

PLANTS, RITUAL, AND MEDIATION IN THE AYAHUASCA SHAMANISM OF THE
PERUVIAN AND ECUADORIAN AMAZON

By

JAMES C. TAYLOR

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To Laurie, who believes in me when I don't

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Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School
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James C. Taylor

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In the Amazonian indigenous and mestizo shamanic traditions located in the geographic region beginning with the Napo River to the north, following downriver toward Iquitos, Peru to the east, and finally back upriver along Ucayali River to the south, plants, or plant spirits, used in ritual contexts play a unique role as mediators – guides and gateways, paths and guardians – between one „world“ and another. While animals, stones, places, and humans all likewise participate in material, spiritual, social, and cultural worlds, plants in particular aid humans as part of the shamanic ritual traditions of this region by mediating for those who desire, for a variety of purposes, to acquire the knowledge and power of, or relationship with, beings of these other worlds. As suggested by Whitten for Quichua *yachaj*’s, the crossing of thresholds and boundaries, and mediating between worlds, is in many ways the defining position of the shaman, as it is in many of the ritual and cosmological systems throughout Amazonia. With this in mind, it is my contention that the ritual use of ayahuasca, in context with the related uses of tobacco and *Datura*, is *particularly* suited to this mediatory function of shamanism in this region, in historical, cultural, and religious terms; and that the complex of ideas and beliefs described as „ayahuasca shamanism“ found along this

riverine cultural and geographic region owes both its form and its manner of dissemination to this „efficacy of mediation“ between worlds.

CHAPTER 1 CONTEXT AND LITERATURE

Plants and Mediation

In the Amazonian indigenous and mestizo shamanic traditions located in the geographic region beginning with the Napo River to the north, following downriver toward Iquitos, Peru to the east, and finally back upriver along Ucayali River to the south, plants or plant spirits used in ritual contexts play a unique role as mediators – guides and gateways, paths and guardians – between one world and another. While animals, stones, places, and humans all likewise participate in material, spiritual, social, and cultural worlds, plants in particular aid humans as part of the shamanic ritual traditions of this region by mediating for those who desire, for a variety of purposes, to acquire the knowledge and power of, or relationship with, beings of these other worlds. As suggested by Whitten for Quichua *yachaj*'s (2008:61), the crossing of thresholds and boundaries, and mediating between worlds, is in many ways the defining position of the shaman, as it is in many of the ritual and cosmological systems throughout Amazonia. With this in mind, it is my contention that the ritual use of ayahuasca, in context with the related uses of tobacco and *Datura*, is *particularly* suited to this mediatory function of shamanism in this region, in historical, cultural, and religious terms; and that the complex of ideas and beliefs described as „ayahuasca shamanism“ found along this riverine cultural and geographic region owes both its form and its manner of dissemination to this „efficacy of mediation“ between worlds. I intend to accomplish three primary goals with this paper. My first goal is to provide a thorough historical orientation to the geographic region and cultural groups under consideration, with a specific focus on indigenous exchange networks and the situation of particular cultural groups as

political-economic „brokers“ and cultural mediators between the indigenous and white cultural worlds. My second goal is to provide a rigorous ethnographic contextualization and defense of the thesis statement in terms of plants and mediation, with an explicit parallel being drawn between the shamanic conceptions of mediation between worlds and a historical role of intercultural brokerage. My third goal is to put plants, mediation, and the concept of „spirit worlds“ in dialogue with anthropological and religious studies theoretical work on embodiment.

