private realm (Asad 2003), ayahuasca visions in Australia are interiorized, personalized phenomena that lend moral autonomy to individuals undergoing practices of aesthetic and therapeutic self-invention.

The move toward a largely monotheistic, vertical style of shamanic practice in neoshamanic circles appears to mediate a sensory individualism. On the one hand, for the Westerner, the synesthetic blurring of the so-called discrete five senses is a strange experience that peaks with an ultimate sensory blending in the form of a mystical union “with everything.” As we explained above, this mysticism supports an axiology of individualized truths and moralities. On the other hand, the synesthesia of ayahuasca inebriation among indigenous people is constitutional in that it materializes a fractal cosmos where the person is a dividual and partible domain charged with moral capacities and potencies along a socially ambiguous horizontal axis. Therefore, what it means to see ayahuasca visions can embody different social configurations of moral life regardless of the actual content of what is being seen. The sensory, ceremonial, and

8. However, in verticalized cosmologies such as those of Avila Runa (Kohn 2013:178–179), a true, absolute perspective can be the privilege of the Master, the only one to see things (His things) as they really are.

discursive conventions of ayahuasca neoshamanism appear to reflect deep-seated features of Western cultural history through the disembedding and verticalizing of ayahuasca vision outside the social or inside the individual.

These crudely delineated modes of ayahuasca vision suggest ways in which mental imagery is shaped by political and cultural processes. Analyzing prayer practices among evangelical Christian congregations in the United States, Luhrmann and Morgain (2012) considered how the vividness of the mental imagery of God was cultivated through training the attention of “inner senses.” The study points to the role of learning and attention in the development of mental imagery and spiritual experience. In the case of ayahuasca neoshamanism in Australia, novices arrive to ceremonies expecting visions, and—probably because of the pharmacological properties of the brew—this appears to be enough training to make vivid mental imagery a common phenomenological report. But how participants learn to perceive and articulate an incredible variety of visions brings the question of mental imagery cultivation and attention into the stomping ground of social analysis. The ayahuasca drinkers follow ritual and discursive conventions of holding space that privilege aesthetic, therapeutic, and moral self-invention while naturalizing a wide diversity of mental imagery as authentic, sacred, and true. This suggests that ritual and discursive conventions of spiritual practice may be shaped by political and cultural processes that expand or contract the range of attentional objects of mental imagery.

Indigenous shamans or healers working as service providers in the global ayahuasca economy benefit from accommodating Western sensory proclivities. The ayahuasca economy is contributing to the transformation of indigenous Amazonia not simply through enhancing visualism and individualism among indigenous people. Indigenous Amazonian settlements were already constituted by robust forms of visualism and individualism. In this sense, the change is not one of degree but of kind. Ayahuasca neoshamanism materializes European Enlightenment notions of the individual through an inebriated visualism that we have framed as a novel type of vertical shamanism. This vertical neoshamanism wipes out the moral ambiguity, animal metamorphosis, and dividual socialities that undergird indigenous ayahuasca use. The complexities of power, inequality, and social conflict that are mediated by the moral ambiguity of indigenous ayahuasca use are silenced or placed largely beyond the scope of ayahuasca in the Australian neoshamanic milieu. In the space of ayahuasca globalization, a European Enlightenment political philosophy embodied in perennial mystical visions and plant-spirit healing has eroded the foundations of indigenous morality and its social means of affect.

Acknowledgments

We thank Daniela Peluso, Sally Babidge, and the reviewers and editors at *Current Anthropology* for useful feedback on earlier drafts of the article.

Comments

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First of all, I thank the authors for giving us a fresh opportunity to explore the fantastical world of ayahuasca. This question of the uses of hallucinogens in what is known as Amazonian shamanism has indeed awakened enormous interest, particularly in the context of so-called mystical or shamanic tourism (the New Age tourism market), which is burgeoning almost everywhere in the world, giving rise to a considerable body of literature that today comes to several thousand articles and books.

It is perhaps one of the rare examples in history in which an element of Amerindian shamanic tradition has led to such an infatuation in the West (the colonial history of contact had accustomed us to the opposite). Long before ayahuasca, however, another plant, tobacco, knew even greater success. Traditionally used in Amerindian shamanic healing, tobacco was introduced to Europe in the sixteenth century for therapeutic purposes, initially to treat headaches. By the end of the sixteenth century, tobacco was known throughout the world. Within South America, coca is another example. Thus, the Western attraction to a plant like ayahuasca is really not a new phenomenon.

I must point out, however, that shamanism and ayahuasca constitute two separate domains, even though they are closely connected in the neoshamanic ceremonies described here. In fact, a great number of Amazonian groups either make no use of such substances in their shamanic practices or have abandoned them, while others have only recently adopted them from neighboring societies or in an urban context. The ayahuasca vine (*Banisteriopsis caapi*) alone seems to have long been used by certain Amazonians (the so-called Jivaro groups, e.g.), sometimes together with tobacco and *Brugmansia*, for activities related to war and hunting. On the other hand, its association with *Psychotria* appears to be more recent and localized (to the northwestern and Upper Amazon), a fact that has provoked different hypotheses about the route by which this hallucinogenic drink spread.

The authors focus mainly on the notions of visualism and individualism, comparing the ayahuasca experiences and visions of Amerindian shamanism with those of the neoshamanism practiced by Australian followers. They emphasize the West's valorization of the visual as indisputable proof of a given reality (e.g., in the purported objectivity of photography). We can then grasp the distance between this definition and the experiences of “vision” in Amerindian societies: there, vision is anything but a “possession” (the subject does not possess what he or she sees, unlike the neoshamanist followers, for whom the visions are personal and have meaning for themselves) and is in no way

limited to the visual field, instead involving an interaction with hearing and smell, as well as frequent reference to colors.

According to the authors, the difference resides in the notions of personhood and property rights dear to the West and to Enlightenment thought, echoing the process of secularization in Europe, which relegates spiritual experiences to the private domain. Amazonian individualism thus becomes a relation between subjects (Anne-Christine Taylor), while modern individualism is a possession. In this sense, the authors, drawing on the distinctions made by Hugh-Jones, describe neoshamanism's "verticalization" of ayahuasca, to the extent that it effects a naturalization or objectification of the world, leading to a beneficial moral autonomy. One can likewise see in these changes, however, the expression of a new form of "horizontal" shamanism expunged of its ambivalent or malevolent components. In the neoshamanic ceremonies in Australia, the ritual specialists provide no (or little) interference among followers, who have a direct contact and are the sole interpreters of their own visions, the universe being a sort of spiritual reservoir from which each person serves themselves. This configuration does not seem very congruent with the definition of a vertical shamanism. Moreover, each follower can declare themselves a "shaman" in the end (we should rather say their own "shaman"), which moves in the direction of a weak hierarchy and free access, recalling the diffuse and faintly institutionalized nature of this horizontal category of Amazonian shamans.

