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**An exploration of psychotherapeutic aspects of Santo Daimé ceremonies
in the UK.**

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the experience of participants in rituals organized by the Santo Daime, a Brazilian religious organization. These rituals involve the use of Ayahuasca, an Amazonian psychoactive brew traditionally used as a healing medicine in South America. The study used semi-structured interviews to explore the thoughts and attitudes of six participants of Santo Daime rituals in the UK.

The findings highlight a number of themes addressed in the discussion as follows:

- increased awareness
- beneficial and negative effects
- modification of values and behaviour
- Ayahuasca as a teacher and as a discipline.

Recommendations and considerations about the psychotherapeutic potential of Ayahuasca rituals will be offered to support the integration of this traditional healing medicine in Western psychotherapy practice.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research is to study the use of Ayahuasca amongst those participating in rituals organised in London by the Santo Daime, a religious organisation originating from Brazil. Ayahuasca is a potent psychoactive brew that has been used for spiritual and healing purposes by Amazonian natives since prehistoric times. At the beginning of last century, a religious organisation based on the use of Ayahuasca appeared in Brazil, the Santo Daime. Initially, Santo Daime was first a rural phenomenon (Richman, 1990). In recent decades, however, Santo Daime has maintained its centers in the rainforests and has established new assemblies in Brazilian urban areas (Larsen, 2000). It is now a recognized religion with thousands of practitioners, and has been expanding during the last decade through western countries, including the UK. Further information on the history of the Santo Daime, the structure of its rituals, the pharmacology and physiology of Ayahuasca and its legal status can be found in Appendix I.

The aim of this study is to gain an understanding of the psychological effects amongst Westerners of taking part in this South American ritual. I will attempt to identify and study, using qualitative methods and a Humanistic perspective, any possible psychotherapeutic processes facilitated by Ayahuasca use in a ritualized setting.

Existing literature

Ayahuasca use has been well researched amongst native South American populations. Archaeological evidence supports the existence of the ritual use of plant hallucinogens by native peoples of the New World, long predating the arrival of the European explorers and colonists (Adovasio and Fry, 1976). Knowledge of Ayahuasca use by native peoples of the Amazon was first recorded in the seventeenth century when Jesuit priests described the existence of “diabolical potions” prepared from forest vines by the native people of Peru (Ott, 1994). The first botanical identification of Ayahuasca was by British botanist Richard Spruce during an Amazonian expedition in 1852 (Schultes, 1968).

Since then there has been abundant research on this subject, mainly carried on by anthropologists and ethnobotanists. The best example of this is the work of R. E. Schultes, who dedicated his life to the study of medicinal and psychoactive plants in Amazonia

(Schultes, 1990). His approach consisted in documenting systematically the relationship between the indigenous people of the Amazon and the psychoactive plants used in their rituals, producing outstanding work in this area. Although he documented the healing processes involved in Amazonian shamanism, he did not study the psychotherapeutic aspects of this phenomenon. There is research on this subject that has a more psychological and psychotherapeutic perspective. An example of this is the work of M. Lemlij, Primitive Group Treatment, where he studied the group processes of healing ceremonies in the Peruvian jungles (Lemlij, 1978). His was an interesting attempt at interpreting the shamanic rituals using concepts developed by the theory and practice of Western group psychotherapy. Special emphasis was given to the importance of the group as a container for the expression of conflict and unresolved emotions. The conclusions of Lemlij's study are however limited to the cultural and social circumstances found in rural Peru, and can not be fully applied to the European urban context that is the object of my research. Another example of a psychological perspective on this subject is the work of W. Andritzky. In his work "Sociopsychotherapeutic functions of Ayahuasca healing in Amazonia", Andritzky examined the social and psychotherapeutic functions of healing rituals with Ayahuasca among Amazonian groups (Andritzky, 1989). Their healing effectiveness was explained in terms of Western scientific and sociopsychotherapeutic perspectives, using concepts from psychoanalysis, transpersonal psychology and parapsychology. The author chose to fully immerse himself in the field of study and was personally involved in Ayahuasca rituals, including his subjective reactions to the brew in his work. This allowed an in-depth description of the perceptive and cognitive effects of the ingestion of Ayahuasca, mentioning its properties of giving the user access to the conscious experience of symbolization processes. The author managed well to establish some correspondences between the South American ritual and Western Psychotherapy, comparing the Amerindian shaman to a group psychoanalyst working with group unconscious processes and comparing the principles behind the Amazonian healing practices with those postulated by transpersonal psychology. His work did not attempt to study the experience of participation in Ayahuasca rituals by Westerners, and it only mentions hallucinogenic drug use in European and American industrial societies as a symptom of social and personal disintegration.

Another expert in Ayahuasca use in South America is the anthropologist and psychotherapist JM Fericgla. He has studied the effects of regular use of the brew among Amazonian Shuar tribesmen, finding lower levels of anxiety and depression and higher

levels of adaptability to stressful circumstances among regular users of the brew, compared to subjects that did not use it (Fericgla, 1997). He used quantitative research methods, such as EEG's and other quantitative tests, on a wide population of Amazonian Indians. The limitations of his work were a lack of in-depth study of the individual experiences of the participants, and the use of psychiatric diagnostic tests designed for a Western population and not easily adaptable for their use with an Amazonian indigenous population. Some of its results were questionable. He indicates a 0% incidence of schizophrenia among Shuar Indians that is more probably due to a limitation in the evaluation methods used by the researchers rather than an unlikely total absence of this condition among this particular population. There is recent research on the pharmacological and psychological effects of participation in Ayahuasca rituals amongst urban population of Brazil (Grob and Callaway, 1996). Using quantitative and qualitative research methods, this work showed how regular participation in these rituals improved psychological and physical well being, with significant improvements in interpersonal, work and family interactions. On a neuropharmacological level, J.Callaway found an enhancement of serotonin production and metabolism in long term Ayahuasca users. This led him to hypothesise a possible antidepressant property of Ayahuasca consumption. The most striking finding of this research is the capacity of the subjects to recover from long term histories of alcohol, tobacco and drug addiction, after joining and participating in these rituals. This is a methodologically sound and in-depth piece of research in this particular subject, combining quantitative research methods as personality tests with qualitative methods as semi-structured interviews. Its results can be relevant to the population considered in my research, as both projects studied urban subjects from industrialized countries.

There is very scarce research about the use of Ayahuasca by Westerners, and the little that has been done has not been about its therapeutic potential. The only research on Ayahuasca use among Westerners that has been published in Europe is the work of the Spanish psychopharmacologist J. Riba. The aim of the study was to assess the reliability and convergent-discriminant validity of a Spanish version of the Hallucinogen Rating Scale (HRS) applied on to two differentiated populations of hallucinogen users, one of them Ayahuasca users, involving the retrospective assessment of drug effects. This work did not study the subjective experience of the participants, focusing exclusively on the neuropharmacological aspects of Ayahuasca ingestion. The results of this research offer very valuable information on the neurotoxicity and biochemical effects of Ayahuasca in the human brain, but they do not give any insight on how the brew affects the consciousness of

the individual. The experiments were conducted in a hospital setting, excluding all the ritual and social aspects of the Ayahuasca ceremony. The only existing research about the therapeutic applications of Ayahuasca rituals in Europe, yet unpublished, is by JM Fericgla from Barcelona University. He is using quantitative methods, principally the Hartman test, for studying the psychological changes occurring as a result of group sessions using Ayahuasca (Fericgla, 2000). His work suffers from the limitations of quantitative approaches, it offers some interesting general conclusions but it does not reflect the richness of the individual experiences of the participants.

This evident lack of research is probably due to two main factors. Firstly, the use of Ayahuasca among westerners represents a relatively recent phenomenon. It is only in the last decade that the use of this psychoactive brew has spread around Europe and the USA (Ott, 1996). There has been a proliferation in recent years of "shamanic tourism" to Amazonian countries and the export and expansion in Europe of Brazilian spiritual communities such as the Santo Daime and the UDV (Uniao do Vegetal) (Ott, 1996).

The second factor is the unclear legal status of the brew. One of its components, DMT, is a controlled and scheduled substance in most Western countries. This is a consequence of the prohibitionist stance adopted by most Western governments during the second half of last century. Experimentation and research on the therapeutic potential of psychedelic substances has been virtually interrupted since most of them were made illegal in the late 60's, in the USA first and then in the rest of the world. This decision was based more on political than on scientifically based reasons (Ott, 1996). It is only in recent years that the USA's Federal Drug Administration has been softening its stance, allowing research in the pharmacologic, physiologic and psychologic effects of DMT in normal volunteer subjects (Strassman, 1994). However, decades of prohibitionism have left a gap in this field of research. It is this gap that my research wishes to address.

Psychotherapy and psychedelics

Before its prohibition, and since the discovery of LSD in 1943, an impressive amount of research was dedicated to the possible uses of psychedelic substances in psychotherapy (Caldwell, 1968). European therapists such as H.C. Leuner developed the "psycholytic" (psyche loosening) approach, where neurotic patients were given light doses of LSD in a series of sessions with the aim of facilitating analytic interactions using a Freudian perspective (Passie 1997; Grof 1980). The rationale was that through the psycholysis, the loosening of defences, the patient would become more vividly aware of his or her previously

unconscious emotional dynamics and reaction patterns, and such insight would bring about a resolution of inner conflicts. At the same time, in the USA “psychedelic” (mind manifesting) therapy was being developed by psychiatrists as S. Grof and H. Osmond. It consisted in one or a small number of high-dose sessions during which the contents of the unconscious mind would be manifested in the form of vivid hallucinatory imagery leading to insight and transformation. Both approaches aimed for an expanded state of consciousness in which the individual could gain therapeutic insight into neurotic or addictive emotional dynamics and behaviour patterns, but they differed in their approach to the spiritual material and mystical experiences often emerging during these sessions. The psycholytic therapists tended to discourage such material, considering it as a neurotic escape from painful unconscious conflicts. The psychedelic therapists instead considered those episodes as profoundly therapeutic and encouraged them, believing they allowed the individual to question and transcend fundamental self-concepts and views of the nature of reality. Although the prohibition of most psychedelics in 1967 meant the interruption of this approach, it created the basis for the development of Transpersonal psychology, a psychology that is interested in the spiritual dimension of the human experience and its integration in everyday life. Today the psycholytic approach has evolved and uses hypnosis and visualisations instead of low doses of LSD for accessing unconscious material. H.C. Leuner developed the Guided Affective Imagery approach (Leuner, 1984) that facilitates visionary experiences with the aim of uncovering and resolving unconscious conflicts. S. Grof developed the psychedelic approach using breathing techniques instead of high doses of LSD that bring a similar experience of ego boundaries dissolution and contact with the transpersonal dimension. He named this technique Holotropic Breathwork, and it is nowadays mainly used in the USA, not having had the same success in Europe.

Psychotherapy and spirituality

Regarding the religious and spiritual aspects of the rituals researched here, there has been abundant literature about the relationship between psychotherapy and religion ever since the beginnings of modern psychotherapy. S. Freud considered religion as the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity, comparing it to a childhood neurosis that fulfilled the function of calming human anxiety about death and suffering (Freud, 1927). He believed that getting rid of religious beliefs conduced to a greater psychological health. In direct contrast with this view, C. Jung postulated that humans possess a natural religious function, and that their psychic health and stability depend on the proper expression of this, just as

much as on the expression of the instincts (Jung, 1964). A. Maslow also rejected Freud's pessimistic views of the human psyche that focused on its struggle with animal instincts, and created the basis of humanistic psychology by studying and describing the human tendency of fulfilling its highest potentials (Maslow, 1968). He developed the concept of "peak experiences" as the manifestation of the highest possibilities of human functioning. These peak experiences were understood as representing the fulfilment of the highest of human needs, the need for experiencing the spiritual qualities of existence. His interest in spirituality led him to found in 1969 the Journal of Transpersonal Psychology with S. Grof, a Czech psychiatrist that had widely explored the use of psychedelic substances in psychotherapy, developing a psychotherapeutic model that adopted a spiritual perspective in its understanding of human experience. This was the start of a direction in the field of psychology and psychotherapy that is still thriving today, supporting a widespread and growing cultural interest into transpersonal studies. Transpersonal studies can be defined as disciplined inquiries into those observed or reported human behaviours and experiences in which one's sense of identity appears to extend beyond its ordinary limits to encompass wider, broader, or deeper aspects of human, life, and/or the cosmos including purported divine elements of creation (Krippner, 1997). Several research studies have indicated a relationship between spiritual incidents and positive outcomes in individuals' lives, such as psychological well-being and improved psychological attitudes (Hood, 1974; Kaas, Friedman, Lesserman, Zuttermeister, & Benson, 1991; Pollner, 1989) as well as individuals' relationship to the world, investigating the purpose of life and their place in that purpose (Grof, 1988; James, 1902/1958). My research shares with these a common field of study, the relationship between ritual, religious experience and psychotherapeutic processes.