The Dissemination of a Ritual Complex

I have selected the riverine cultural and geographic area to be discussed in this paper by way of ethnographic comparison, geographical similarities, historical contact, and linguistic exchange. In order to establish this region as one within which it is viable to discuss the development of a particular ritual complex, I begin by tracing the historical relationships of exchange between a number of the indigenous groups, or their predecessors, of this geographic region. I make use of work by A. Taylor (1999), Myers (1974; 1981), Oberem (1974), and Hudelson (1984) among others to outline the general shape of exchange networks, and the political field more broadly, of the Napo and Ucayali River regions from early days of contact and missionization on through the beginnings of the rubber economy. I suggest that those indigenous groups of this region who historically have played the role of economic brokers and cultural mediators are those same groups who have been responsible for the greatest development of the ayahuasca ritual complex. By employing Bourdieu's sense of cultural capital (1985), I note that the ritual elements that tend to persist throughout this complex are those associated with cultural groups situated, both historically and currently, as „mediators between worlds“. Langdon's assertion that ritual knowledge and power can be

understood as “trade items” (1981:112) mobilized along these networks provides a crucial analytic construct with which to approach the dissemination of ritual knowledge and broader trade networks throughout the region. I also follow Hill’s work on ethnogenesis (1996) to suggest that for the groups most often associated with the creation and elaboration of this ritual complex, particular ethnic identities are in an ongoing process of development and elaboration, where the maintenance of tradition goes together with the generation of novelty, perhaps especially where this intersects with ritual and religious elements.

Gow (1994) suggests that ayahuasca shamanism, especially of the region under consideration here, is of relatively recent origin. He suggests that it has roots in the intensive indigenous cultural exchanges that began with the Catholic mission *reducciones*, and continued its expansion with the trade of the rubber economy. This has proved to be a controversial claim, inasmuch as the received wisdom, suggested and defended by studies in the 1970s and 80s (Luna 1986; Dobkin de Rios 1972), and further affirmed by more recent work (Narby 1998; Llamazres and Martínez Sarasola 2004),¹ have stated that ayahuasca shamanism of Amazonian Peru and eastern Ecuador were based on centuries-old, if not millennia-old, indigenous ritual practice. While this debate is far from wholly resolved, recent scholarship by Beyer (2012a), Highpine (2012), and Brabec de Mori (2011) has begun to offer fresh historic and linguistic evidence that sheds new light on the subject. This evidence suggests that the phenomenon of ayahuasca shamanism as it is found in among the riverine cultural groups of the Napo, Ucayali, and lower Urubamba rivers from Ecuador to Peru is a

¹ Cf. Beyer 2012a

complex of related ideas and practices, an open but shared system that saw its most recent genesis among Napo Runa ritual specialists. This research does not state, however, that all ayahuasca use, especially the uses of the *Banisteriopsis caapi* vine in particular, were isolated to this area or had their origin here. It suggests rather that a particular complex of ideas and practices – perhaps overly-hastily reified as „ayahuasca shamanism“ – is in some ways unique to this geographic and cultural region, and is of relatively recent origin. In order to engage with this phenomenon that extends to these geographic limits, I draw on historical and ethnographic work dealing with three distinct cultural groups, as well as culturally, historically, and linguistically related cultural groups of the region. These groups include the Kichwa-speaking Runa people of Ecuador, drawing from the work of Uzendoski (2005; 2012) and Swanson (2009; N.d.b) on the Napo Runa, Whitten on Canelos and Puyo Runa (1976; 2008); the mestizo shamans of Iquitos, Peru, drawing on the work of Luna (1984a; 1984b; 1986; 1999; 2000), Dobkin de Rios (1972; 1994; 2005; 2009), and Beyer (2009; 2012a); and the Shipibo-Conibo, drawing on the work of Tournon (1984; 1988; 1991; 2002), Cárdenas Timoteo (1989), Roe (1982), Illius (1994), and Gebhardt-Sayer (1985; 1986). While bearing in mind a concern toward over-generalization, I follow Whitten's lead in noting that there is something of a shared religious complex of ideas among the Runa and the Shuar of the Napo, Puyo, Canelos, and Pastaza regions (2005). I will therefore draw on Harner's work on Shuar ritual practices (1972; 1973; 1990) from this region as well. Similarly, while it is necessary to avoid assuming cultural commonalities based solely on a shared linguistic family, the Pano-speaking Cashinahua/Kaxinawa (Peruvian/Brazilian spellings) have many substantial ritual and cosmological tenets held in common with the