In addition, we know that for some years now, other forms of neoshamanism have been appearing on the market more or less everywhere around the world, notably in Central Africa (Gabon). It is interesting that these "new rituals" have in some ways entered into competition with ayahuasca neoshamanism. Indeed, a good number of Western followers of ayahuasca over the past decades now seek initiation into certain African rituals that include the use of the roots of a hallucinogenic plant, iboga (*Tabernanthe iboga*). This ritual interests anthropologists of the Amazon because in many aspects it recalls the ritualized use of ayahuasca. We find the same ingredients, the same imaginaries, the same salutary ideas, and the same mechanisms of normalization and patrimonialization. The two rituals are also compared on both sides of the Atlantic in terms of primitivist rhetoric: the followers of ayahuasca are now trying iboga for a supposedly more radical experience of a "return to the origins," in an Africa seen as the cradle of humanity. Discovering iboga is presented as a journey deep within oneself and one's own DNA. These transcontinental travels in the context of modern primitivism also merit reciprocal study by researchers working in different regions of the world.

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Some 15 years ago, Jan Kounen, a renowned European film director, interviewed Jean-Pierre Chaumeil and me to learn more

about Amazonian shamanism. Naturally (or should I rather say, "culturally"), he was particularly interested in ayahuasca, which fascinated him and was to play a prominent role in the film he was then shooting (Kounen 2004). Unsurprisingly, the interview left Kounen greatly disappointed. Instead of "scientifically" confirming it, Jean-Pierre and I vainly tried to undermine his belief that indigenous people drink entheogenic sacramental beverages to commune with "nature" and enhance their "supernatural powers." The ensuing film provides a typical example of the issues highlighted by Gearin and Calavia Sáez's excellent paper. It is a hodgepodge of pan-Indianist mysticism and New Age corniness in which final redemption is gained thanks to visions induced by a bogus Navajo medicine man played by a real-life Shipibo healer, Kestenbetsa (alias Guillermo Arévalo Valera, who also happens to be one of the authors mentioned in Gearin and Calavia Sáez's text). Obviously, the very notion of a Navajo ayahuasquero makes just as much sense as would that of an Inuit scuba diver riding on a traditional !kung surfboard in the Kalahari Desert. Yet the film's success goes to show how eagerly the general public accepts such notions and is prepared to indulge in the contemplation of kaleidoscopic computer graphics supposedly representing drug-induced visions.

Ciro Guerra's (2015) Oscar-nominated *El abrazo de la serpiente*, especially its apothecic final scene, in which the quest for a "sacred" plant is rewarded with Holy-Grail-cum-king-of-the-hill-like success, provides yet another example of how appealing visionary plant imagery can be for a Western audience. The public really appreciates it, prepared perhaps by the inveterate cliché of Amerindian people inflicted—from the Great Plains to the Upper Amazon—by purported infatuation with the vision quest. Yet filmmakers are far from being the only ones resorting to such imagery, to which anthropologists also recur with (for?) undeniable, albeit dubious, success. And here, names such as Jeremy Narby or Angelika Gebhart-Sayer come to mind, as do those of their most astute critics, ranging from Shipibo scholars to Nobel Prize-winning chemists (Brabec de Mori and Mori Silvano de Brabec 2009; Dubochet, Narby, and Kiefer 1997).

Given the ubiquity and potential harmfulness of such ideas, Gearin and Calavia Sáez's effort to contextualize and deconstruct them is more than welcome. And their text is indeed to be commended for the wealth of erudition mustered to show how neoshamanism "draw[s] its origins from a sacred naturalism embodied in but not authored by Amazonian Indians." My only quibble concerns the emphasis their demonstration places on the supposedly lesser importance of vision for Amazonian peoples, in opposition to the notion of global bodily change. One of the examples they mention, for instance, is that of kambo frog exudation, considered a means of providing a bodily purge rather than enhancing eyesight. Admittedly, there is some truth in that assertion, and paying due heed to ethnophysiology is indeed crucial in dissipating misconceptions regarding indigenous theories. Indeed, people who inject kambo frog venom into their bloodstream to strengthen their bodies

do insist on its purging effect (understandably so since—just like ayahuasca—the intoxication produces such vivid effects as vomiting, diarrhea, and heaving sweating). Yet some Amazonian peoples, such as the Matis, with whom I did fieldwork in the Javari Basin (Brazil), also claim that kambo is effective because the frog from which the venom has been extracted will, once released, return to the forest and help the hunters by making them see the same game animals it sees itself. Rather than providers of drug-induced instruments of body shifting, the frogs therefore act as remote binoculars of sorts (which, by the way, explains the great care taken to keep them alive after extracting their poison).

Because European languages, when it comes to evoking mental processes, make such abundant use of metaphors relying on eyesight, there seems to be a tendency, in part by the anthropological literature, to seek alternative models for Amazonian people's ways of contemplating cognition, the idea being that instead of transposing a Eurocentric emphasis on vision to Amerindians, we should rather investigate what other senses their categorization might rely on. This, of course, is quite legitimate, and some authors—Don Pollock and Anthony Seeger, for instance—have produced quite stimulating research based on such premises. However, overemphasizing this point carries the risk of reinforcing the radically perspectivist theory whereby, since Amazonian theories of the body differ from ours, so must their bodies effectively be considered different. This, in my “view,” carries the danger of fostering the notion that Amerindians might be radically different, perhaps to the extent of even being so on a biological level. Obviously, Gearin and Calavia Sáez have not followed this perilous path leading from cultural relativism to extreme differentialism (if not neoracism). Rather, in an effort to decolonize neoshamanic narratives, their paper is content to very finely denounce the dangers implied by “the hypervalorization of seeing” that has gradually emerged in Western discourse regarding ayahuasca. Let us just beware that even the antidote to our infatuation with visions is not without risks.

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Senses of Self, Society, and Cosmos

This phenomenal paper concerns the internationalization of ayahuasca, a potent hallucinatory brew indigenous to the shamanic cultures of the Amazon. The authors relate how ayahuasca drinking has been appropriated and domesticated in the West, specifically in Australian neoshamanic circles. As an exercise in ethnology, or cross-cultural comparison, this paper is a brilliant testimony to the varieties of sensory experience and forms of personhood across cultures, and since it also concerns cross-cultural consumption, it offers many insights into contemporary processes of globalization as well. Indeed, what most

stands out about this paper is the care with which Alex K. Gearin and Oscar Calavia Sáez have teased out what could be called the rules of transfiguration. They abjure the false universalism of “pharmacological reductionism” by documenting how the contents of ayahuasca-induced “visions” vary in determinate ways in Amazonia versus Australia. And by adopting a transcultural vantage point, they are able to make sense of the many gaps and inconsistencies inherent to the replication of the ayahuasca experience in the Australian setting; for example, in Australian neoshamanism, truth is relativized, personalized, and buffered (“my truth”); having a vision is valorized above all else (i.e., other effects, such as cross-modal associations, vomiting, and sweating, are occluded); the boundaries of humanity are shorn up (human-animal metamorphosis disappears); monism or “oneness” trumps relationality; and the container of the self is expanded exponentially (“ego death” is offset by mystical union with the universe).