An important inspiration for the development of transpersonal psychology was the work of Italian psychiatrist R. Assagioli (1888-1974), founder of the psychotherapeutic approach known as psychosynthesis. Psychosynthesis is founded on the basic premise that human life has purpose and meaning and that humans participate in an orderly universe structured to facilitate the evolution of consciousness (Ferrucci, 1982). A corollary is that each person's life has purpose and meaning within this broader context and that it is possible and therapeutic for the individual to discover this. Another major aspect of psychosynthesis is its affirmation of the spiritual dimension of the person, i.e. the "higher" self. The higher self is seen as a source of wisdom, inspiration, unconditional love, and the will to meaning in life. The aim of psychosynthesis is the integration of this higher self with the whole personality.

Its interest in rituals as means to achieve this integration makes it a relevant theoretical framework to this research.

Aims of the research

By studying the reports that the subjects of this research have produced about their experience of participating in Ayahuasca rituals, my aim is to identify and understand any possible psychotherapeutic benefits deriving from this participation.

My central research question could be presented as follows: “What are, if any, the psychotherapeutic processes facilitated by Ayahuasca use among those participating in Santo Daime ceremonies in the UK?”

Those psychotherapeutic processes are considered from a humanistic perspective, including elements of transpersonal psychotherapy. I am investigating the areas in which the subjects show the way they have of becoming aware of their needs and how to fulfil them, their modalities in contacting their environment, the way they give meaning to themselves in the world, and how they fulfil their potential for growth.

I understand the aims of psychotherapeutic processes as they are described in the new Ethical Framework of the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy:

“alleviating personal distress and suffering, fostering a sense of self that is meaningful to the person(s) concerned, increasing personal effectiveness, enhancing the quality of relationships between people.” (BACP,2001;12)

I am interested in investigating the changes that participants perceive in themselves and in their relationships with others after participating in the Ayahuasca sessions.

I consider the ritual and the brew as a whole, as both are integrated in a unique phenomenon, the Daime experience. My aim is to understand how this experience contributes to the psychological well being of the person.

METHODOLOGY

Sampling and participants

I recruited participants that had been involved for at least one year in Santo Daime rituals in the UK. I approached the participants randomly during their monthly meetings, selecting the first 6 participants that accepted to be interviewed. I interviewed one woman and five men,

all White European. Their age range was from 27 to 47 years old. The less experienced participant had one year and a half experience with the Daime, the more experienced had been a member for the last six years. The frequency of participation ranged from once every two months to once every two weeks.

Procedure

I did semi-structured in-depth interviews, not surpassing one hour duration. I let the participant choose the time and the place they wished to be interviewed, taking into consideration noise levels and privacy issues. I audio-taped and transcribed verbatim the interviews. They were conducted without interruptions. I ended the recruitment phase by the end of October 2001, the data collection and interviews by the end of January 2002, the verbatim transcription of data by the end of February 2002 and finally the analysis of data and write-up of the research study by the end of April 2002.

Ethical issues

Due to the possible legal implications of Ayahuasca use, I ensured confidentiality was kept to a maximum level and the anonymity of the participants was respected. I explicitly formulated in an Informed Consent Form (Appendix III) sent to all participants the steps taken to protect their identity, and I did seek written participant's permission to tape the interview and to transcribe it using a pseudo-name. All reasonable steps to safeguard the security of audio-tapes were taken until completion of the research, after which they were destroyed.

The general purpose and aims of the research were explained to the participants. It was clarified that they were not obliged to disclose more than they felt comfortable disclosing. Participants were free to withdraw or retract agreement after the interview. In the case of any aspect of the interview being perceived as disturbing by the participant, I offered one follow-up counselling session if necessary. In case of needing ongoing support and due to ethical considerations, help in finding appropriate resources other than myself would be offered. The interviews took place at least one week after the last participation in a Daime ritual and the participants were not under the influence of Ayahuasca while being interviewed.

Analytic strategy

One choice a researcher faces is between using a “nomothetic” methodology, for example questionnaire surveys, one in which the researcher collects data from a large number of people, looking for a wider validity of the conclusions, or an “idiographic” methodology, as in-depth interviews, collecting data from a reduced number of participants, aiming to capture the richness and complexity of the phenomenon under investigation, but at the risk of basing conclusions on a small number of potentially atypical cases (Uzzell, 1995). In the case of research about the therapeutic aspects of Ayahuasca rituals, I believe that a nomothetic methodology would risk missing the complex cultural aspects of the phenomena. An idiographic methodology such as semi-structured in-depth interviews allows instead taking into consideration the culture and the social world of the respondents.

Ayahuasca use in Europe is a relatively recent phenomenon and the research that has been carried on this subject has had mainly a toxicological perspective until now, using quantitative methods that disregard cultural and subjective factors. Being a new field of study where there is a lack of previous theory, I believe a qualitative method is the most appropriate for researching this subject. Qualitative methods are a good choice when the aim of the research is innovation and creation of new theories about topics that have not been well researched yet, rather than validation of theories about well researched subjects.

In this research I used the modes of interviewing and analysis of the Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) and Thematic Analysis, developed in the context of interactionist and phenomenological research traditions by G. and W.F. Rosenthal (Wengraf, 2001). BNIM is an example of a lightly structured interview design based on an initial single question, aimed at inducing a biographical narrative. My initial question to the respondents was “How did you get in touch with Ayahuasca ?” with the expectation of obtaining narratives about the events in their lives that led them to participate in Ayahuasca rituals. A narrative approach offers the advantage of being able to grasp an understanding of the life of the participants as it is lived, without imposing a structure on them that has little to do with their real life. The freer the interviewee’s behaviour is from external constraint, the more completely their internal dynamic can be expressed, and the more intelligible to the researcher this internal dynamic then becomes:

“In interviewing terms, this means, for those who wish to allow the gestalt of the interviewee to become observable, adopting an interview strategy that minimizes (for as long as possible) the interviewer’s concerns (system of values and significance) to allow

fullest possible expression of the concerns, the systems of value and significance, the life-world, of the interviewee.” (Wengraf, 2001; 62).

It is a methodology of research that is inclusive of data rather than exclusive, and avoids the tendency to reductionism. It is also consistent with the practices and values of psychotherapy, as the respect of the richness and uniqueness of the individual experience. These practices and values of psychotherapy might include:

“the idea of human agency, collaborative and dialogical forms of meaning-making, the importance of feeling and emotion, the role of language in constructing realities, the capacity for reflexive self-monitoring and the validity of sacred experience.” (McLeod, 2001; 3)

A qualitative approach such as BNIM is more able to take into consideration the spiritual dimension of the human experience, as this dimension is unique for every individual and cannot be easily measured or explained with a cause/effect model. This research is about a phenomenon that is culturally very complex: the experience of westerners following a thousands years old ritual from another continent involving the consumption of a psychedelic substance, adapting it to their personal and social circumstances. It is a unique phenomenon that creates new culture through an integrative process. It is impossible to talk about the effect of psychedelics in an abstract fashion, we have to talk about the effect that a specific substance produces on a specific subject, in a determined symbolic and cultural background, as every single factor is extremely important for shaping and understanding the experience. This is why an approach is needed that takes into account the social and cultural circumstances of the participants:

"Biographical narratives are powerfully expressive of the natures of particular persons, cultures and milieux, and they are valuable instruments for a large range of social and psychological research theory-questions because they present to the researcher embedded and tacit assumptions, meanings, reasonings and patterns of action and inaction." (Wengraf, 2001;116).

After the first narrative-eliciting question I continued with the semi-structured interview aimed to gain an understanding of the changes the participants could have experienced as a

consequence of their participation in Ayahuasca rituals. The interview was partially structured in order to cover three domains of the participants' existence as relational beings: the relationship with their bodies and their environment, the relationship with significant others and the relationship with a meaningful or transcendent sense of self. This approach to study human experience is based on the principles followed by Humanistic Psychology. In its Core Beliefs Statement, the Association of Humanistic Psychology Practitioners declares that:

“The process of living is creative and involves interaction between the physical world, the intellectual and emotional realms, the spiritual, the social world and the environment.” (AHPP, 2000).

There was a deliberate intention in the construction of the interview to avoid leading questions. Open-ended questions were used essentially to give permission to the respondent to express their views. Basic counselling skills such as active listening, paraphrasing, seeking clarifications were used to facilitate the respondent's thought processes. A complete list of the research questions can be found in Appendix IV. The answers the participants gave to these questions were analyzed following the Rosenthal's model of Thematic Field Analysis. Its aim is to understand the told story of the life narration as constructed by, and consequently expressing, a gestalt or pattern or structure that has to be detected:

“Thematic field analysis involves reconstructing the subject's system of knowledge, their interpretations of their lives, and their classification of experiences into thematic fields. Our aim is to reconstruct the interactional significance of the subject's actions, the underlying structure of the subject's interpretations of his or her own life, which may go beyond the subject's own intentions.” (Rosenthal, 1993;61).

My aim was to translate both the singular quality of individual experiences as well as the collective themes that dominate through some of the shared meanings emerging from the data across cases. To ensure transparency and ability to replicate, I will describe step by step the process of coding and analysis of the data: I used an iterative process, which began by reading one transcript many times and noting interesting associations or significant aspects of the participant's discourse in the left-hand margin. Then themes or words describing the

main essence of the participant's concepts were noted in the right-hand margin. These emerging themes were analysed in order to find shared meanings between them. As links between themes emerged, they were grouped into wider themes that reflected the participant's experience in a more comprehensive way, including and relating the sub-themes within them. Theme associations were cyclically checked back against the data to ensure they were congruent with the original transcript, paying attention to any possible researcher's bias. I removed from the analysis any theme that could not be grouped into a wider category or appeared irrelevant. I repeated this process for every transcript, linking the themes that appeared in them with the categories that had emerged through earlier analyses. When new themes emerged during this process they were tested against existing categories that were modified in order to further consolidate the list of main themes.

Epistemology

Adopting a constructivist approach, I processed the data obtained from the interviews not merely as a description of facts but as a version of a co-constructed reality between myself and the participants in this research. As McLeod (1994) points out interviews are shaped both by the attitude and personality of the interviewer and that of the participants. I considered the impact interviewing had on the participants and myself, as producing a narrative is a way of giving meaning and shaping our experience of reality:

“One of the key features of the qualitative paradigm is that researchers construct versions of the world through their activities as social and political subjects, and do not merely reflect facts with a self-evident objective reality; this position is known as epistemological “constructionism” or epistemological “constructivism” (Henwood, 1996;27).