Shipibo-Conibo. Because the Cashinahua are an interfluvial group, distinct from the riverine culture of the Shipibo-Conibo, this makes ethnographic work by Kensinger (1973; 1995) and Lagrou (2002; 2004; 2006; 2009) worth noting for the similarities, but also for the divergences, with Shipibo-Conibo ritual practice and belief. Insofar as Gow (1991; 1994; 2001; 2002) has been foundational in much of the work on ayahuasca shamanism of this region, it proves worthwhile to address his work with the Arawak-speaking Piro in this context as well, for while they do not share a language family with the Cashinahua and Shipibo-Conibo, they do live in close proximity. Unlike the Cashinahua and Asháninka, the Piro are a riverine and not an interfluvial or forest-oriented cultural group, making the ethnographic work dealing with the spread of an ayahuasca shamanic ritual complex to their cultural region on the Bajo Urubamba relevant. Finally, making use of the ethnographic sources as noted, I outline what I take to be the most central tenets of the phenomenon of ayahuasca shamanism in this region. This is not an attempt to generalize a predictive schema, but rather an effort to trace what seem to be the historical and cultural outlines of an open but shared set of ritual images, practices, beliefs, and ideas.

Mediation as an Analytic Category

The trope of mediation is the most pivotal analytic category that I make use of in this paper, applying it to spirit worlds, cultural contexts, historical moments, and geographic regions in kind. Mediation, as a metaphor, has the potential to extend its reach almost *ad infinitum*, insofar as all communication, interaction, and exchange can in some ways be understood as mediatory. With that concern in mind, I focus on three facets of mediation which I take to be the most expressive in terms of the thesis: 1)

contact, as the establishment and maintenance of relationships, 2) translation,² as the expression and transformation of concepts, selves, and sociality across boundaries and borders, and 3) transportation, or the radical disjuncture of movement wholly across a boundary. It is my argument that the phenomenon of ayahuasca shamanism within this cultural and geographic region has its context within a broader understanding of plants-as-mediators between worlds, peoples, and beings. As has been well documented by many ethnographers and anthropologists working in this region, rivers and the underwater world have a central place in the cosmology of this form of ayahuasca shamanism (Luna 1986; Luna and Amaringo 1999; Arévalo 1986; Cárdenas Timoteo 1989; Tournon 2002). Creatures such as the *bufeos* (pink dolphins) and anacondas take on significance and potential danger as *yacuruna* (Quechua for 'water people') spirits, beings of the water-world who are specifically considered in terms of love, seduction, and attraction. Rivers are, unsurprisingly, the defining feature of daily life for the riverine cultural groups under discussion here, and so there is little wonder that rivers would have distinct place in the shamanic cosmologies of these groups. However, simultaneously, rivers are a place of significant cultural exchange, with all the ambivalence this entails – contact with other groups does not always or even regularly imply a fully benign exchange of knowledge, power, persons, or goods. To this end, the cosmological category of rivers, the water-world, attraction, seduction, danger, movement, exchange, and engagement with the „other“ of both human and spirit

² Cf. Viveiros de Castro (2004b) and Benjamin (1997) for some of the problematics of translation. In particular, Benjamin suggests that it is not the purpose of translation to make “itself resemble the meaning of the original”, but rather to “fashion in its own language a counterpart to the original’s mode of intention” (1997:161). By approaching a notion of „translation“ of selves and concepts across boundaries of spirit and human worlds in these terms, it is possible to recognize in the shaman’s songs „counterparts“ to the spirit world, manifested in the human, without demanding a simplistic identity between them.

worlds suggests a metaphoric harmonic with the mediation and translation across worlds that ayahuasca is capable of facilitating. In effect, it is my argument that there is something specific about the ritual conceptions and uses, as well as the phenomenological effects, of ayahuasca that make it, among the other mediatory and teacher plants of the region, uniquely suited to being that ritual plant which has evidenced historical dissemination along the rivers throughout this region. While I have recourse to certain therapeutic, neuro-biological, and cognitive psychological models to situate this assertion (Shanon 2002; Metzner 2006; Grob 2006; Winkelman 2000), I support this claim with reference to ethnographic work rather than constructing a hybrid neurocognitive model of the actions of ayahuasca as they relate to cultural uses.