The authors frame the contrasting forms of individualism and visualism in the two contexts as turning on the distinction between the “synesthetic and socially partible” configuration of personhood and the sensorium in Amazonia, on the one hand, and a segregated, visualist, and socially autonomous conception of selfhood and the senses in the West, on the other. It is understandable that, for the sake of exposition, Gearin and Calavia Sáez persist in speaking of an indigenous “theory of ayahuasca vision” (and concomitant theory of sociality) even as they caution against such ocularcentric interpretations of the effects of the drug. Nevertheless, I think that it would be more coherent and consistent with the ethnographic record were they to relate their findings to a cosmogonic theory of intersensoriality, which is at the same time a theory of moral sociality.

Consider the origin myth of the Desana of the Colombian rain forest. “For the Desana, . . . the crying sounds of a mythic baby called Cajpi are also the tastes and visual images of the hallucinogenic drink made from his body (the magical plant, *Banisteriopsis Caapi*) ‘for as soon as the little child cried aloud, all the people . . . became intoxicated and saw all kind of colours’” (Sullivan 1986:26). A divinity commanded that the child be dismembered and its parts distributed, partitioning the society into ranked groups, each with its own style of singing, speaking, and use of colors as well as other sensory media.

Desana cosmology is likewise modeled on the interrelation of the senses and sensations under the influence of the hallucinogenic drink. Color energies are understood to emanate from the light of the sun or moon and then combine with heat to produce corresponding sets of odors and flavors. These threads of cross-modal association are also imbued with moral values: for example, the drawn-out sounds of a large flute played by men are said to have a strong yellow color, hot temperature, and masculine odor and to trigger a message that refers to child-rearing, or, again, different flavors are identified with different kin groups and are used to regulate marriage. The Desana shaman is responsible for ensuring that people make the correct intersensorial-moral linkages and do not

jumble them (which would be tantamount to committing incest) through manipulating the sensory environment during rituals (see, generally, Classen 2005).

The Desana conceptualize not only society and the cosmos but also the brain in terms of complex sensory imagery. In one image, “the entire brain is one huge humming beehive consisting of layers of innumerable hexagonal honeycombs. . . . Each tiny hexagonal container holds honey of a different color, flavor, odor, or texture” (Reichel-Domatoff 1981:82–83). Significantly, Reichel-Domatoff was told by one shaman: “He who truly sees, does not need a personal memory” (quoted and discussed in Howes and Classen 2014, chap. 6).

In Australian ayahuasca neoshamanism, by contrast, personal memories eclipse all else, and the emphasis is on “owning” and “integrating” them in the interests of healing a putatively fractured self. The authors explicate the “ownership-driven individualism” of the Western subject by reference to the writings of John Locke. However, Locke was not only the author of the political philosophy of “possessive individualism” (Macpherson 1973) but also the architect of modern faculty psychology, which is to say the pacification and compartmentalization of the sensorium (see Howes 2017:163–164). As regards pacification, there is no trace of the ancient extramission theory of vision (according to which the eye emits rays) or of the notion of “the common sense” (which was responsible for actively sorting and interrelating the deliverances of the five senses as well as the sense of sensing) in Lockean psychology. In Locke’s terms, there is only the mind as *tabula rasa* on which sense impressions get inscribed and become “ideas.”

Not only are the senses stripped of agency by Locke, but also any intercourse among them is ruled out. According to Locke, each sense has its own sphere: the “proper object” of sight is color, that of hearing is sound, and so on. He uses an anecdote to illustrate what he regarded as the perversity and, indeed, impossibility of forming ideas about one sense by means of another.

A studious blind Man who had mightily beat his Head about visible Objects and made use of the explication of his Books and Friends, to understand those names of Light, and Colours, which often came in his way; bragg’d one day, That he now understood what *Scarlet* signified. Upon which, his Friend demanding, what *Scarlet* was? the blind Man answered It was like the Sound of a Trumpet. (Locke 1975:425)

Locke does not cite this anecdote to endorse the blind man’s intuition, only to ridicule it:

For to hope to produce an *Idea* of Light, or Colour, by a Sound, however formed, is to expect that Sounds should be visible, or Colours audible; and to make the Ears do the Office of all the other Senses. Which is all one as to say, that we might Taste, Smell, and See by the Ears. (Locke 1975:425)

From Locke’s perspective, any attempt to circumvent the exclusivity of the modalities and understand sounds by refer-

ence to colors or to tastes can produce only “nonsense.” This atomistic conception of the senses is of a piece with Locke’s atomistic conception of the universe (he was a proponent of the new corpuscular philosophy of the chemist Robert Boyle) and his atomistic conception of society as made up of propertied individuals who contract with each other to form associations.

Imagine if Locke had tried ayahuasca. Had he done so, he could perhaps have seen what the blind man was saying. It might also have inspired him to be less self-possessed or to get outside himself, the way the Amazonian shaman does when he transforms into a jaguar.

In this commentary, I have sought to flesh out and put a finer point on some of the broad strokes of Gearin and Calavia Sáez’s masterful comparative study of “sensory individualism” in Amazonia and Australia. By virtue of the authors’ refusal of pharmacological reductionism and insistence on the sociality of sensation and the cultural contingency of perception, this paper makes a profound contribution to the anthropology of cross-cultural consumption and the anthropology of the senses—including the sense of self.

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This article is a truly thought-provoking contribution to an extensive yet not always critical literature on the ayahuasca diaspora. Against the ever-encroaching desire of Western globalism and its invincible romantic modernist primitivism to absorb difference into an overall “oneness,” where everything human meets and melts, the authors prefer to look at the undeniable contrast that opposes indigenous Amazonian and Euro-Australian ways of experiencing the “mental imagery” induced by the ingestion of ayahuasca, famous for its vivid visionary potential. After having convincingly argued in favor of the profound difference that separates both, the authors conclude with a pessimistic note: “A European Enlightenment political philosophy embodied in perennial mystical visions and plant-spirit healing has eroded the foundations of indigenous morality and its social means of affect.”

But has this indigenous sociality really been eroded by the use of ayahuasca in remote areas such as Byron Bay on the east coast of Australia? The ayahuasca network indeed consists of a complex web of human and nonhuman agencies where the agentive vector does not always point in the same direction. Are we witnessing another episode of predatory colonial extractivism or, to the contrary, a movement of reindigenization of the urban capitalist world? Has the Amazonian elixir of mystical self-discovery become the new export product that will be exploited until exhaustion on the international market, without

any capacity “to change the system from within,” or will the dualistic ontology that opposes subject and object and is at the origin of modernist capitalism slowly be undermined by the return of relational ontologies and their aesthetics?