Therefore in this study I did not attempt to fulfil the criteria of objectivity as expressed in the quantitative paradigm through the use of nominal measurement, statistical data or controlled experiment conditions. It can be argued that measurability and replicability are not the exclusive criteria needed to validate scientific research. It is also possible to generate new scientific theory that is at the same time firmly grounded in participant's own accounts and in substantive domains, working on the construction of intersubjective meaning (Henwood, 1996). Following these principles, I placed great emphasis upon an attention to respondents' own accounts of social and psychological events and of their associated local phenomenal and social worlds. My aim was to respect and investigate the richness of the personal

experience of the participant, and take into account his/her social and cultural circumstances. These epistemological considerations determined my chosen model of research:

“a model of research that is flexible, is carried out in everyday contexts and has as its goal the (co)-construction of participants’ symbolic worlds and social realities.”
(Pidgeon, 1996;47).

Reflexivity

An awareness of my own preconceived ideas as well as the influence of my own experience in Ayahuasca rituals were taken into account in order to keep a high level of transparency. As someone interested in the scientific study of psychedelics, I belong to the Society of Applied Ethnopsychology and Cognitive Studies (S d'EA). I have participated in the seminars led by its president, JM Fericgla, one of the leading experts in Ayahuasca, and I have personal experience in the use of the brew. I am also a member of the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS), an organisation that works to assist researchers design, obtain governmental approval, fund, conduct and report on psychedelic research in humans. Regarding my religious stance, I am not a member of the Santo Daime while sharing some of their religious beliefs. Carrying out this research I became aware of how my own participation in Ayahuasca rituals could influence the process of collecting and analysing the data, creating both positive and negative bias towards it. As a cause of positive bias, I realized that the positive outcomes of my own experience in Ayahuasca rituals could lure me into disregarding the negative accounts of the participants in favour of more enthusiastic descriptions of the effects of the brew. Being aware of this tendency, I paid special attention to the participants’ critical or negative comments about their experience giving them the same importance as the rest of the data. I also aimed to keep a critical approach to the mostly positive data that was expressed, systematically considering alternative interpretations to it. I identified as well factors that could cause a negative bias in my interpretation of the data, the most important being a personal mistrust of religious organisations having its roots in my school years in Spain where Catholicism was forcefully imposed on every pupil. During the research I became aware that the Christian elements of the Santo Daime reawakened my aversion to organized religion, and as a result of this I identified a tendency in myself to interpret the positive themes emerging from the interviews as being a consequence of the participants’ indoctrination. I tested this preconception by openly considering the possibility of the Santo Daime being a religious cult. One key

characteristic to any group forming itself into a cult is to become a closed system, filtering out the outside world (Clarkson, 2000). I noticed that the Santo Daime did not fulfil this characteristic, being an open organization that accepts non-members in their rituals and does not put pressure on them to stay in the group or become a member. Outside influences from other belief systems and spiritual traditions are not discouraged. These observations were useful in guarding me against my preconceptions on this subject and having a more realistic view on the nature of this particular religious organisation.

Regarding my longstanding interest and involvement in psychedelic studies, I consider them, once examined, as an important and helpful part of the research process, rather than a hindrance that could invalid the conclusions of my work. This accords with the statement of Moustakas (1994) that the research questions of phenomenological research methods reflect the interest, involvement and personal commitment of the researcher. In his words:

“Heuristic inquiry is a process that begins with a question or problem which the researcher seeks to illuminate or answer. The question is one that has been a personal challenge and puzzlement in the search to understand one’s self and the world in which one lives. The heuristic process is autobiographic, yet with virtually every question that matters there is also a social, and perhaps universal, significance.” (Moustakas, 1990; 15)

Having a deep interest in this subject, I believe I have gained the necessary experience and understanding to carry on this research.

ANALYSIS

The major themes and their respective sub-themes, which emerged from the analysis of the transcripts, are presented in this section. The major themes are: increased awareness, beneficial effects, negative effects, modification of values and behaviour, Ayahuasca as a teacher and as a discipline.

I - Increased awareness

One of the major themes that emerged from the participants’ discourse relates to the experience of increased awareness during and after the rituals. This increased awareness manifested itself in various ways, appearing in the following sub-themes: awareness of

the body, awareness of interpersonal processes, awareness of the natural environment, awareness of the transpersonal dimension and awareness of negative aspects of personality.

Awareness of the body

Three participants reported a heightened awareness of bodily sensations and processes, usually associated with a deep sense of wellbeing and connection with a spiritual dimension. Ada, a 30 years old Italian woman that has attended Daime ceremonies in 5 occasions since November 2000, said:

“You really feel yourself breathing, your heart is pulsing into a kind of universal love when you take Daime.”

Edgar, a 30 years old Italian male that has been participating in Daime rituals twice monthly since January 2000 said:

“I feel that I'm much more in touch with every process of my body, from the process of eating, to the simple breathing, each little movement for me is much richer than before, I get much more pleasure in using my body.”

David, a 41 years old British male that has been participating twice monthly since 1996 has noticed as well an increased awareness of his body, including ageing processes:

“I'm more aware of how I am deteriorating. My health has improved, but the awareness of my own entropy has increased.”

Increased body awareness has been reported in the existing research on this subject (Fericgla, 2001; Grob, 1996). It can be linked with themes of physical and emotional wellbeing that will be mentioned later.

Awareness of interpersonal processes

Participants talked about an increased awareness of their interpersonal processes, their difficulties and skills in relating to others. Regarding interpersonal difficulties, participants expressed how the Ayahuasca experience has helped them to become more aware of the

conflicts present in their relationships with others, enabling them to find a resolution to these conflicts. For instance, Ada mentioned having problems in trusting people. She also thought of herself as being judgmental and uncaring, and during the Daime ritual she felt the need of examining these aspects of her personality:

“The whole Ayahuasca experience was an exponential of seeing myself as a caricature, because I was five times more suspicious than I am, it was such a challenge for myself in this way, the caricature that Ayahuasca gave to me was so well done it was impossible for me not to be able to face that.”

Simon, a 35 years old English male that has been attending Daime works twice monthly since 1999 also commented on the enhancement of interpersonal sensitivity during the Daime rituals:

“In the Ayahuasca experience I realize that people are in a very sensitive state... and if they are doing a rattle rhythm which isn't to the music, and you see that it is stressing everyone around and then you are going to have to mention them without them getting angry, being able to do it sensitively, without causing aggression or a negative response.”

This enhancement appears to allow improvements in interpersonal relationships. Edgar said:

“Thanks to the concentration that the Ayahuasca ceremony gives me, I've been able to contemplate some of the harshness of my own language, so I have become very sensitive to the way I speak.”

Walter, a 27 years old English white male that has been participating monthly in Santo Daime rituals for the last year and a half mentioned how increased sensitivity improved his confidence:

“I started really trusting my sensitivity, and I also noticed that as I did that, I felt more comfortable, more confident. I just stopped trying to emulate other people's behaviour, and it's a very strange thing but I felt people's respect for me grow, as I did that, because I respected myself more,”

Awareness of the natural environment

Participants also believe that Ayahuasca has improved their awareness in the way they perceive their environment, making them feel more connected to it:

“ I started to feel more and more connected with them (the plants). I feel anytime we can feel connected to the blossom, the moment when the first green leaves appear, we can experience the same feeling of the plant.”(Edgar)

This theme of connectedness is supported by existing research. In his work on Ayahuasca rituals, JM Fericgla noticed a positive change of the users’ vision of the universe, their position in it and their opinion of the world, feeling more connected to it (Fericgla, 2001).

Awareness of transpersonal dimension

Participants reported an increased awareness of the transpersonal dimension. For instance, Walter mentioned a feeling of connection with his ancestors:

“Sometimes during the work I have a strong sense of myself and my father and my brothers being at the front of a line of something that extends back, and rather than being a little bit shy, it’s like “Represent! Now this whole line has come to this point in you now, and you are part of this people here!” and that is a strong thing, and that was good as well. It made me very aware of my place in my family and also in a bigger family of people.”

Participants described becoming aware of their place in the universe, finding new meaning to their lives:

“I also had this kind of scene of a miraculous complete beautiful system which I was a part, that all that needed to happen was for me to be in it, and I had missed the whole point all my life.” (David)

This awareness of the transpersonal dimension is described as the experience of connection with a “higher self”, using a psychosynthesis terminology:

“Ayahuasca creates an internal dialogue which appears to be “not you” something that you understand, and that intimately you know it is part of you. You understand it, and it overshadows you ” (Walter)

This higher self gives participants an insight on their existential condition and the purpose in their lives, giving clear instructions on how to fulfil this purpose:

“And now there was work to do, and it showed me what the work was, it showed me a kind of university of spiritual growth, and I knew that I had to enrol” (David)

It promotes participant’s growth by showing them their shortcomings and negative aspects:

“It's like turning on the lights somewhere where normally it's dark, you can really see your mistakes, you can see really well what was the consequence of your actions, so you can plan better as well your future.” (Edgar)

Awareness of negative aspects

The process of becoming aware of and confronting one’s own conflictive aspects is described as being emotionally painful, usually more so during the first contact with Ayahuasca. Five out of six participants described their first experiences as difficult, scary and extremely challenging, as they had to face the parts of their personalities they found more difficult to accept:

“That happened very strongly to me, on my first session I got incredibly uncomfortable, feeling that all of that (anxiety) was completely visible, I could see exactly what it was that I was uncomfortable with, for the first time in my life it was clear to me.” (Walter)

All 5 participants that had difficult experiences declared that becoming aware of their fears and negative aspects helped them challenging them, giving them an opportunity to improve themselves:

“It was a very positive thing for me, kind of going through that, coming out on the other side of it” (Walter)

They reported feeling as having gone through a purification process, feeling cleansed as a result:

“Lots of stuff came out, physically, emotionally, psychically, all kind of stuff, all the demons came out, and I felt proud inside me” (Ada)

All participants share a similar kind of experience: they believe the Ayahuasca showed them their internal conflicts, and at the same time helped them realize that these conflicts were solvable because they were of their own creation:

“The Ayahuasca gave me the motivation to change it (the problem) and also the feeling that it wasn't a problem, it kind of reminded me that it was me who created it in the first place” (Walter)

Through the exposure to their difficulties, participants managed to reach a deep understanding of aspects of themselves that had remained unexamined until then:

“ It was like a journey within, a very strong inner journey, I never felt so deeply, I never thought so deeply, it was a bright shining inner understanding of things. It allowed me to have a vision, a journey, through the darker parts of reality, that I had failed to make a true entrance into up to that point in my life ” (David)

These difficulties were different for each participant. They included:

- fear of death:

“I had quite scary experiences with it, to do with mortality and death, and one time it (Ayahuasca) showed in no uncertain terms, first of all that everyone was going to die, that I was going to die, and it showed me really hard things, like my parents are going to die, my mother, and it was like, how can I accept that” (Ada)

- sexual identity:

“and it was also a sexual thing, very kind of deeply rooted insecurity about something, I wasn't exactly going "am I straight, am I gay" there was a question there, "are you sure?" and I was like "I don't know", I was locked in the question” (Walter)

- insecurity and low self esteem:

“Before I was more insecure about myself, I always thought that maybe I was a bad person” (Edgar)

- blocked emotions:

“ I had not an idea about what emotions were, I blocked them hard, I could feel these blocks inside my body, and the Ayahuasca located these blocks, it is like a doctor, emotionally I feel doctored” (David)

- depression:

“ I think I had become very absent from my life in lots of ways, actually sometimes I was very dark, very depressed” (Walter)

- addiction:

Peter, a 47 years old white English man that has been taking Ayahuasca regularly since 1998 said:

“I think one of the reasons why I had quite a lot of internal difficulties it's because about ten years ago I had a really bad split with a girlfriend my life went down, really down, and I was drinking really bad, really kind of self destructive way”

II – Beneficial effects

It is possible to assume that increased awareness and confrontation with conflictive aspects of themselves could have an impact in the participants' wellbeing. They reported a number of improvements in their lives and beneficial consequences of participation in the rituals.

This main theme is formed of the following sub-themes: relaxation, health, increased energy, emotional wellbeing, development of skills and qualities.