Social Plants

Following work by Wright (2009), Swanson (2009), and Hill (2009) among many others, I suggest that plants play an eminently *social* role in both daily and ritual life, a role whose relations are not wholly confined to the predator-prey orientation of the social Other as outlined by Viveiros de Castro's theory of Amerindian perspectivism (2002).³ The concept of *plantas maestras*, or 'teacher plants', in emic discourse (Luna 1984b; Arévalo 1986) opens on to a broad range of potential relationships, pointing to a re-conceptualization and reframing of relationships between humans and plants. The questions this concept presents range from the existential – what is knowledge, who or what can possess it and pass it on, where are the boundaries of personhood and subjectivity drawn – to the practical and categorical – which plants teach, in what contexts, how do they teach, and to whom. Comparative ethnographic work in the

³ Cf. Wright 2009

region does not paint a single, unambiguous image in response to these questions: some plants are doctors (*doctores*), while some are *brujos* (witches); some are mothers, or have mothers (*mamas* in Quechua); many have *almas* or souls; some plants teach, but only when contacted in altered states brought on by still other plants; some plants teach only after or during intensive, long-term *dietas* (akin to alimentary 'diets', but with extended ritual pro- and prescriptions). This is to say that any exhaustive or even reasonably robust treatment of all plants considered as potential teachers is far beyond the scope of this investigation. However, three plants stand out in this geographic region as playing significant roles in shamanism and ritual practice for each of the cultural groups under consideration: tobacco (*Nicotiana* spp., though *rustica* is most common in ritual settings), ayahuasca (*Banisteriopsis caapi* and various additives of which *Psychotria viridis* or „chacrana“ is one of the most well-known), and Datura (in fact a group of *Brugmansia* spp., though commonly referred to and until recently taxonomically considered to be of the Datura family). Tobacco is, in many ways, the ritual plant *par excellence* of Amazonia, and one could argue for the Americas in their entirety (Wilbert 1987; Harner 1973). Datura is widely dispersed throughout Amazonia but plays a notable role in the shamanic complexes of Andean cultural groups as well (Schultes and Raffuf 1992; Schultes et al. 2001). Ayahuasca, specifically in terms of the practice of brewing it with DMT-containing *Psychotria viridis* leaves and other additives, is in large part unique to Amazonia,⁴ and is especially to be found in the Northwest Amazon. Along with marking this investigation's geographic boundary conditions at the rivers – rather than focusing on forest or interfluvial cultural groups – it is my intention to mark cultural

⁴ Despite its recent movements toward „internationalization“, though see Labate and Jungaberle 2011

bounds for this investigation in terms of ritual plants, insofar as certain plants do not feature prominently, or at all, into the particular practices of ayahuasca shamanism under discussion here. These plants, specifically, are the Andean mescaline-containing *Trichocereus* spp., as well as the *Virola* spp. (among others) DMT-containing snuffs found in other parts of the Amazon. While certainly these plants could find place in terms of teacher plants, as well as the more specifically theoretical aspects of subjectivity, sociality, and personhood of other-than-human beings, they fall beyond the geographic and cultural bounds of this investigation. The selection of tobacco, ayahuasca, and *Datura* allows me to address the concept of mediation in terms of contact, translation, and transport, respectively. It is my contention, following the ethnographic evidence of this region, that in terms of mediation: tobacco can be understood through the lens of *contact*, or the establishment and maintenance of relationships with spirits and spirit worlds; *Datura* is associated with and facilitates *transportation* into wholly other spirit worlds for the purposes of acquiring knowledge and power; and finally that ayahuasca is associated with *translation*, or simultaneous presence in more than one world, allowing the expression and transformation of concepts, selves, and sociality across the boundaries of worlds – both spirit and distinctly human cultural worlds.