The strategy adopted by the authors of describing two contrasting chronotopes of ayahuasca use has the advantage of making the philosophical and social foundations of the difference between both ayahuasca shamanisms visible. The urban cultural elite that participates in the ceremonies in Australia expects the “specialist” to be a “facilitator” who “holds space” for their self-discovery and healing. People take the brew “in order to see.” After the session, they narrate their visions, which can be interpreted only by themselves. The ontological status of the images is open to doubt: they can be perceived as manifestations of nonhuman agencies, “spirits,” or of the unconscious because, in the end, “we are all one,” participating in “the same vibration.” This absolute equivocation absorbs and relativizes all contradiction, dissolving, in the work of interpretation, the relational network from which the images emerge. Ego dissolution and mystical trance reinforce Western individualism. Objectivism and subjectivism meet when “‘knowledge’ . . . is not situated as part of a relation.”

Vision in an Amazonian indigenous context is, to the contrary, intrinsically relational. To see and to know is to partially become other, and this, following Taussig (1993), could hold for us, too. Westerners who go to the Amazon on a “vision quest” risk becoming entangled in the relational, corporeal, and economic relationships that have marked the Amazonian rain forest ever since the arrival of missionaries and colonists. Ayahuasca shamans have long since understood the power of the brew as a cosmopolitical capturing and taming device. Analyzing the ritual setting of ayahuasca tourism in the Amazonian rain forest, with indigenous shamans administering the brew to foreigners, Losonczy and Cappo (2014) show how this “interface shamanism” is based on a “working misunderstanding” that permits the mutual fulfillment of the diverging motives and interpretations of local shamans and foreign visitors. The ritual setting and metalinguistic tools produce a “ritual refraction” that permits the establishment of the successful maintenance of equivocation.

Working with the Huni Kuin for more than 30 years, I have witnessed a transformation from invisibility to the extreme visibility of ayahuasca rituals. If in the 1990s the ritual intake of ayahuasca was kept almost invisible to outsiders as a defense strategy against missionary defamation, nowadays, the Huni Kuin are protagonists in the spread of ayahuasca rituals in the big cities of Brazil and abroad. In this context, we witness a similarly complex dynamic of equivocation whereby mutual contradiction is avoided through the use of common concepts that hold different meanings for both sides; the anaconda, Yube, stands for the collective unconscious and the generous female principle of Mother Nature in the eyes of the urban cultural elite, while for the Huni Kuin, this complex and multiple being is a captivating device and strategy par excellence to show how war, seduction, and hunting are closely related

strategies of attraction, extraction, inversion, and alliance in contemporary shamanistic cosmopolitics (Lagrou 2018a, 2018b, 2019).

To see and to be seen depends on a relational quality that is never given. What the Yanomami shaman Davi Kopenawa (Kopenawa and Albert 2010) said of the *xapiri* spirit helpers also holds true for Yube and the revelation of his world of image beings: to see these image beings, it is necessary to first be seen by them. They look at the person and thus become visible for her. To see *xapiri*, one needs to become one of them and see with their eyes. In the same way, to see Yube, the novice needs to see through his eyes. It is therefore not enough to ingest his soul substance, the visionary vine, index of his agency inside the body. Yube can decide not to look at the novice, not to show him/herself to him, to show only “lies,” or simply to show nothing at all. The process of anaconda becoming, a condition for obtaining visionary capacities, is not evident—besides being a risky enterprise. To be devoured by Yube is at once intensely longed for and terribly frightful. To sing with the power of the vine in one’s voice, the novice has to engage in a process of other becoming, animal becoming, that only song can make and unmake. The song evokes the process of being swallowed by Yube in his monstrous, frightening form. To be reborn as Yube, at once predator and ancestor, one has to be swallowed by Yube. Only those who have thus been devoured and regurgitated by the anaconda people can take on the power to cause visions through song. Henceforth, when he sings, it is the voice of Yube, of all beings of the forest, that sings through him. The collective intake of the brew is recommended principally for young men, who take the brew to counteract the contrapredation of animal doubles who take revenge on the hunter. But the brew could also be taken alone by an apprentice wanting to be initiated and adopted by the spirits to become a shaman, as described in Capistrano de Abreu (1941 [1914]:4677–4762); a man who had taken the brew, called *huni* (person), ran into the forest and climbed up the lupuna tree, where he received his initiation by the spirits in a way very similar to initiations using other psychoactive substances such as the bark of the same tree and tobacco snuff.

Gow (1996) was the first to point out the difference between ayahuasca shamanism of riverine and mestizo peoples focused on healing and varied indigenous uses of ayahuasca by backwoods people. Among these, the rituals tended to be collective and related to initiation rituals or festive encounters between distant groups, marked by competition and the wish to discover the hidden intentions of visitors; they would be only indirectly related to shamanistic healing practices. Observing the contemporary uses of ayahuasca by the Huni Kuin as part of a cosmopolitical and aesthetic strategy of capturing powerful urban allies, one has the impression of witnessing a reactivation of these older strategies of alliance, different from or complementary to those that presided over the relational strategies of taming and healing in the context of rubber exploration, when the most powerful shamans were mestizos, prototypical mediators between the city and the forest.

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The pervasiveness of ayahuasca use in lowland South America, alongside its rising global diaspora spurred by ayahuasca tourism, religious movements, and the psychedelic renaissance, makes Gearin and Calavia Sáez's critical scholarship particularly welcome. The authors' comparative attention to visualism and individualism across "glocal" contexts of ayahuasca practices, namely, neoshamanic uses in Australia and indigenous practices in Amazonia, is compelling. They invite us to focus on diverging notions of property and personhood to understand ayahuasca visualism as an expression of divergent cultural viewpoints. I concur with their proposal that ayahuasca visions are sites of equivocation whose interpretations are rendered meaningful by particular socialities. They view the Australian neoshamanic individual as a product of the philosophical Enlightenment who becomes the center of the ayahuasca experience, interpretation, and outcome, while for "Amazonians," the centrality of the individual is a product of animistic and perspectival ontologies and is therefore by default fractal and more broadly connected to larger social worlds.

My comments will focus on the article's discussions of the irony of indigenous technology-laden visions, the inalienability of visions, the individualism of New Age notions of "oneness," and the primacy of sight. To begin, the authors note that local ayahuasca visions of outsiders' technology are "ironic." Yet the wielding of Western technology forms part of a widely spread practice whereby indigenous origin stories and creation narratives (de Civrieux 1997 [1970]), discussions of heroic exemplars (Peluso 2014b), and other nonhallucinogen-induced visions of healing or diagnosis and dreams (Peluso 2003) meaningfully incorporate and reinterpret technology into local geographies (Guss 1989). I suggest that by bringing technology visions into the fold of indigenous power and creation, indigenous peoples are negating irony by removing technology from the zone of opposition that irony requires to be ironic. As I trust the authors agree, indigenous and local recastings of technology speak to power through indigenous agency. As such, from local perspectives, the use of technology is neither ironic nor a novel form of indigenous visuality unique to ayahuasca practices.