Relaxation

One of the major themes that emerged from the participants' discourse relates to the experience of relaxation during and after the rituals. This relaxation was described as the liberation from physical tension. Ada said:

“(During the ritual) I did let myself go and relax and sit down and just enjoy and let myself go ... and suddenly I found myself, not this completely different person but much more relaxed and open, if I have to visualize myself I was light like a person that had been wearing for the last five years a very heavy medieval metal armature, after the Daime session I came out and I was just light, without any kind of armature.”

This experience of physical relaxation can be linked with the theme of increased body awareness identified before. The participants become aware of their tensions, often through metaphorical visions (e.g. the “heavy medieval armature”) and are then able to relax. It can be proposed that the increased physical awareness facilitated during the Ayahuasca ritual enables in participants a release of tension and anxiety. This release can induce a state of relaxation that allows the free flow of energy through the body, promoting physical and psychological health and improving movement expression and control. The same principles are expressed in the theory and practice of Tai Chi, where training a focused awareness of breathing and movement induces relaxation and stimulates the energy circulating in the body, making the practitioner feel contentment and greater vitality after practice (Clark, 2001). Two participants compared the body sensations experienced after an Ayahuasca work with those felt during their Tai Chi practice.

These interpretations are supported by existing research on this subject. In his research on more than a hundred Ayahuasca users in Spain, the anthropologist and psychotherapist JM Fericgla observed that Ayahuasca made the users' body more flexible, helping them becoming more psychologically flexible as well, relaxing the rigidity of their character. In fact, participants also mentioned having understood through Ayahuasca how to relax in their interactions with other people and let the situation follow its flow, not engaging in unnecessary actions or competitiveness:

“One of the things that really changed my behaviour drastically was letting the situations happen, I always thought that I should act somehow, almost in any circumstances, that I had to bring what I knew, I had to say what I knew, I had to do what I knew, and I realized that most of the time we just need to relax and wait, everything will happen without you interfering” (Edgar)

Health

After many years taking Ayahuasca, three participants reported enjoying good health.

Walter and David both said:

“ My health has improved.”

This is supported by existing research on the subject. The healing and healthy properties of Ayahuasca have been widely reported in the literature (Luna, 2000).

Energy

Three participants have also experienced an increased availability of energy. For instance, Edgar said:

“I sleep better, and I need less sleep. If I have to do something, I know that I'm able because I can find the energy. I work better, I find more energy than before, whereas before, for instance, I didn't know how strong I was, really.”

Emotional wellbeing

Participants expressed enjoying positive emotional states such as happiness and confidence:

“I feel happier, stronger, more confident about the future and I feel that anything I need I will receive it” (Edgar)

Skills

Two participants reported that Ayahuasca has helped them develop greater skill in the movement of their body.

“I've got much more control over my body, and the feeling of this control is really pleasant as well.”(Edgar)

The belief that Ayahuasca use increases effectiveness in interpersonal relationships and develops social skills is expressed by three participants:

“(With Ayahuasca) I just realized that there are better ways, faster ways and more productive ways (to relate with people), maybe even longer ways but more productive, and it's more by letting the person finding its own way rather than every time feel compelled to say something.”(Simon)

Qualities

Participants reported developing qualities as clarity, strength and determination:

“I trust that my intention is good, so if I believe that my intention is good I feel I don't need anything else because I feel strong enough to fight, and I'm really happy to fight for what I believe” (Edgar)

As discussed earlier, health, vitality, emotional wellbeing and development of skills and qualities can be understood as related to the awareness and relaxation processes that appear in the themes described before.

III - Negative effects

None of the participants reported having suffered any long term negative physical side effects after the use of Ayahuasca. Some of the participants mentioned going through unpleasant but brief bodily sensations during the ceremony. Vomiting and defecating is very common, Ayahuasca being also known as “la purga ” (the purge):

“and in the middle of the session, the singing stopped and at that moment I went into the bathroom and started vomiting and rapid bowel moving, rapid bowel movement at the same time” (David)

These purgative effects of the brew are widely seen in the literature as part of the healing process, allowing physical and psychological cleansing and purification (Luna, 2000). None of the participants has noticed any negative impact of Ayahuasca use in the way they relate to other people. However, some participants noticed in other members of the Daime an excessive use of authority over less experienced members:

“There’s a tendency in some people to become dogmatic about it, I’ve noticed that a couple of people are very into the organizational aspect of it, getting into the fact that they are wearing a star, you got to sit in a straight line, you got to dance in a certain way.”(Walter)

Participants reported mainly an absence of negative effects. For instance, when asked if he had noticed any negative side effects of the use of Ayahuasca, David answered:

“Completely and absolutely not. Only the exposure and illumination to the negative in oneself and one’s speech, action and behaviour.”

IV - Modification of values and behaviour

A fourth main theme that appeared in the participants’ discourse is about the changes they brought to their lives as a result of the participation in Ayahuasca rituals. It is possible to argue that these changes are a consequence of an increased awareness that shows what is to be changed in the participant’s life. Participants also described Ayahuasca as providing the necessary vitality and positivity for implementing those changes. The main theme of change contained the following sub-themes: changes in lifestyle and diet, abandoning addictive behaviour, gaining focus in life, changing values, changes in attitude towards life, changes in attitude towards others.

Lifestyle and diet

Three participants believe that the experience during the Ayahuasca work has had an impact on the way they take care of their body, through exercise and diet:

“I work on the kind of instructions that I receive during the work (Ayahuasca ritual), so if for instance during the work I feel that my legs are really weak, after that I do exercise to make my legs stronger.” (Edgar)

Walter made a connection between his participation in the Daime and starting his Tai Chi practice:

“Around the time I started doing Ayahuasca, I got involved with the people I’m training Tai Chi with, which it seems to be the same mind base that one tries to get into training in Tai Chi.”

Addictive behaviour

Participants also have noticed that Ayahuasca work has helped them to control addictions and other unhealthy behaviour. Since attending to the Daime rituals, four participants stopped smoking:

“I went down (to the Daime ceremony), we did the work, I had various moods, feelings, then I distinctly felt, at one point, like a pendulum right through the center of my being, that said "you never will smoke again one cigarette". And I said "ok, that sounds good to me", and I haven't smoked one since. There was no cutting down, I just stopped.”
(Peter)

Peter also had a drinking problem that he believes has been solved thanks to Ayahuasca:

“It (Ayahuasca) has settled me down ... It's made me more consistent. Before, I think one of the reasons why I had quite a lot of internal difficulties it's because about ten years ago I had a really bad split with a girlfriend, my life went down, really down, and I was drinking really bad, in a kind of self destructive way. Now I only drink occasionally.”

Walter was a polydrug user, and he was struggling with an addictive behaviour. This is how he told his story:

*“I used to take lots of Ecstasy, I used to take lots of acid, 2CB, everything I could get my hands on, at one point in my life, just to change something, because I was not comfortable. During the (Ayahuasca) work, as well as being confronted by mortality and death, all the things that I wanted to hold on to, I thought: “that's going to be taken away, that's not going to be there”, and it (Ayahuasca) was going: “if you don't start looking after yourself a little bit better, then you are going to be off quite soon as well!” and it scared the shit out of me, we were in this beautiful church in F***(the place where the session was taking place), I was talking to the flowers and the spirit of the earth, and just saying "I understand that, I won't abuse myself anymore, I'm not going to take life for granted”*

He continues to use drugs now, but he believes Ayahuasca has helped him to be more in control of it, and he does not see his drug taking as problematic as it was.

There is research that supports these participants' reports of changes to a healthier lifestyle and resolution of addictions. In his investigation of fifteen long-term users of Ayahuasca, psychiatrist C. Grob found that 73% of participants had a past history of substance abuse that had been completely resolved in all cases following regular attendance at Ayahuasca ceremonies (Grob, 1996).

Gaining focus in life

Several participants reported having changed their attitude in life, becoming more focused:

“It's given me more focus, on less things, there were a bit scattered before, spread very thinly before, too many interests, too many fingers in too many pies” (Peter)

Changing values

Participants believe Ayahuasca helped them to question and modify their values and adopted new values based on love and cooperation:

“The moral values that I acquired by accident were just given a bit of a reshuffle”
(Simon)

Changes in attitude towards life and own identity

Participants reported having developed a more positive and flexible attitude to life and its difficulties:

“I got the same amount of difficulties, but less negative attitude, less of a tendency to think that a negative attitude is a solution towards them.” (Peter)

Changes in attitude and behaviour towards others

An important part of the participants’ discourse was about the changes they noticed in their relationship with others, developing a greater acceptance, respect, forgiveness, trust, sincerity, gentleness, empathy and gratitude.

- **Acceptance:**

Ada believes her Ayahuasca experience made her change her attitude towards other people, becoming more accepting:

“I realized that no one deserves to be judged in the way that I was judging them (other members of the Daime). At the end of the first day all that I wanted to do was to give everyone a hug and listen to all the stories that they wanted to tell me, and that was very nice, because no one of them would be the kind of people I would have thought I could be interested in.”

This acceptance appears to bring changes to values and beliefs around sexual behaviour, allowing the undoing of repressive processes and the expression of sexuality:

“I think (Ayahuasca has changed) lots of things to do with love and sex, and how to be able to experience them, and interact with people on those intimate levels, and have very close bonds with people and, some types of social taboos, and say "that's fine! that's not bad behaviour, that's good behaviour!", and other things you thought were fine, say "well no, that confuses things a little bit" (Simon)

- **Respect:**

Walter explained that his attitude towards others changed and became more respectful because during the Daime ritual he could appreciate the divinity in every human being:

“Everybody else is the same, is equally that valid and made out of the same form, God is in everybody, and that is why I should respect everybody else, not because what they do or what they say, but because they are all part of the same thing, and they are me in a way.”

- Forgiveness:

Feelings of forgiveness of themselves and others were experienced during and after the rituals by four participants:

“The feeling of forgiveness is enormous, you really feel like your mistakes have been forgiven.” (Ada)

These feelings of forgiveness often include issues around past relationships, allowing the resolution of “unfinished business”, using Gestalt terminology. As Walter said:

“There was a lot of other things that I hadn't resolved, things like old girlfriends, Ayahuasca helped me to admit it to myself what it was, and that was all that I had to do, I didn't have to do anything about it, or repent, or be punished, it was just a matter of noticing it, and going ok, well, I did that, and next time I don't have to do that, that seemed to make it much easier.”

- Trust, sincerity and openness:

Four participants also mentioned being more able to trust others and becoming more sincere and open, improving communication:

“I say much more often what I believe, or anyway, I show my feelings. I am more open, and patient and I trust more people as well.” (Edgar)

- Gentleness:

Participants talked about developing gentleness in their relationships:

“When I would be at work, and it would be 3 o'clock in the afternoon, and everyone would be very tired, slowly the job is not going as fast as it should, I would go into a motivational character, to keep myself motivated, and to try to keep them focused, and

when they would start asking me what I was doing, I would say "you don't need to know, get on with your own fucking job", and it would just ask me not to swear, the Ayahuasca would ask me not to swear in those situations. Now at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, I don't swear anymore!"(Simon)

- Empathy:

Two participants also mention having noticed a development of their capacity to empathise:

"It is (the Daime ceremony) such a rich experience on the emotional side that suddenly you find yourself experimenting even other people's emotions."(Peter)

- Gratitude:

Participants experienced an increased capacity to appreciate and to thank others:

"With Ayahuasca I felt immediately my heart opened to my parents. I realized, oh my god, look how long they've looked after me, I really awoke to this understanding, my parents had given me oceans of love, so I've been trying since then to repay them with just being in love somehow." (David)

In the respondents' discourse about their relationship with others it is possible to find a similar connection between awareness, relaxation, skills development and resolution of past difficulties. Participants reported an increased awareness in interpersonal relationships facilitated by Ayahuasca use, becoming more empathic and sensitive and thus able to undo negative projections of their fears unto others. This helped them relax in their interactions with other people, allowing the development of social skills and an increased effectiveness in interpersonal relationships. Interpersonal difficulties such as mistrust, fear and judgmental attitudes were replaced by greater acceptance, respect, forgiveness, trust and sincerity. It could be said that the Ayahuasca experience facilitates openness to others through reduction of fear and negative projections, developing a greater capacity for love and appreciation in relationships. This state of optimal interpersonal functioning has been described by A. Maslow as a result of the process of self-actualization, that he believed facilitated a loving, uncondemning, compassionate and accepting way of relating to others:

"Because self-actualizing people ordinarily do not have to abstract need-gratifying qualities nor see the person as a tool, it is much more possible for them to take a

valuing, non-judging, non-interfering, non-condemning attitude toward others.”
(Maslow, 1968;46).