Bodies and Healing

Ayahuasca shamanism, as a complex of ideas and practices in this region as it has been described by Gow (1994) and Brabec de Mori (2011) among others, is oriented toward healing, to the virtual exclusion of other elements (i.e. hunting, warfare) common to many other indigenous Amazonian shamanic systems. It is my contention, following Beyer (2009:44), that in the ritual spaces of ayahuasca shamanism, it is

necessary to focus on the dense physicality of healing – the blowing of smoke, the shaking of a leaf rattle, the coughing of phlegm, the sucking, vomiting, spitting, massaging, palpating, and fanning that all put the body of the shaman in immediate contact with the body of the patient. A focus on embodiment and practice has shown itself to be a necessary corrective, in both anthropology and religious studies, to tendencies toward textualism, idealism, structuralism, and the swarm of post-'s (Vásquez 2011; Csordas 1988; Bourdieu 1977). In analyzing the ayahuasca ritual complex in terms of shamanic action in this region of the Amazon, I suggest an orientation to the body as the site of suffering, transformation, and contact with other bodies. It is where the „transformational body“ and the „suffering body“⁵ make contact that I intend to focus the question of embodiment and ayahuasca shamanism. I follow Taussig's understandings of „yagé“ shamanism as indelibly marked by a history of colonialism (1987). However, based on a history of its origination as a cultural complex in this region and an analysis of its phenomenology and the ritual beliefs surrounding it, I would also like to suggest of the ritual complex of ayahuasca shamanism that it is precisely because of the „simultaneity in multiple worlds“ that it affords the shaman that this complex is oriented to bodies through the idiom of *healing*. Ayahuasca – resonant with a region-wide history of indigenous exchange and socio-political mediation – provides a means of remaining-in-place while simultaneously „reaching beyond“ to the transformative power of the spirits and spirit worlds. The power of the spirit world to bring about transformation in terms of healing – manifested as discourse, performance, songs, stories, chants, ritual acts, among other practices – is not unique to Amazonian

⁵ Cf. Kleinman (1992), Kleinman et al. (1997), Good (1992; 2008), Das (2000; 2001) on suffering, bodies and social illness in anthropology.

shamanism nor to ayahuasca shamanism in particular. However, the phenomenology of this plant brew, and the particular political-historical position of its origin and its dissemination, suggest that the effects of the plant on the body of the shaman – already structurally transformational with regard to ritual space and the suffering body of the patient – are entirely consistent with the concept of mediation. Mediation then allows *healing* to be that act in which the transformational power of spirit-beings is applied to the flesh of bodies that suffer, especially as these bodies are produced by material, biophysical, psychological, religious, economic, historical, ecological, and both macro- and micro-political power. This orientation toward mediation allows a juxtaposition of two of the bodies in ritual space – the transformational body of the shaman, and the suffering body of the patient.

The body of the shaman, as a site of mediation between human and spirit worlds, opens to theoretical notions of Amerindian perspectivism (Viveiros de Castro 2002), „constructional“ cosmologies and bodies (Santos-Granero 2009), transformational bodies as in the shaman-jaguar complex outlined by Reichel-Dolmatoff (1975), and bodies-as-multiplicities in terms of inhabitation by other-than-human beings in both spirit and material forms (Viveiros de Castro 2004a; Harner 1990; Luna and Amaringo 1999; Walker 2009). To that end, particular myths and stories of the cultural groups on which this paper focuses (drawn in part from Tournon 2002; Uzendoski 2012; Luna and Amaringo 1999; Swanson 2009)⁶ are utilized in order to contextualize shamanic bodies and spirit worlds as transformational, especially as such transformations at boundaries-between-worlds are as much *social* transformations as they may be spiritual or somatic.

⁶ Comparative ethnographic material of theoretical import for the discussion will be drawn from Wright (2009), Hill (2009), and others.