The authors argue that neoshamanic individuals are distinct from Amazonians because they consider ayahuasca visions to be inalienable objects of healing that are accompanied with discursive ideas of oneness. While I appreciate these distinctions, they are slippery analytic statements, particularly since inalienability and the discursiveness of oneness cannot fairly be compared with the absence of such discourse among Amazonians. As the authors note, Amazonians are generally known for a political philosophy whereby individualism and autonomy are valued and affect all workings of sociality. Indeed, Clastres (1977) reminds us that Amazonian individualism does not de-

tract from collective power as long as leadership is not concentrated in one individual. He exposes the dangers at stake if indigenous peoples claim the oneness that neoshamanic practitioners do so easily; "to name things according to their oneness, is tantamount to assigning them limits, finitude, incompleteness" (173). Such a position highlights why the focus on one person's visions can make someone vulnerable and the ways that speech can sometimes be nothing more than an "edifying discourse" (Clastres cited in Guerreiro 2015:62).

Therefore, the lack of individual discourse (speech) about visions or oneness does not detract from their importance. Taking Latour's (1993) suggestion in *We Have Never Been Modern* into account, indigenous peoples see their world(s) as a hybrid mixture of hybrids; while alleged "moderns" see the world as a hybrid mixture of pure forms, neoshamans (and anthropologists) can be viewed as "splitting the mixtures apart in order to extract from them what came from the subject (or the social) and what came from the object. Next they multiplied the intermediaries in order to reconstruct the unity they had broken and wanted nonetheless to retrieve through blends of pure forms" (78). This way, indigenous peoples—despite their alleged dividuality and fractility—may also maintain an ideal of oneness that neoshamans strive for yet achieve only with discourse. With these considerations, we can say that indigenous peoples also "own" their visions as inalienable parts of themselves, as these are not pure forms that can be separated from them. Certainly, indigenous people, as people who are healed by (or with) the shaman, often need their own personal individual visions to assist (or work with) the shaman in healing themselves, rendering the inalienability of visions a vital feature not unique to neoshamanism.

While, as the authors note, the full sensorium, synesthesia, is vital in all Amazonian interactions, the primacy of a particular sense will shift, retract, and emerge on the basis of conditions of immediacy—therefore, the value of sight and vision depends on its context and source within a particular set of histories. It is not that sight is more primary to neoshamans than to Amazonians. Indeed, in many Amerindian languages, the root of "to know" is the same as that of "to see." Seeing is verifiable and is therefore an important antidote to hearsay (Peluso 2017). Yet, as the authors state, "What we see in ayahuasca visions is true but not necessarily trustworthy." Experienced ayahuasca participants understand that reality and cross realities are realms that influence each other amid an onslaught of the multiple agendas of diverse independent agents and subjects, all holding distinct perspectives and intentions (Peluso 2014a). I concur with the authors that perhaps where shamanism and neoshamanism differ most is over the possibility of transformation (Peluso 2014a), where the possibility to transgress to another state of being, although more possible in the past, can still happen today. In this way, ayahuasca images and visions, like dreams, are generally viewed by Amazonians such as Ese Eja peoples as "envoys between cross realities" and offer a unique opportunity to explore the coexistence and the possibility of transgression between these realities (Peluso 2004).

For this reason, visions, although “true,” need to be properly evaluated in such a far-reaching landscape. It would be difficult to encounter an Amazonian who could not tell you stories about being “tricked” or duped by their visions—the foolery is attributed to the power and agency of the being or image itself, yet in that sense the trickery itself is real.

Neoshamanic visions, as highlighted by the authors, are viewed as facing inward rather than outward, reflecting what Westerners might refer to as an inner truth whose veritability depends on one’s personal psychological environment and the unconscious. They elaborate on how this splitting apart of the neoshamanic individual from the social environment necessitates restoration with oneness through the collective practice of “integration,” whereby the emotional load of individual isolation is distributed to the group so that they can become “one.” Gearin and Calavia Sáez expertly show us how neoshamanic rhetorical claims resolve the ruptures between self and group healing as well as provide temporary social relations in lieu of broader social and ecosystemic relations that are vital in local and indigenous healing settings.

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It is not as paradoxical as it sounds. Ayahuasca is now the motor of a missionary enterprise that indigenous Amazonians have directed toward the same societies that bombarded them with their own missionaries for centuries. The dialog has finally gained some symmetry. (Calavia Sáez 2014:xxiii)

In a previous commentary on ayahuasca’s international expansion, Oscar Calavia Sáez was more sanguine in his assessment of the cultural misunderstandings between Amazonian indigenous shamans and their “northerner” clients in the ayahuasca tourism industry: “The situation is perhaps not so hopeless as it seems” (Calavia Sáez 2014:xxiv). In the current collaboration with Australian ayahuasca researcher Alex K. Gearin, the authors describe a situation that appears beyond any hope of intercultural dialogue. As the ayahuasca scene in Australia has come to depend less on the ministrations of Amazonian shamans and is increasingly presided over by local neoshamanic facilitators, indigenous cosmologies have been all but engulfed by deeply entrenched Western conceptions about self, subjectivity, and spirituality.

Drawing on ethnographic observation of Australian neoshamanic ceremonies, the analysis proceeds along two major trajectories, the first concerned with contrasting sensory hierarchies implicit in Australian and Amazonian ayahuasca ex-

periences and the second focusing on how Australian users process their visions in group discussions known as “sharing rounds.” Though the authors do not articulate their analysis as such, I see this two-pronged approach as dissecting the ayahuasca experience into two components: the embodied psychedelic sensations unto themselves and the culturally mediated postprocessing that follows. One could push this line of inquiry even further (though the authors do not) toward the dualistic poles of the pharmacological versus the sociological. More on this below.

The authors unpack how Enlightenment political philosophies about property and subjectivity, so different from indigenous Amazonian concepts (Fausto 2008), permeate the discourses of Australian neoshamanic participants as they integrate their ayahuasca visions into personal projects of self-discovery. In interviews, experienced Australian ayahuasca facilitators describe the ritual attitude of “holding space,” which involves promoting a safe and trusting environment without mediating or authorizing any specific beliefs. As the ayahuasca spirit herself told one of the facilitators, “Whatever you want to believe on top of that is your business.” Elsewhere, I have described such ayahuasca heterodoxies as modernity’s way of “having it both ways” (Shepard 2017).