This self-actualization process was described by Maslow as manifesting itself through “peak-experiences” where openness is achieved through reduction of fear:

“One aspect of the peak-experience is a complete, though momentary, loss of fear, anxiety, inhibition, defense and control, a giving up of renunciation, delay and restraint. This implies a greater openness of perception since fear distorts.” (Maslow, 1968;104).

Similar conclusions are found in JM Fericgla’s research. He observed that participation in Ayahuasca sessions generates a strong emotional empathy, and enhances the capacity to love as the subject becomes able to see others more objectively, opening up the possibility of more profound interpersonal relationships (Fericgla, 2001).

It is possible to understand the improved participants’ relationship with significant others as a consequence of this process. This is confirmed by C. Grob’s research, where respondents reported a tendency to become better parents, partners, friends and citizens (Grob, 1996). Interestingly, they stressed the importance they now gave to “watching one’s words” and avoiding being even slightly verbally hurtful to others as much as the participants of this research did. It can be said that Ayahuasca use increases a particular sensitivity in verbal communication and increases an awareness of the effects words have in other people.

V - Ayahuasca as a teacher and as a discipline

A general theme that emerged in the participants’ discourse was the identification of Ayahuasca as a teacher. This theme can be considered as a metaphor representing the process described earlier, a heightened awareness that exposes the positive and the negative aspects of the participant’s personality facilitating change in him/herself. Exposure to the positive aspects gives the strength and determination necessary to implement changes, and exposure to the negative aspects shows what changes need to be implemented. It is understandable that participants use the figure of a severe but forgiving and supportive teacher as a representation of this process:

“ I would say that Santo Daime has provided me with a teacher” (Peter)

The teacher can be perceived through a visual metaphor, together with themes of relaxation and insight:

“The Daime actually creates a cartoon situation above your head, your higher self, going "ok", taking control, and telling you what to do. Sometimes it steps in, and maybe gives you a few ideas on how to deal with something it will pause, tell you to relax, it is like somebody teaching you about human beings” (Simon)

This inner teacher is seen as giving clear instructions and can modify the participant’s personality, as it emerged in the themes of modification of values and attitudes:

“the function of the ceremony, and the Ayahuasca itself tells you on occasions things that you will have to stop doing, stop preoccupying yourself, it just says "drop that", don't have it, it's just completely redundant, part of the personality that gets vomited into a bucket and you go and pour it down the toilet, say goodbye and that is the last time... it's not needed anymore” (David)

It is perceived as severe but not unfair and it’s also patient. As seen before, participants were often confronted with the most difficult aspects of their personality:

“It is quite severe in its discipline but it's doing that for the reason that it wants you to succeed in being yourself. It's got infinite patience for you to get it done, a sort of saving grace” (Ada)

This connection with the internal teacher is maintained after the end of the rituals:

“I found myself trusting my instinct, and a very subtle voice started appearing after that I've done a few works, it seemed to be the Daime in me, and I still speak to that voice sometimes if I need some guidance, if I'm not sure about something, I'll ask the spirit of the Daime, wherever it might be, to come and help me, and every time it helps me” (Walter)

It is experienced as transcending time and space:

“Sometimes I feel connected with a part of me outside of time, outside of my body, living and dying, hours and days, it’s connected with something that has persisted and will always be there” (Edgar)

It can be perceived as an instinctual voice, and participants feel connected to it by letting go of conscious control:

“And then something can come through you, you don’t have to be responsible for doing it, it comes through you, it’s like by completely giving up and relinquishing all control, suddenly you have absolute control” (Walter)

It can also be perceived as an inner light:

“there was a garden in my belly, that was like a rosebush, and it was made of light, and this thing was growing in the mist of all this darkness that I’ve locked inside, this thing was starting to grow, being happy just to be, and that was kind of an indescribable relief” (Walter)

Ayahuasca is also seen as a discipline, a work of self development:

“to me the Ayahuasca is training, it seems to operate on my deepest mind” (Edgar)

This discipline is perceived as complete, working on a physical, emotional and cognitive level:

“You can take up intellectual disciplines that feed your brain, you can take up emotional disciplines that feed your emotions you can take up movement disciplines that enhance your movement but you don’t often have the chance of having them all present” (Simon)

It is seen as a path of self-discovery:

“I always felt about Santo Daimé that it is a gateway, it's something that it's opening up a path, which I don't know what it is yet” (David)

This experience of connecting with a higher self facilitated profound healing processes in the participants. This transcendent self was experienced as an internal guide that gave them insights on the meaning and purpose in their lives and promoted their growth through the understanding and resolution of their psychological difficulties. It corresponds to what Maslow called “intrinsic conscience” and described as based upon the unconscious and preconscious perception of our own nature, destiny and capacities. This conscience was seen by Maslow as manifesting itself through “peak experiences” and having therapeutic effects, changing the view of the person in a healthy direction, changing the person’s view of other people and the relations to them, changing the person’s view of the world, increasing spontaneity and creativity and allowing the person to feel that life is worth living (Maslow, 1968). The therapeutic processes it facilitates appear to follow the sequence mentioned in the previous paragraphs: an increased awareness of psychological difficulties accompanied by a reduction of fear associated to them that allows the participants to implement beneficial changes in their lives. This process has been described by Grof (1980) in his study of psychedelic therapy:

“Under these circumstances (psychedelic experiences) the defense systems are considerably weakened and psychological resistance decreases. The emotional responses of the subject are dramatically enhanced and one may observe powerful abreaction and catharsis.” (Grof, 1980; 24).

Similar findings were presented by JM Fericgla, as he noticed that the participants in his research developed a “dialogic consciousness”, the creation of a relationship with an “internal guide” that had a powerful therapeutic effect, decreasing maladjustment and increasing responsibility of the subjects for their lives (Fericgla, 2001). This internal guide can be assimilated to the “superconscious ” postulated by psychosynthesis. In the words of Assagioli:

“The superconscious is the region from which we receive our higher intuitions and inspirations – artistic, philosophical or scientific, ethical imperatives and urges to humanitarian and heroic action. It is the source of the higher feelings, such as altruistic

love; of genius and of the states of contemplation, illumination and ecstasy.” (Assagioli, 1965; 36)

The themes emerging from the participants’ discourse can be interpreted from a transpersonal psychology perspective: participation in Ayahuasca rituals can facilitate an expansion of the usual boundaries of personality, allowing the experience of intuitive and healing parts of the self that can help the person fulfilling potentialities and resolving blockages. These same processes of awareness expansion and connection with superconscious realms are at the core of transpersonal psychotherapy practice.

DISCUSSION

Reliability and Validity

From the emerging themes it is possible to identify psychotherapeutic processes experienced by participants in their Ayahuasca sessions that had a beneficial impact in their lives. It is important for reliability and validity purposes to consider all aspects that could have influenced this outcome. Firstly, I interviewed persons that were currently attending to Daime rituals. This selection of population of my study excluded any person that could have had a negative experience of the rituals and chosen not to participate again. My aim in this study is not to ascertain if participation in Daime rituals is beneficial for everybody or not, but to gain an insight into the experience of persons actively involved in these ceremonies. Surely a future study of people that dropped out from the Santo Daime, for instance, would offer a view on very different experiences and could balance and complement the results of this work.

Another factor that possibly could have had an influence on the results is the relationship between the participants and me, where the participants were aware of my status as a researcher and psychotherapist. This could have had an impact in the participants’ discourse, orienting it towards themes of therapeutic change out of a need of pleasing the interviewer. A way to avoid this would have been to conceal my psychotherapist status, but ethical considerations make this solution unworkable, so this bias must be accepted as unavoidable and taken into consideration when evaluating the results.

Finally an important factor influencing this research is my own experience and involvement in Santo Daime rituals. Considering that I believe Ayahuasca has had a beneficial impact in my life, I am aware that this could have affected the way I approached the interviewing and processing of the data. This awareness helped me in minimising this bias as much as

possible. During the interviewing process I avoided leading questions and I paid attention to my body language, adopting a neutral stance as much as possible. Aiming to avoid omission or denial of difficult material, I made explicit inquiries into the possible negative experiences of the participants. During the processing of the data I systematically considered alternative interpretations, paying equal attention to every theme and only discarding those that appeared irrelevant, independently of their content. I sought to be self-aware and reflective, documenting personal internal processes relating to the research so that these could be dealt with openly. I aimed to describe clearly and comprehensibly the research procedures employed. Verbatim statements are presented in the results section and a full interview transcription can be found in Appendix V, so that the reader is free to consider the interpretations offered and make alternative explanations. I compared and matched the results with the existing literature on the subject and general psychological theories. Finally I believe that the convergence between the data produced by participants gives validity and significance to the themes. Therefore I believe the results meet the evaluative criteria of reliability and validity.

Psychotherapeutic processes and applications

It is possible to identify a pattern operating in the participants during their Daime sessions. Initially Ayahuasca seems to facilitate a heightened awareness of physical tensions and emotional conflicts that produces fear and despair. The psychological defenses of the participants are destructured, confronting them with the difficult material previously defended against. This is a very difficult and painful experience, one that would be avoided at all costs in the participants' normal life. It is only the powerful effect of the drug and the group dynamics in the ceremony that pushes the person to face the neurotic aspects of their personality structure. This temporary destructuring of their personality, though painful at times, allows a subsequent restructuring resulting in a change towards a more adaptive personality. This process is experienced by participants as following the guidelines of a higher self that can be equally mercilessly severe as immensely forgiving and helpful. This is reflected in the Daime hymns, where the participants ask for strength, light and love: "*Dai-me força, dai-me luz dai-me amor*". This figure of the Daime as a teacher that gives strength, light and love can be associated with the concept of "higher self" used in transpersonal psychology. It is a symbolic representation of the process experienced by participants of an increased awareness and exposure to one's own strengths and limitations that allows change of values and behaviour and the fulfilment of potentialities. These

participants' experiences fit well with the transpersonal psychology paradigm that studies the therapeutic potential of mystical or ecstatic states of consciousness. In the transpersonal worldview the plants are seen as the manifestation of the universal consciousness that generates the existence of this material reality. Ingestion of the plants allows the dissolution of ego boundaries and the experience of contact with the power and wisdom of this universal consciousness. This experience is seen as having profound therapeutic effects, giving meaning and direction in life and reducing fear and anxiety. From the participants' worldview as they have expressed it, it can be argued that disconnection from a transcendent or meaningful sense of oneself in the universe can cause psychological disturbances as depression, lack of confidence, blocked emotions, addictions and interpersonal difficulties. Experiences like those described in this study can be seen as filling an existential void in an adaptive way, where before participation in Ayahuasca rituals some participants reported attempting to fill that void by abusing substances or with compulsive behaviour. This would make Ayahuasca an interesting field of research for the treatment of addictions, especially considering that existing research already points in this direction (Grob and Callaway, 1996). In conclusion, the participants' reports in this study allow to hypothesise a correspondence between the therapeutic processes taking place in Ayahuasca sessions and the processes of integration of spiritual dimensions facilitated by transpersonal psychotherapists. It could be possible for them to integrate Ayahuasca use in their practice, as transpersonal psychotherapy already includes the use of ritual and ecstatic states of consciousness in its framework.