At times, such a social transformation may be uncontrolled: being abducted by the *yacuruna* (water people), for example, and taken to worlds beneath the waters, threatens that the abductee will transform in such a way that he or she can no longer return. Indeed, by dint of being somatically-socially re-constituted, it may be the case that the abductee no longer even wishes to do so.⁷ This potential for uncontrolled or uncontained transformation is further reflected in the consistent concern widespread in Amazonia that a shaman, who is by his or her very nature one capable of transforming into a jaguar or a number of other beings, may forget his or her humanity, and remain a predator, turning on his previous kin (Wright In Press).

I suggest, at the same time, that it is necessary to counter-pose the potentially transformational body of the shaman with the suffering body of the patient, not in a typological duality, but rather to orient the point of contact *between* bodies. In an analysis of the particular practices of ayahuasca healing common throughout the region, I follow Taussig (1987) in suggesting that the phenomenon of shamanic healing bears the ineradicable political-historical marks of colonialism. In addition to colonialist exoticizing the bodies and subjectivities of indigenous persons, the „suffering bodies“ of indigenous and *ribereño* peoples of this region must be understood as being simultaneously both *produced* and *afflicted* by power in terms of political repression, economic exploitation, racist segregation from sites of cultural capital, residence in specific ecological sites both urban and riverine, religious or ritual experiences and expressions derived from both „Christian“ and „traditional“ sources, as well as the means of resistance afforded by the vitality of indigenous peoples“ own historical agency. Each

⁷ Cf. Luna 1986, Beyer 2009, Whitten 1976 on the problem of abduction by *chullachakis* and *yacuruna*

of these „forces“ may permeate not only local, national, and regional discourse, but the very bodies and subjectivities they produce. This is not to suggest a social constructivist orientation to the body,⁸ but rather represents an effort to point to the composition of the field from which the processes of montage (Taussig 1987), bricolage (Lévi-Strauss 1966), paradigm manipulation (Whitten 1976), and world-making (Overing 1990) draw material with which to work, as these weave both micro- and macro-political histories together with cosmological and historical referents. I highlight the irreducible carnality of the body, as well as its situation as an expressly political object subject to, and generative of, historical change, by way of reference to anthropological theories of violence and sorcery (Whitehead and Wright 2004; Whitehead 2004; Stewart and Strathern 2004), as this work finds immediate intersection with the concept of the „suffering body“. With this orientation to both transformational and suffering bodies, I return to the notion that particular plants, by way of their ritual mediatory capacity, open these other worlds for shamanic engagement, allowing a shaman to temporarily become-toward the world of the spirits. In drawing on transformational power within the space of ritual, the shaman’s body then becomes – in direct contact and material engagement with the suffering body of the patient – a conduit, tool, or site of transformational, and thereby healing, power.⁹

⁸ Cf. V squez (2011:211-257) for a thorough analysis and critique of constructivist orientations to the body.

⁹ Cf. Luna 1986, Beyer 2009, and Gow 1994 for more on *bancos* as „seats“ of the spirits, through which they act.

CHAPTER 2 EXCHANGE AND ETHNOGENESIS

Networks

In this chapter I take a network-oriented approach to an analysis of the indigenous exchange networks of the Napo and Ucayali rivers of Ecuador and Peru. As this thesis is concerned with the transmission of the beliefs and practices associated with ayahuasca shamanic complex¹ throughout this region, I follow Langdon in her suggestion that ritual material, knowledge, and power should be understood within the context of broader systems of exchange, treating these as “trade items” not wholly distinct from other forms of exchange (1981:112). While an aesthetic of „flows” and „currents” might seem to be more in line with a geography so dominated by rivers, in the case of indigenous exchange networks in their historical specificity in this region, a „networks” approach will serve better. This is because the critiques leveled against a „flows” approach – especially in terms of the movement of religious goods – outlined by Vásquez (2008) are at play here. Though the rivers lend themselves to a sense of fluid transit, these passages were never without points of colonial control, mission reduction, rubber slavery, assault from warring indigenous groups, and the miasmatic threat of disease. The will to control indigenous bodies was paramount in this region during the colonial era – bodies that were captured as slaves, isolated and organized in missions, and pushed from ancestral lands by disease and violence. This does not suggest that there were not very fluid transfers of items, goods, knowledge, and power between indigenous groups, and even between heterogeneous networks of highland peoples, lowland peoples, missionaries, colonial outposts, and rubber traders. Rather, it