Amid a multiplicity of visionary experiences, spiritual credos, and personal baggage, Australian ayahuasca facilitators and users interviewed by Gearin repeatedly emphasize the somewhat paradoxical goal of “becoming one.” Quite to the contrary, Yanomami shaman Davi Kopenawa describes the altered state of consciousness induced by DMT-containing *Virola* snuff as “becoming other” (Kopenawa and Albert 2014). This contrast neatly sums up the deep ontological divide between Western and indigenous attitudes. The authors characterize this distinction in terms of the “horizontal” relations of exchange and transformation that are found in indigenous Amazonian shamanism as opposed to more “vertical” spiritual systems emphasizing transcendence and hierarchy.

Borrowing David Howes’s (1991) concept of the “sense ratio,” the authors demonstrate how the extreme privileging of visual perception in the West leads Australian ayahuasca users to focus almost entirely on the ocular content of their experiences. By contrast, the ethnographic literature from Amazonia attests to a more synesthetic ayahuasca experience. The authors cede that Amazonian peoples have their own versions of “ocularism,” and yet in this context they miss the opportunity to point out that the Panoan term *weroyoshi*, referring to a spirit body that travels outside the physical body during dreams and altered states of consciousness, literally means “eye demon” or “eye spirit.”

Studies of ayahuasca shamanism have emphasized the centrality of chanting to guiding visions and other bodily sensations (Brabec de Mori 2011; Shepard 2004; Townsley 1993). Urban neoayahuasca religions such as Santo Daime and União do Vegetal likewise place a strong emphasis on sacred hymns as well as on selections of recorded music (Labate, de Assis, and

Cavnar 2017). Thus, I was surprised to find no description of the auditory dimension of neoshamanic ayahuasca rituals in Australia: Is the auditory realm truly neglected? Or did the authors overlook this detail in their singular focus on the ocular content of visions?

More generally, sensory experience provides a way of approaching altered states of consciousness without falling prey to the Cartesian dichotomy, noted above, between the pharmacological and the sociological. Psychedelic molecules produce their unique effects on human consciousness by imitating neurotransmitters, thus amplifying, echoing, or short-circuiting the usual channels of sensory perception. One need not embrace the radical cultural relativism implicit in the so-called ontological turn to see how contrasting cultural constructions of sensory experience could result in such strikingly different human experiences of the same substance. Such considerations undercut the comparative paradigm of researchers like Shanon (2002) in their quest to find cross-cultural universals in ayahuasca imagery. The authors point out how such approaches threaten to “silence the Other” (after Viveiros de Castro 2004) by subsuming indigenous worldviews into the voracious universalism of bioscience and capital.

If ever there was a magic bullet that could blast Westerners out of their atomized personae and destructive capitalist impulses, Mamma Ayahuasca would seem to be just what the doctor ordered. But if the Australian data presented here are any indication, not even the chemical and spiritual powerhouse of ayahuasca has been capable of such alchemy. Especially as biomedical science undergoes a “psychedelic renaissance” (Pollan 2018) and seeks new cures for addiction and mental illness while delving into the neurochemistry of religious experience, this article serves as a cautionary tale about the dilemmas and contradictions that are certain to emerge.

Given the profound cultural and experiential differences the authors highlight between the Australian and Amazonian contexts, one is left wondering how a participant observer like Gearin has navigated the philosophical, moral, and sensory divide that separates these apparently incommensurate worldviews. Though we are wont not to share private experiences in the public arena of scholarship, such personal insights might help others better appreciate not only the chasms that separate us as human societies but also the bridges that perhaps still connect us.

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Taking as its case ayahuasca shamanism, this article by Gearin and Calavia Sáez on visualism and individualism in Amazonian and Australian societies is both innovative and provocative. It

participates in the anthropological debates on personhood, ownership, knowledge making, and health. It importantly shows different cultural ideas of individual property in neoshamanism and Indigenous Amazonia, which in my opinion highlights dissimilar ideas of dependency between beings.

The article’s first premise is about multisensorial experience in Amazonia, beyond considering vision in a higher ladder of hierarchical sensory systems. Among the Manchineri, with whom I have worked in Brazilian Amazonia, the ayahuasca substance (*kamalampi*) is precisely for a corpo-spiritual experience, in which the plant substance itself is considered to contribute to the development of people and their relations with other entities. Therefore, a drop of the plant substance is even given to babies. In “Western” contexts, visualism is high in the hierarchy of senses. Even in scientific knowledge making, it is often highlighted over other senses, and something becomes a “fact” when it is identifiable externally and is measurable (Stengers 2010).

The article shows clearly that the healing objects in Amazonia and Australian neoshamanic ceremonies are different. In Amazonian Indigenous relational social systems, beings are constantly changing and fractal, and thus many Amazonian ethnographic studies have in fact shown how illnesses are about relationships. Furthermore, the authors note that in contrast to visions being considered the “true dimension of the world” among Australian neoshamanic practitioners, in Amazonia the visual appearance does not necessarily make the entities any truer. Beings can be ambiguous and transform to different ones, and therefore, from a young age, they are made “firmer” by various social practices with similar kinds of beings (Virtanen 2012). Consequently, the rituals are dangerous moments both for growth and for annihilation, as they open space and time for entities that can be either good or bad.

The contrast of welcoming the uncertainty and the Amazonian ambiguous character of beings in the world is well observed by Gearin and Calavia Sáez. The authors describe how Western neoshamanic ayahuasca practitioners experience “oneness” in their private personal visions, but they can be unsure about interpreting the visions. I have noted a similar phenomenon in Europe, albeit not in neoshamanic ceremonies, and these uncanny or supernatural experiences are considered ungraspable presences (Virtanen and Honkasalo 2020).

The authors contribute greatly to the discussion on theories of sociality, but for me the authors overgeneralize about what is Western or neoshamanic. The authors state that there are radical differences in ayahuasca visions between the “Westerners” and Amazonian Indigenous persons and that the experiences of metamorphosis are almost nonexistent among Australian neoshamanic ayahuasca practitioners. Moreover, only “good” entities are encountered. However, several non-Indigenous ayahuasca practitioners, as well as a number of anthropologists and botanists, have described being metamorphosed into an animal, as well as encountering unpleasant and evil beings (e.g., Barbira-Freedman 1979; Luna 2005; Shanon 2010). The results

may apply to this Australian group of shamanistic practitioners but not necessarily to other Western ayahuasca practices.

Although the authors review a rich literature relevant to the topic of the article, there are significant gaps. “Western” can include several views, such as those of spiritualists; the scientists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who tried to capture the visions, voices, and sounds of the “supernatural” (Henson et al. 2016; Sconce 2000); and contemporary folk healers. The examples come only from one neoshamanic group and therefore do not give a broad picture of Western ayahuasca practitioners. Furthermore, to study cultural differences in the construction of individuals, the cases should be comparable. The authors’ sources come from Australia in recent years, whereas most ethnographies coming from Amazonia go back much further in time.