Other therapeutic aspects

From a pharmacological perspective, the participants' experiences of optimism, confidence and joy seem to validate J. Callaway's hypothesis of Ayahuasca having an antidepressant quality by enhancing the production and metabolism of serotonin in the human brain. This hypothesis is currently being tested by ongoing neuropharmacological research. Although preliminary results are promising, the antidepressant properties of Ayahuasca have not been yet proved (Callaway, 2002).

From a group psychology perspective, the participants' descriptions of their interactions with the other members of the Santo Daime during and after the rituals seem to correspond to some processes present in group psychotherapy. The participants describe being able to communicate openly in a respectful and safe setting, gaining an awareness of their modalities of interaction with others, experiencing rewarding and meaningful interpersonal

contact. This seems to allow them to identify and resolve interpersonal difficulties. Participants can be seen as rehearsing social skills in the group that are used in their everyday life, bringing improvements in their relationships with people outside of the group, as family and friends. However, how the Ayahuasca and the group dynamics of the rituals exactly manage to facilitate these therapeutic processes is beyond the reach of this work. My aim has been to observe, identify and describe patterns of change in Daime participants. Further work hopefully will give greater understanding on how these patterns of change are happening.

Final considerations

Finally, I would like to balance the overall optimistic tone of this dissertation by pointing out possible dangers and pitfalls of participation in Ayahuasca ceremonies. Participants talked about the risk of members becoming too dogmatic, as in possession of a fixed “ultimate truth”. This can trap the members in a narcissistic outlook of the world where they are right and all the others are wrong. The access to a “higher self” can also carry the risk of enacting the archetype of Icarus: flying too high (inflating the ego) can result in a catastrophe. We have seen in this work how deflation of the ego can be part of a healing experience, but it is important to keep in mind that it can be terminally destructive as well. In my research I did not come across any experience of irreparable personality breakdown, but literature exists that reports episodes of psychotic reactions and suicides among the Brazilian Santo Daime communities (Castilla, 1995). Legal procedures following these episodes did not find any wrongdoing and withdrew all charges against the Daime Church, but even the most enthusiastic London Daime participant expressed the need for caution due to the extreme vulnerability members are exposed to during ceremonies. If Ayahuasca sessions are to be considered as a possible way of working in a psychotherapeutic setting, further work is needed to understand how to minimize its dangers and become able to use its remarkable healing properties. In that respect, research on the drug addiction clinics currently using Ayahuasca in Peru and Brazil seems to be the logical next step. Ayahuasca rituals could also be used within the framework of existing humanistic and transpersonal individual and group psychotherapies that aim at awareness development and connection with the superconscious realms of the psyche.

CONCLUSION

As a final conclusion to this work, I put forward the proposition that Santo Daime rituals can be considered as an “indigenous psychotherapy”. The term “indigenous psychotherapy” is used in recognition of the pluralistic healing systems in most societies (Boon-Ooi-Lee, 2002). In a broad sense, psychotherapy is defined as a process or activity that involves the following (Frank and Frank, 1991;2):

“(1) A healing agent, typically a person trained in a socially sanctioned method of healing, believed to be effective by the sufferer and by at least some members of his or her social group. The healing agent need not be a professional.

(2) A sufferer who seeks relief from the healer.

(3) A healing relationship – that is, a circumscribed, more or less structured, series of contacts between the healer and the sufferer in which the healer, often with the aid of a group, tries to bring about relief of symptoms. This relief is typically accompanied by changes in emotional state, attitudes and behaviour. Except in cases of involuntary treatment, all concerned believe the changes to be beneficial. Although physical and chemical adjuncts may be used, the healing influence is exercised primarily by words, acts and rituals in which sufferer, healer, and sometimes groups participate jointly.”

It can be seen that Santo Daime rituals fulfil all of these characteristics. Further exploration of its therapeutic aspects can show new ways of working that can be integrated in Western psychotherapy practice.

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APPENDIX I

History of the Santo Daime

The Santo Daime Church was founded in 1930 by Raimundo Irineu Serra, a Brazilian black rubber-tapper. While learning the rubber trade he followed a spiritual apprenticeship with the Peruvian Indians with whom he worked. He tried the sacred Ayahuasca tea and was shown the way to prepare it. Irineu's first significant vision was of a divine lady, the "Forest Queen" who told him that he must start a new faith in which the Ayahuasca drink (to be called "daime", meaning "give me" in Portuguese) would be central. The doctrine (including beliefs from both Christianity and nature religions) and the first hymns of the Santo Daime were received by Irineu through the visions he had drinking Ayahuasca. When Irineu died in 1971, the Church had grown so much that a spiritual community composed of forty-five families was set up on the outskirts of Rio Branco. In 1981, led by Irineu's follower, Padrinho Sebastiao, the community settled in Ceu de Mapia, a centre in the middle of the Amazonian rain forest, where they still live today. Since then it has expanded all over the world and Santo Daime communities exist in the USA, Japan, Germany, Italy, Spain, Holland, France and the UK.

Structure of a Daime ceremony

The ceremony is facilitated by a *padrinho* or *padrinha* (godfather/godmother). Men and women sit in opposite sides of the room, facing each other. They wear white shirts, blue trousers the men and blue skirts the women. In the middle of the two groups, a small altar with Christian symbols and images of the Daime founders is prepared. After a brief introductory speech from the *padrinho* where participants are asked not to leave the premises until the end of the ceremony, he gives to each participant a small glass of Ayahuasca. A brief silent meditation follows, and when the *padrinho* feels the onset of the Ayahuasca effects, he and a band of usually 3 or 4 musicians start playing and singing the Daime hymns (Appendix II). These hymns were written in Portuguese by the founders of the Church, and transmit the doctrine of the Daime. All participants sing along and play percussion instruments. There is some dancing as well, following a simple choreography. At approximately one hour intervals, the *padrinho* starts a new distribution of Ayahuasca. There are usually 3 or 4 'takes' during the ceremony. After 5 or 6 hours, the *padrinho* declares the ceremony over. After a communal final prayer, the participants hug each other

and spend some time together sharing their experience. The atmosphere is usually very loving and joyous.

Pharmacology and Physiology

Ayahuasca is made out of two main ingredients, a plant containing DMT (usually *Psychotria Viridis*) and a vine (*Banisteriosis Caapi*) containing harmaline, an inhibitor of the MAO or monoamine oxidase enzyme. DMT is the psychoactive compound of the brew, but alone it is inactive if taken orally, as the MAO enzyme that occurs in human digestive system breaks DMT down before it can reach the bloodstream. Since prehistoric times South American natives learned to combine DMT-containing plants with others possessing anti-MAO compounds, so swallowed DMT can withstand enzyme breakdown long enough to enter the bloodstream and exert its psychological effects. DMT (dimethyltryptamine) is a tryptamine, as also is the neurotransmitter serotonin. The earliest psychopharmacological experiments in humans and animals suggested that DMT exerted their primary effects on the brain's serotonin system. In 1972 Nobel-prize winning scientist Julius Axelrod reported finding DMT in human brain tissue. Additional research showed the pathways by which the human body makes DMT. DMT thus became the first endogenous human psychedelic.

Legal status

In 1987, an enquiry ordered by Brazilian government concluded that Daime had a positive influence on the community and encouraged social harmony and integration. No evidence was found of harmful effects or potential for abuse of Ayahuasca. In 1992 the use of Ayahuasca was declared legal in Brazil, and it remains so. So far no country other than Brazil has officially permitted the use of Ayahuasca for religious purposes and DMT is prohibited all over the world. This has caused remarkably few problems to the Daime Church. Apart from the episodes before mentioned in Spain and Holland that did not have any legal repercussion, and despite several police investigations, no charges have been brought in any other European country.

APPENDIX II

Estrela D'Agua

Vou chamar a estrela d'agua
Para vir me iluminar
Para vir me iluminar
Para vir me iluminar

Dai-me forca e dai-me amor
Dai-me forca e dai-me amor

Da licenca eu entrar
Da licenca eu entrar
Nas profundezas do mar
Nas profundezas do mar

Foi Meu Pai quem me mandou
Foi Meu Pai quem me mandou
Conhecer todos primores
Conhecer todos primores

Dai-me forca e dai-me amor
Dai-me forca e dai-me amor

A Minha mae que me ensinou
A Minha mae que me ensinou
Conhecer todos primores
Conhecer todos primores
Com amor no coracao
Para cantar com os meus irmaos
Para cantar com os meus irmaos
Para cantar com os meus irmaos

Water-Star

I'm going to call the water-star
To come illuminate me
To come illuminate me
To come illuminate me

Give me strength and give me love
Give me strength and give me love

Let me dive in
Let me dive in
Down to the depths of the sea
Down to the depths of the sea

It was my Father who sent me
It was my Father who sent me
To know every kind of beauty
To know every kind of beauty

Give me strength and give me love
Give me strength and give me love

It was My Mother who taught me
It was My Mother who taught me
To know every kind of beauty
To know every kind of beauty
With love in my heart
To sing with my brothers and sisters
To sing with my brothers and sisters
To sing with my brothers and sisters

Received by Raimundo Irineu Serra

APPENDIX III

Informed Consent Form

As part of my Masters Degree, I am conducting research into the psychological effects of participation in rituals using Ayahuasca. My aim, in the immediate term, is to build on the paucity of existing research, seeking to understand more about the subjective experience of participants in Ayahuasca rituals (i.e. what it is like for you, your thoughts, your feelings, how it is affecting your life).

In the longer term, it is hoped that these findings will be useful in identifying possible psychotherapeutic processes facilitated by Ayahuasca use in ritualized settings, and contribute towards the development of a psychotherapeutic model that integrates the use of ritual with psychoactive plants.

- In order to help me understand more about your subjective experience of participating in Ayahuasca rituals, I would be grateful if you could tell me in your own words about your personal experience. I will ask a few questions to direct you to areas of relevance and maintain focus on the research question. I may also use a few non-committal probes to facilitate further information or to seek clarification. At no stage are you obliged to disclose more than you feel comfortable to disclose.
- The interview will be taped (to assist me in remembering what you say) over a period of 45/60 minutes. Once tapes have been transcribed, they will be erased.
- All information will be treated confidentially and as a participant you will be anonymous.
- Participants are free to withdraw or retract agreement.
- It is not expected that any aspect of the interview will be disturbing as participants are free to disclose information to the extent that they feel comfortable. However, I would be happy to offer one follow-up counselling session should any concerns arise after the event.

I agree, voluntarily, to be a participant in the study according to the conditions set out above.

Signed

Manuel Villaescusa (Postgraduate student)
Whittington Hospital School of Counselling and Psychotherapy
Middlesex University

APPENDIX IV

Research Questions

"What are, if any, the psychotherapeutic processes facilitated by Ayahuasca use amongst those participating in Santo Daime rituals in the UK?"

Is there any change in the perception the participants have of their relationship with their body and their environment?

Since your participation in Daime rituals, have you noticed any changes in your health? (diet, exercise, drinking, smoking, etc...)

Has there been any changes in the way you see yourself relating to your environment?

Have you noticed any difference in the way you think about animals and plants?

Does participation in Daime rituals enhance the quality of relationships between the participants and significant others?

Since your participation in Daime rituals, have you noticed any differences in the relationship with your family?

Since your participation in Daime rituals, have you noticed any differences in the relationship with your friends?

Since your participation in Daime rituals, have you noticed any differences in the relationship with other people?

Does participation in Daime rituals foster a sense of self that is meaningful to the participant?

Have you noticed any change in your sense of purpose in life?

Have you noticed any difference in the way you think about spirituality?

Have you noticed any difference in the way you think about death?