Among other things, it would be worth knowing what the role of “training” in the visions is, as the Australian case shows that leaders play a strong role in the neoshamanic ceremonies. This raises the question of how to “cultivate” the mind and vision (Luhmann et al. 2015) and what is universal. To say something about different cultural models of individualism, we would need to know whether practitioners in this specific ceremony collectively cultivated certain practices as individualistic approaches: whether discussions of experiences were necessary aspects of “therapeutic self-invention” or whether such limited discussions were more voluntary. An interesting question is also whether the situation among Australian practitioners would be different if the leader of the ceremony were an Amazonian Indigenous person. Would it have affected the visions?

Another interesting thing to study would be the testimonial style of the ceremonies that are also common in Amazonia, especially those crucial in the processes of learning (Virtanen 2012). I see that this was not the focus of the article, but there also seem to be cultural differences in selectivity, discourses on “facts” (see Knorr-Cetina 2017 [1984]), and language and consequently how the testimonies point to relationships rather than to individual persons and their life histories. Overall, the idea of private ownership still seems to be a major difference between non-Indigenous and Indigenous views. It is convincingly shown that in Amazonian social worlds entities are made in relations and depend on each other, in contrast to thinking of independent actors.

Overall, I find the authors’ final argument characterizing Western ayahuasca neoshamanism as a vertical style of shamanism, or rather its increasing style of vertical leadership, the most important. It clearly originates in Western ideas of monotheism and in private domains of religion. It has certainly also affected Amazonian shamanism, as an increasing number of Indigenous communities have contacts with vertical neoshamanic groups in Euro-American countries. In Amazonia, however, both horizontal and vertical shamanism sometimes live side by side, along with types of shamanism in which there are no such figures as shamans but only shamanic practices (“shamanism without shamans”).

Reply

These kind comments about our paper deserve our gratitude more than a reply. They are incentives to continue researching new developments in the subject—as in the case of the transatlantic parallel with the use of Iboga—or to refine the analysis of something that, effectively, could be called a “theory of intersensority” instead of a “theory of vision” or the relevance of ayahuasca individualism to analyses of the allopathic psychedelic therapy industry that is currently emerging in the United States and elsewhere.

Several commentators have referred to some critical tone in our assessment of the divergence between Western and indigenous uses of ayahuasca. They underline that the indigenous uses are alive and kicking, very far from being a kind of endangered ancestral heritage. They are fully capable of changes, departures, shifts, and switchovers, as all Amerindian history has proved during the past 500 years. We wholly agree. We agree, also, that the notion of a “Western” model of the use of ayahuasca represents a generalization as abusive as that of an indigenous model would be. The various ayahuasca churches that emerged during the twentieth century in the countries of South America are quite a proof of this. Our analysis notwithstanding has not tried to identify models but only some vectors, such as the predominance of visualism and individualism, that can define the divergence of a more general order. We do not intend to impinge on Western usage any opprobrium of either the old style, “spurious culture,” or the new brand, “cultural appropriation.” However, we found it necessary to point out some abuse of generic Indianness in the symbolic and religious field.

Melancholy, even in that professional variant that Marshall Sahlins labeled “ethnographic pessimism,” has been an important motor of anthropological research and thought that was, however, heavily overplayed during the twentieth century. The elegies of Native culture, from the *The Last of the Mohicans* to the “last Ona,” undoubtedly moved by empathy, ended up being harmful to indigenous peoples, implicitly denying their mere physical existence or capacity for cultural response and change. Now, and for at least 30 years, an opposite ethnographic optimism has imposed itself as an antidote to that tendency: it has served its purpose, but it is probably heading for a symmetrical excess. The indigenization of modernity runs the risk of becoming excessively celebrated. There is no shortage of indigenous voices complaining about the growing flow of spiritual quest tourism. In indigenous communities, there are actors interested in occupying a place in the global economy as providers of spiritual services and others who are not so. Ethnographic optimism predisposes anthropology to listen less to the latter than to the former. They also have a more immediate relationship with the academic world. The asymmetry is established between global and local flows rather than according to ethnic borders, and the factors that we highlight in our analysis

are very appropriate for integration into analyses of the lingua franca of global spirituality.

In my (Calavia Sáez) fieldwork experience, the parallel between elements of the indigenous world and the world of the whites was constantly proposed by the Yaminawa, with ironic undertones: the banana puree was “Indian coffee”; the old festivals were “Indian carnivals.” Equivalence was suggested, provocatively, to highlight inequality. This gives special interest to comparisons made without irony: shamans were “doctors” or “nurses,” without irony. In the domain of shamanism, the irony can indeed be reversed. Tukano students who have attained university degrees refer to their new status as that of *papera kumu* (paper shamans; Barreto and Dos Santos 2017:94). The parallels between the effects of ayahuasca and the technology of the whites are shared between these two possibilities of irony. There is irony when ayahuasca is talked about as “Indian television” but not when it is pointed out that the shaman, with the help of ayahuasca, has flown over the region “like in a helicopter” to examine the progress of an epidemic.

The exceptions are thus centered on the shaman: not in the simple ayahuasca drinker or in the subject who plays his part in the “shamanism without a shaman” but in the effectively initiated and specialized individual. He is the one who can embody without irony figures from the world of whites. And for this very reason, it may be that he opens an exception in our argument about individual property, precisely because he is, because he can be, a hoarder. Yaminawa mythology repeatedly presents a protoindividual figure who is precisely the man (sometimes a woman) who, for one reason or another—in general, carelessness or laziness—is abandoned when all his companions transform, become “other,” and go to live in the sky or under the waters. Now, if ownership and individuality in a “legal” sense thus remain a borderline case, it is more difficult to determine to what extent the subject incorporates the visions in his own subjectivity, as something “of his own.” The Yaminawa, for example, cultivate a type of erotic song focused on personal memories, the *yama-yama*, which tells, for example, why a person is jealous or unhappy. But as for the experiences with the spirits, in a cosmology of transforming subjectivities or becoming other, it seems to lead to something different, as Cesarino relates. An Amarubo shaman speaks: “‘I am not like you,’ he once said to his kinfolk. ‘I am like the bird spirit. I am another person’” (Cesarino 2014:123).

Visions have an effect on the subject, not by being integrated into his memory but by transforming the whole subject into another. Of course, we should abstain from generalizing this idea.

The cosmology of Western ayahuasca practitioners has obvious roots in Christianity, but it is, of course, a cosmology from which the ladder or scaffolding that allowed the “higher reality” to settle into doctrine has largely been removed in the neoshamanic context. It may be inappropriate, in that case, to associate “vertical” shamanism with the global movement of ayahuasca neoshamanism: there are no ancestors, there are

no specific mediators, there is no vertical “path.” Even so, there would remain a difference between this “new horizontality” sheltered under a transcendent sky and the immanent horizontality (Hugh-Jones 1996) or “transversality” (Viveiros de Castro 2014) of Amazonian shamanism.

Popular therapeutic and religious approaches to ayahuasca drinking in the West come wholesale with ideologies of individual rights, responsibilities, and ownership drawn from Euro-American histories—including the Lockean influences we examined. We remain convinced that these histories have shaped the sensory and social architecture of ayahuasca healing approaches in Australia and likely Europe, North America, and similar cultural locales. Such totalizing claims, however, are tested by the diversity and novelty at play among types of ayahuasca neoshamanism that include horizontal traits of personhood and selfhood, as several of the comments above have critically hinted at.

It is safe to say that ayahuasca drinking is both amplifying and challenging existing modes of individualism in modern market economies. The “atomization of the senses and society” contained in the Lockean ideology of discrete senses and persons—unpacked so well by David Howes above—has special affordances and limitations when ayahuasca drinking is considered in Western contexts where “dividual” expressions of personhood are also evident. When an Australian describes drinking ayahuasca and becoming “one with the universe,” perceiving a vision of his brother “dropping in,” or purging and expelling the psychic residue of his mother from his own body, the porosity of consciousness throws the “Western individual” into question. The individualist ideologies of ayahuasca neoshamanism may ironically reproduce kinds of possessive individualism through attempting to heal embodied spiritual problems that some drinkers associate with “capitalism” and “the sick system” (Gearin 2017)—domains deeply tied to the production of possessive individualism—yet the modalities become less ironic in light of the dividual modes of consciousness that ayahuasca neoshamanism strives for and, to some degree, achieves.

A further mapping of ayahuasca practices that indicate internal challenges to culturally specific modes of individualism and dividualism would be an important exercise to undertake. Gearin’s (2017) Australian data suggest that neoshamanic acts of ayahuasca purging or vomiting tend to index a greater expression of social relatedness than acts of ayahuasca vision. Participants described purging social and interpersonal trauma from their bodies, the purging of multiple persons (such as family members) from the body, and even purging for groups of people, such as a white Australian describing purging for “the indigenous people of this land” (Fotiou and Gearin 2019:7). These descriptions point to a deeply embodied experience of social relatedness and dividual personhood, albeit in a negative or expulsive dynamic. Gearin has previously offered a partial explanation of this while considering the neoshamanic visions as primarily representing forms of divination or esoteric knowledge

acquisition and the purgings as primarily acts of healing and purification. Purging is a way to melt the ineffable into a river that leaves the system. This mercurial substance, in the neoshamanic context, appears to signify a deeper visceral social depth when compared with the individualist orientation of the visions. “If the healing practice of ecstatic purging in Australia appears to be characterized by an increase individual elements, the pathological relational fluids of the purge may signify a psychic confrontation with relational modes of sociality by a decidedly individualistic culture” (Gearin 2016:210).

The perceptual and noetic social impressions that these ayahuasca drinkers embody while purging and the narratives that they share about them may therefore partially be defined by tensions of social organization tied to modernity and its cherished individual. Such an approach suggests that we treat individualism and dividualism not as absolute analytic categories that could enable a comparative index of different cultures but as an integrated conceptual tool whereby different cultural contexts exhibit different (or similar) configurations of each (see LiPuma 1998:75; Ortnor 1995:371), depending on a range of social, cultural, and historical factors.

With a post-truth moment currently testing liberal democracies worldwide, the use of ayahuasca in its neoshamanic incarnation appears to be partly representing another individualist social technology that can embolden personal truths. Its special angle is in providing a means for the deep spiritual wellspring of the individual to become available. By bringing the universe to the individual, ayahuasca retreats inspire sensations of relief, peace, joy, or exhilaration that extend each neoshamanic drinker into varied cosmic depths, with potentially diverse moral projects inscribed within. Many neoshamanic ayahuasca drinkers approach healing as a personal responsibility whereby improving yourself with ayahuasca—so-called shamanism without shamans—indicates the path of true healing. Given that the narrative healing practices of integrating personal ayahuasca experiences into stories and affirmations happen during ritual and communicative techniques of “holding space” that privilege the individual in defining what is true and good, diverse utterances of “your truth” and “his truth” can reverberate with senses of vitality, well-being, or a grasping toward health. Ayahuasca is thriving in its current neoshamanic form among other post-truth “echo chamber” technologies of social life—such as digital social media platforms—that promote pluralities of truth and diverse consensual realities.

We agree with Glenn Shepard’s comment above that the theoretical stakes in our article are likely important to assessing the emerging industries of psychedelic-assisted therapies in North America, Europe, and elsewhere. This is because the coming legalization of psychedelic clinics will blast psychedelic patients into uncharted degrees of commercial capitalism. The issues of what could be called psychedelic-assisted individualism are unlikely to disappear. Being on the brink of a historic experiment in integrating psychedelic-assisted therapies into allopathic health care systems presents us with a

series of questions about the future of ayahuasca. It also permits a certain level of analytic imagining. How will the coming psychedelic health care industry disrupt the ayahuasca tourism economy and impact the emerging healing techniques, cosmologies, and livelihoods of the hundreds of indigenous healers working therein? The split between legal and illegal psychedelic therapy services in Australia, the United States, and Europe (such as between the coming psilocybin therapies and the existing ayahuasca ceremonies) may come to mirror historic distinctions between the “civilized” and the “primitive,” the colonizers and the colonized, the wealthy and the poor, and the individual and the dividual, including the medical binaries of the doctor and the quack, the rational and the irrational, and the safe and the dangerous. There is already incipient evidence of such a formation. For instance, one ayahuasca ritual specialist in Australia describes his ceremony approach as more like “psychedelic therapy” than the apparently inferior indigenous shamanism. He tells participants at his retreats that “powerful psychedelic therapies with psilocybin don’t include vomiting, and they are supported by science.” Indigenous shamans, he explained to me, are “unevolved” and have cultivated only the “lower three chakras” or energy nodes of the body and therefore practice “sorcery” and “great purging” and have a “sexual abuse problem” (Fotiou and Gearin 2019). Such racist spiritual ideologies attempt to capture the market by elevating allopathic psychedelic therapy to a “civilized” scientific status that overshadows the so-called primitive ways of indigenous healers. It is also curious how this Australian specialist informed his ceremony attendees to vomit in the buckets provided in the ceremony space only if they could not get themselves to the toilet outside. Given that purging, in this context, appears to indicate greater themes of social relatedness when compared with reports of visionary experiences, the ritual specialist’s efforts to limit group expressions of somatic purging allow a kind of visionary individualism to dominate the healing modality. Yet most ayahuasca ritual specialists in Australia encourage purging in the ceremony space, and some even claim that true healing is dependent on purging. The body and its significance have become a site of contestation among emerging types of ayahuasca drinking and a psychedelic science that emphasizes visions, ego dissolution, and a disembodied mental life. If psychedelic therapy becomes industrialized, with legal therapists determined by medical boards and accreditation and their services provided by private corporations and entities, neoliberal vectors of individual rights, responsibilities, and ownership could inflect popular approaches of ayahuasca neoshamanism to dizzying vertical heights.

—Alex K. Gearin and Oscar Calavia Sáez

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