APPENDIX V**Transcript of interview**

	Subject: Davide, 41 years old male, has been participating regularly to Daime rituals since 1996.	
Manuel	Ok, let's start with a general question, how did you get in touch with ayahuasca? Tell me your story.	
Davide	The story so far is, or the story I tend to tell when I'm asked this question, is this: that searching through my life for something to do with our relationship with plants, and resisting very early age wanting to kill animals, led me to this attention to the vegetable kingdom,	
	I always liked plants, trees, it just drive me crazy, and of course the forest, being in nature made me think, yes, I want to be there,	
	and the National Geographic magazines my father had, I saw in them pictures of people living in houses built in mud, just like I would try to do in a sandpit myself, and I understood this,	
	but where I lived I didn't understand at all, complete madness, all my life I have been thinking, there is a way of living, a way of being, and I don't know what it's about, don't know how it's called, but it's kind of to do with building your house, living in it, not doing horrible things to animals,	
	I imagined everyone that lived there was vegetarian, by the way,	
	I imagined they did not kill animals, and I compared with what we eat today, a steak at every meal, a mistake at every meal for sure,	
	Since I went to Brazil I cleaned myself out completely of the idea that I'm going to be eating meat again.	
	But these are commentaries, the question was how I first came to the ayahuasca, well, listening out for every sign of the connection with the forest, and with plants, R and L went to Japan, and when in Japan they gave some Santo Daime to some people, these people, some of them were English, one of them was connected with a friend of mine, so this connection, this guy A, wrote to me saying, "Let's go to Brazil and follow up this strange beverage and this things"	
	I thought it was a very good idea, it made complete sense, and I went there in a way because I wanted to impress him, that I was completely there,	
	because this made complete sense, and wanted to do something with the 500 pounds in my pocket, cos I knew that in a week's time it wouldn't be there, so I bought an air ticket, and I wrote to him back saying "I bought those tickets, let's go"	
	And his communication after that was very anxious, cos he was a bit worried that I took him completely serious, so he said at one point that he couldn't go, he didn't have the money or time, so I thought "ok, well I've got a ticket, that's ok, I'm going" but near the time he did get a ticket,	
	my partner and friend and mother of my children, J, went with me, so we went as a group of 4 people, and flew to Rio, and were met by R and L.	
Manuel	What year was that?	
Davide	6 years ago, whatever that is. R and L introduced themselves to us, and fed us Daime that evening, we drank some Daime together, my very first time.	
Manuel	How was it?	
Davide	It was very tricky for me, very hard, I experienced all kind of dark paranoias, I really thought "Oh, what I have got myself into, this is definitely not me, this is too heavy, but something inside me, some kind of little fragment of light remained, despite of all of it,	
	and it was just because of the suffering for me during the first session, so hard, I felt completely exhausted, I could hardly sit up at all, I had all sort of psychic breakdowns, everything was falling to pieces, I couldn't believe it, I shrank into this kind of little crumpled heap of paranoia, neurosis, panic,	
	I felt very sorry for myself, I felt it was so unfair, everybody pushing down on me, what I'm a doing here, this is crap, this is the kind of state I was in,	
	and in the middle of the session, the singing stopped and at that moment I went into the bathroom and started vomiting and rapid bowel moving, rapid bowel movement at the same time,	
	but fortunately the toilet and the sink were positioned so that I could just about get my arse over the bowl and my chin over the sink (gesticulating), I stretched out between these two things and moaned, made an awful noise in the silence that the people had gone into,	
	I was thinking, (hushin)"why did they stop singing? they were singing, they wouldn't hear me and I could moan, aaargh!"	
	I felt so terrible, aaah! (big sigh), and lots of stuff came out, physically, emotionally, psychically, all kind of stuff, all the demons came out, and I felt proud inside me, or panicky, running around, trying to start fires and put fires out, and everything was going mad inside of me.	
	So that's a sort of slogan of the experience that I've just said, but the experience seemed to be eternal, multiple eternities, so my current way of describing it is completely inadequate, it's just off the wall, the experience was so immense, many many immensities, somehow piled up,	
	and this was too overwhelming, I'd bit more than I could chew,	
	I thought "I wish I had experimented more with LSD, when I was younger, why was I so restricted, why did I hold back all these possibilities"	
	Because I was waiting for something that was really spot on, and in the meantime I didn't move, so I never experimented with psychedelics before the ayahuasca, so it was the first psychedelic experience that I was having.	
	So I was splash splosh bing!!! (noises of things exploding), all my organs were taken to pieces, and splash, shblong,	
	and it seemed to be not gentle, I felt "this is what people have been thinking about when they were describing alien abduction"	
Manuel	So it was quite an unpleasant experience!	
Davide	It was the strangest experience in my life, but it had beauty in it.	

Manuel	What was the beautiful side?	
Davide	It was this!!! (plays some music from Daime ceremonies in a tape recorder). That's where the beauty was! It's the music, it's like a magic carpet, so something else happened,	
	something else I should say, as well as all that darkness and problems, feeling of nausea and panic, I also had this kind of scene of a miraculous complete beautiful system which I was a part, that all that needed to happen was for me to be in it, and I had missed the whole point all my life,	
	I got down this dark place and put this raincoat on and I put a dark hat on, somehow I really had done this for myself,	
	and now there was work to do, and it showed me what the work was, it showed me a kind of university of spiritual growth, and I knew that I had to enrol, I had to do the work, and if I didn't then you're on your own, you've been shown now, you've asked, you asked for the Daime, you said give me, the Daime gave you,	
	so this one Daime work was kind of a complete teaching of everything I needed to know,	
	and the responsibility was so immense, you know, I crashed again, but it's good to crash, now it was time, leave the car and spin it on the motorway,	
Manuel	So it looks like it gave you a different way of considering your role in this planet?	
Davide	I believe so, I am convinced in this stage in my life, although I'm open to all kinds of strange permutations, what I think now is that my mind is able to reprogram itself, just a bit, just to begin, and this is a way for me to describe the need I have for paying attention to negative behaviour, negative speech, negative thought, negative energies,	
	and living in a sort of madness, in an illusion, it's very difficult because somehow we are in this thing called society which is a kind of illusion,	
	so it gave me this whole feeling of understanding something, an exposure to it,	
	how? it was like a journey within, a very strong inner journey, I never felt so deeply, I never thought so deeply, it was a bright shining inner understanding of things, it was like literally, and I say like because it is only a symbol, of what the experience was,	
	it is a mistake to say "it is this" because it is not a thing, so it can be represented, maybe with a beautiful image, but it is something beyond this, so it's hard to describe,	
	but the feeling was of a communion, a blissful communion, blissful meaning something disconnected from the suffering in this world, some kind of edge that hurts and spikes, the terror and the horror of death, all this things,	
	a relief complete, a shining understanding of something that you can immediately take to be a complete understanding,	
	so all in one, so overwhelming, not too much because somehow the ayahuasca presents you,	
	in a way the ayahuasca is putting your tie on, doing your hair up for you, doing everything for you so you can present yourself at this moment,	
	and whatever you are at that moment, is what is has to work with, so it does its best and if it has to make you sick, it's doing its best to clean you up. It is like a University, something quite beautiful, like a Cosmic University.	
Manuel	You mentioned that it changed your way of seeing death and experiencing suffering, can you tell me a bit more of that, in what way did it change your view on suffering and death?	
Davide	It was like the nudge or kick I needed in order to get through some kind of fear about even thinking about such things. Suffering was something that didn't happen to me, and I did not want to even challenge it in the world,	
	instead, it allowed me to have a vision, a journey, through the darker parts of reality, that I had failed to make a true entrance into up to that point in my life, despite pretension, all I did is pretend to be something,	
	now I've stop pretending to be on a path doing spiritual things, now I'm the chaos of it..	
	Groups go through four stages, pretension or pseudo community, chaos and confusion, emptiness, and then community.,	
	and this relates to my belief that the ayahuasca has been very concerned with community,	
	I think of it as a teacher, the teacher ayahuasca is talking to me a lot about community.	
Manuel	It's interesting that you are talking about others, and you in relationship with others, how about the rship you have with your own suffering and your own death?	
Davide	This is true. The identification with other is one of the means by which I achieve understanding of myself.	
	In the ayahuasca ceremony, I think it is correct to say that you die, and maybe you die more than once, I believe you have a chance to meet the moment when your coalesced consciousness in this human form is able to release itself into the greater cosmos and die,	
	and this moment seems to be filled with all kind of characters, which you identify ultimately with yourself, this is me, the crowd within me,	
	then you meet some understanding of something deeper inside you	
	I found that I lied to myself, I lied about what I'm sort of really thinking and feeling in some ways, I found that my language is too extreme, I'm currently going through a period which is been a number of years, there's a kind of another voice that is saying "too hard, this is not true, this is a kind of lie, be careful now!",	
	then I think "wow, I need to take really good care with what I say", and in this ritual, the names of God are used, and this voice manages to show how in our language how we affect the world and how we affect others,	
	I know I'm deeply affected by what other people say to me, this experience can have a profound effect,	
	thanks to the concentration that the ayahuasca ceremony gives me, I've been able to contemplate some of the harshness of my own language,	
	so I have become very sensitive to the way I speak.	
Manuel	So it looks like you are more aware of the effects on others of your language and you take more care in what you say to others because you realize the impact that it can have.	
David	I am aware of the dishonesty in myself, now I realize "well, I've spoken so badly, how have I used such a language in my life", so I wanted to soften my approach, but than makes one appear even more vague and grey,	
	and I also had this feeling of being this grey and vague thing, other people seemed to be as being bright, clear cut, and when I looked at myself I asked myself "what are you, what do you do? you are nothing!"	
	So this made me feel even worse, so that's the challenge for me now, to try to be specific, and clear, but not use the sword when you need to use a pastry roller	
Manuel	So it looks like the ayahuasca is telling you, or you are taking the teaching from the ayahuasca on how to	

	improve your communication.	
David	Maybe. I believe that ayahuasca is a teacher, and this way to enter into the dialogue with the entity that maybe is ayahuasca, I say these maybes because I am aware of this beautiful truth about the ayahuasca, that allows for the paradox, so by whatever means the West has interpreted ayahuasca, it appears that the teaching it gives are exactly as you say, yes.	
Manuel	Are there any other ways that you have noticed that ayahuasca has had an impact in your relationships with others? With others I include family, lovers, etc...	
David	It's kind of like exploded at them. This is a long process, the course seems is all one's life, so I'm still very beginner in the sense of understanding what is going on, however, the effect has been that I've had a feeling of more intimacy with my own parents, a kind of appreciation, with ayahuasca I felt immediately my heart opened to my parents (moved, moist eyes). I realized, oh my god, look how long they've looked after me, I really awaked to this understanding, my parents had given me oceans of love, so I've been trying since then to repay them with just being in love somehow.	
Manuel	Lovers?	
David	Well, J was my lover for many years, for 15 years before the ayahuasca, and the ayahuasca immediately busted us up, we sort of pretended busting up before, the ayahuasca shook me up, finally shook me up, and I went into a period of 7 days, after being in Ceu de M and drink ayahuasca there, barely able to speak about anything, finding easier to speak with complete strangers than with friends, with them I was unable to speak almost, so I was in a kind of an interesting state, the mind had stopped, but if you don't communicate with people except with grunts, is like you are abusing them, and I went through a very difficult time with J in Brazil that time, but out of it came many good things, including children, It was a necessary break I had to do with everything, I went into my heart, just laying on the ground, I had a deep yearning inside me, it was like the presence of a divine force, and it stopped me in my tracks the way that I had been, the kind of niggly, pretentious, thinking that I'm doing something that I'm not, clever little man, I thought I was a clever little man!, and ayahuasca stopped me doing this.	
Manuel	So it sounds like ayahuasca showed you modesty in a way.	
David	I hope so, said the modest man. I have to say some very hard concrete facts. I'm more modest and more humble now, because I now understand the way we are all terrified, we all live in this kind of madness and, protecting ourselves, defending ourselves, we don't need to, so I try and forgive myself as much as possible these last few weeks (David had been in Brazil taking ayahuasca), it's just dawning on me, how much to forgive myself about everything, and then move through into forgiveness of others.	
Manuel	So you feel less threatened, more secure?	
David	Funny, it's like suddenly being on the front of a very fast speeding vessel through water, so I definitely feel less safe, but I feel more secure in that I am now in my life, whereas before I was down in the back, rapped up in something, in a concern about something, that was really not the issue, I would miss it, I missed my life, and now I know what the job is for myself, it sounds arrogant but it's a big job, and I feel it's confirmed through my meeting with others, who are for me shining examples of humanity, people who seem to me opening their hearts to love and compassion, honesty, community, harmony, and peace, it all sounds fluffy when I say it but this feels like an essential science to study, and why haven't we been exposed to any of these, of course we are not because we are living in a mad world, once you understand that, you are in a new position of consciousness, and expanded understanding, and at the same time responsibility, to do some work. Immediately the problems in one's life, like "she does not love me enough", disappear, now the responsibility is mine, not a doctor, not a priest, not a book, not a friend, not a mother, nobody, not food, not drugs, no television, no films, no masturbation. Everything is taking care, everything I look around I'm trying to take care now. It does that with your whole being, ayahuasca somehow.	
Manuel	All these things that you have mentioned, like television, masturbation, are things that you used to do and that you are not doing now?	
Dave	No, I still masturbate, but without ejaculation.	
Manuel	How about drugs, has ayahuasca had an impact on the way you take drugs?	
Dave	Yeah, I knew the theory, but now I believe I understand the practice, from people like Terence McKenna, which I think I read some chapters prior to ingestion of any psychedelics, and in the T books he talks about the set and setting, and I always knew, in theory, that where you are, with whom, and the preparation was important, I had always suspected it, so I was very happy that the ayahuasca is all those things.	
Manuel	Have you noticed any changes in your health since taking ayahuasca?	
Dave	Well, I'm more aware of how I am deteriorating, so I have noticed changes in my health, but I am now paying attention to things like sugar intake, and I look after myself with no television, because I think of it as a drug that I try to avoid, so for me the health is to do with boosting the immune system, I try to remove poisons and toxins and television is one of them. I try to eat whole food, so I try to get my diet right. My health has improved, but the awareness of my own entropy has increased.	
Manuel	So it looks like you have become more aware of your body.	
Dave	Yes, I have become more aware of my body.	
Manuel	How do you know that it is ayahuasca that has increased this awareness?	
Dave	I don't really, all that I can say is that it has coincided with the ingestion of ayahuasca, and it seems that ayahuasca gives you the time to sit down and sing in a way that you wouldn't normally do, so it is a completely unique experience, it is a special time in communion with this, and during this time things happen, so it's work, and you do the work and everyday something's happening a little bit, and if you feel the ayahuasca opens and comes into your life, you start stopping to pretend about loving, and now you know I try to have love operating in my life. It is a way rather extreme of describing all of these things taken together.	
Manuel	Does the participation in those rituals had an impact in your sense of emotional well being?	
Dave	Yes, I had not an idea about what emotions were, I blocked them hard, I could feel these blocks inside my body, and the ayahuasca located this blocks, it is like a doctor, emotionally I feel doctored, and I've been able to	

	release what feels like contaminated emotions through the ritual, in the ayahuasca ceremony you have a chance to leave your ego and personality and get down to the nitty gritty of your existence, your physical and etheric existence, is freer during the ceremony, the ritual allows that, it is a safe place in order to remove a mask, maybe find another one, and carry on, and anything that happens is just part of the carnival.	
	In terms of the theatre, you can enter the stage, remove your persona so emotionally I felt that I had my heart opened, my ribs opened, and my guts and different places inside me that I could identify literally with emotions,	
	an exposure to say, a chakra system, directly, being allowed to practice daily, not just during the session but after the session, entering and focussing on my being, in a way that I've never done before, so in that sense now I feel more awake, and it's very much more interesting, it's very much more a feeling of being alive, and every moment feels like bursting with blissful miracles, and I'm much more able to cope with what I think I would by now I believe be probably mentally ill or criminal or even worse, pretentious, getting into an ivory tower, alone.	
	When I was young I was not interested in being a leader, I resisted it, but somehow, during the process of drinking ayahuasca, it's forced me to learn how to be a leader of about ten people, I was very resistant to this before, and now I'm this kind of guy that does the organizing for numbers of people, bringing them together. So I have developed community skills, understanding, being able to listen, to create the things that people need very basically. Now I believe that to be a leader is not a problem, even if being the chief is lot of work, it is very selfless work, and it also demands a kind of inner truth, and this is what I face now in this job, "how can I be a chief if I am a snivelling little liar, how can I be a chief if I am not aware of myself", to be a chief, you need to have all these qualities, and so I'm now trying to face up to the issue of what those qualities are, and not shy away from them,	
	and I've noticed that my kind of artistic fascination with mythological and ancient wisdom, it was kind of dry before, and now it is a blaze, it is living, a spiritual light has entered me, it rushed towards me when I started singing Santo Daime music, and filled me. This is my experience.	
Manuel	So there was a shift between before that, for some reason, you didn't see yourself as a chief or as a leader, what was the shift between not seeing yourself as a leader, and now seeing yourself as a leader?	
Dave	It was a kind of false humility, about me, I thought that it was somehow better to not be a leader, I thought this was a noble thing, instead it's neither better nor worse, it's just a job like washing up, it changed my view of the hierarchy of people deeply, because by then I had been tricking myself with status ideas about being an underdog, the man who is beaten in the boxing match, the man that falls, we feel sorry for him, he becomes the hero, and I completely lost the plot there, I thought that in every occasion the man that lost was the hero.	
Manuel	So you identified with the underdog?	
Dave	Yes, and with the broken thing, not the perfect thing, the broken thing I liked.	
Manuel	And how do you think that ayahuasca took you away from that underdog identification, if it did?	
Dave	How does it do that, it's so amazing how it does this. I don't know how it does, it so miraculous, it just shines light into you somehow, and then you do it, you do the work, that's how it feels, 50% is the ayahuasca shining the light, and then you have to see and engage with it. It's a mystery, but the ayahuasca work for me is emptying my mind, the emptiness is just like a space where there is clarity and understanding of a higher order.	
	My mind in its daily state is confused, it is when it is empty that it feels less confused.	
	Things are brought to rest, it's a kind of peace, everything is alright with the world, basically, and one can participate in it, there is nothing to be feared, so fear is reduced, and with this comes courage,	
	for all kind of situations, just to deal with the world, for me on a daily basis to go about meeting this person and doing this event, reply to these letters, I don't want to reply to any letters, all the bills, I don't want to pay any of that, I don't want to do anything, so it's frightening, it becomes like a great wall of responsibilities in my life, and I love being with my children and with my friends, but the world seems to be like an immense, like a deal that you have to do with this machine, and this developed stress, I was hiding parts of myself, I was secretive about things, needlessly,	
	in voodoo language, I had the feeling that I was better, but I wanted to destroy that because I hated it, I wasn't giving nutrition to things that were good to me, and I was imprisoning myself,	
	you can see how in the world how people have resorted to insane behaviours, on a daily basis, so this madness I could feel capturing me, and ayahuasca has dealt swiftly with that, it is a strong medicine, a purging medicine for dealing with these things, I was not dealing with them quick enough, I was dealing with them also in the wrong way, I was meeting like with like, I was fighting war with more aggression, and now I have been able to change that, to some extent.	
Manuel	Can you give me an example of a hidden aspect of yourself that ayahuasca helped you to deal swiftly with?	
Dave	The way I thought about women. I had covered it, I read feminist literature, and I developed a very strong case for the a way to relate to each other that was mutually respectful and understanding, but basically I still wanted to shag that woman, whoever she was really, if I sort of fancied her a bit, wow, this kept coming back and it wouldn't go away, and no matter what position I was in and how my mind was, it was always there, and so what happened is that I repressed this, I repressed my whole sexuality, it's like one big button, so all of my sexuality went completely bonkers, really, I was sort of celibate, but it wasn't a sort of spiritual celibacy. So the ayahuasca opened up all that nonsense, so now I think I am a sexual man, and I'm not engaged now in thinking about women in the way I used to be.	
	something has come out, something hidden than I used to have, and this is very recently, so in the last year I have purged it, I just faced up something about myself and in the Daime work it comes up as vomit, it symbolically represents for me the letting go of a hidden truth, that I love women!	
	and I like to smell their cunts, this is true, and now I want to understand.	
Manuel	So it looks like you got rid of a lot of guilt about your sexuality?	
Dave	I have been working on guilt, guilt is the worst thing in my personal problems. Guilt and then following the idea that I've been scapegoated, I've been set up, and then I feel resentment, guilt is useless.	
Manuel	And it what way this change, this getting rid of sexual guilt, has modified, if it has modified, your sexual behaviour?	
Dave	Well it has modified my sexual life, to the tune of I now have no sexual rships with any woman as such, I probably have more sexual rships with all women than I ever did, I was only very closed, except with one, and now I have with the one no sexual rship,	
	so now I am in a spiritual celibacy, I've experienced a lot of sex, I've gone through a period of understanding, and now I can feel a sort of sexual awakening, it's very beautiful it's like being a young boy again,	

	out of spirituality has come sexual awakening, it's fantastic.	
	I've invented this character for myself in my life, like a little green ecowarrior type of person, it's eventually come true, here I am, I invented it and here it is.	
	I have a great respect for all the man in my life now, didn't before, had a kind of challenge with them, if I read Plato, I thought I could do better than that. Now I have greater respect for men, for human kind, and more respect for women.	
	The sexual drive it's useful for understanding how energy works, and then transferring this energy up through my system, into my heart, through my guts, into my throat, into my other consciousness, out of myself, out into the universe. This feels like the technique that is thought within the Santo Daime, sitting down, singing, your body is doing this, and your mind follows like a little dog.	
Manuel	Did your rship with your father change after using ayahuasca?	
Dave	Definitely. It has changed, it's now more like a friendship, I say more like a friendship because it's not quite, and maybe it will never be, but it's got now a very friendly edge to it that it's never had. My father and I were never overtly close, he was there in the evenings and weekends, but in his rship with my mother, it was not a fine example.	
	The rship w my father improved, we are now able to communicate better, we weren't able to communicate before, we didn't even speak for years.	
Manuel	Have you noticed any kind of negative side effects in ayahuasca?	
Dave	Completely and absolutely not. Only the exposure and illumination to the negative in oneself and one's speech, action and behaviour.	
Manuel	Any kind of risks or dangers?	
Dave	Yes, the ritual can be more or less safe, depending on who is there and how experienced they are, and how the space is set up, how well it's been done, and who comes. It is possible that somebody can come to this ritual with very bad intentions. And if the people are not strong enough, and clear enough, and in tune enough with how to make this safe environment, literally with doors locked, and also socially with stopping people interfering with others, maybe it's possible that this space as well as opening up for each individual the possibility for personal growth, can also open up the possibility for someone to fuck about with you. Maybe. I think generally it's very safe, it's a very safe vessel, but occasionally there can be leaks that need repairing, or the water may be very rough. So psychically it can open you up into areas that without follow up, without somebody coming back, without community around you, it can be leading to maybe going mad. You need to support somebody after their first drink, follow them up and make sure they are ok, and if it's not done it's not safe. I think it should be the same for every medicine. We all can look after each other.	
	This is the training for the doctor, drinking ayahuasca. The shaman drinks the ayahuasca, and becomes more intimate, more able, is been given skills and awakening of the subtle energies that are involved in our help in order to help others. So we are given responsibility as healers. Individually everybody in the Daime feels that they are engaging in a science, where they can release their own natural birth right, which his to help oneself and help others, increase the life, put the holy spirit into all the areas.	
	I used to say "the ayahuasca it's completely destroying my mind", this is a kind of slogan, meaning that it is carefully unravelling mental thought processes for me, and bringing me together with people.	
	I'm introduced through the ayahuasca to just the best people that I have ever met in my life, more than I could conceive, people that I consider giants emotionally, with love.	

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