¹ See Chapter 3 for an outline of the particular features that characterize this ritual complex

highlights the ways in which these flows were punctuated by sudden and violent breaks, stops, redirections, disciplines, and transformations. Beginning with a brief geographic outline of the region to be investigated, I turn to a critical analysis of how history, in terms of ethnicity and ethnogenesis, are to be undertaken in Amazonia, following the lead of Whitehead (1994), Fausto and Heckenberger (2007), and Hudelson (1984), among others. The profound effects of disease, slavery, and missionization are then addressed, in order to put in context the remarkable degree of historical agency expressed by indigenous groups of this region in adapting, transforming, and re-establishing exchange networks for nearly three centuries after contact. I then turn to the particular networks on the Napo River and the Ucayali River, and the Quichua- and Pano-speaking groups of these rivers respectively, leading up to the beginnings of the rubber economy. The further radical transformations that indigenous groups underwent during the ravages of the rubber economy are put into context with the patterns of ethnogenesis and the generation of new indigenous historical and political identities.

Geographic Outline of the Region

The region I take as the object of this investigation is a part of Ecuadorian and Peruvian Amazonia, particularly following the Napo River from its source near the foothills of the Andes downstream toward Iquitos, Peru, and from there back upstream the Ucayali River toward where it is formed by the Apurímac and Urubamba. Though this region could be extended to include the Putumayo River region to the north in Colombia given a number of geographical and cultural resonances with the region under investigation, I follow Gow (1994:93) in excluding it from this context in that the history of mass colonization from the Andes throughout that region suggests for it a distinct historical situation from the region under investigation here. Throughout this

historical overview I present ethnographic, historical, and linguistic evidence to suggest that this region can be considered together, for while the cultural heterogeneity to be found here is substantial, there is at the same time “a remarkable uniformity of shamanic practice” (Gow 1994:93). A more complete contextualization of this region in historical terms is a goal of this chapter, and it will be beneficial to outline certain other treatments of this region in anthropological literature that support the methodological consistency with other work in selecting this region, especially through a historical explication of particular facets of the region as a whole.

“First,” as Beyer suggests, “some geography” (2012a).² As with many parts of Amazonia, this region is defined by its rivers. Focusing specifically on the major rivers and their headwaters, the Amazon River is formed where the Ucayali and the Marañón meet, about sixty miles from Iquitos (Beyer 2012a), while the Napo flows into the Amazon about fifty miles downstream from the same city. This proximity helps to establish the geographic rationale for demarcating the region under investigation near the urban center of Iquitos, especially given that within twenty miles of Iquitos, the Napo swings to within five miles of the Amazon River, though it does not actually join it until further downstream. The Napo River begins in foothills of the Andes in Ecuador, flowing east toward its conjunction with the Amazon. The Upper Ucayali and Lower Urubamba rivers to the south are host to a number of the cultural groups to be referenced in the ethnographies analyzed in this thesis; these rivers, as already noted, flow one into the other, with the Ucayali later joining the Amazon. There are a substantial number of other, smaller rivers in this region, but those mentioned here are the primary orienting

² See Figure 1-1.

bodies of water. It is worth noting that Brabec de Mori, in an ethnomusicological analysis of the *ikaro* as a song-form specific to the ayahuasca shamanic complex, suggests that the geographic boundaries within which these *ikaros* are found are the Napo and Urubamba rivers (2011:42), which suggests northern and southern endpoints, respectively, that match with the region outlined here. The riverine regions suggested by Brabec de Mori to be the primary locations of the *ikaro* song-form, in particular, are the “Río Napo, Iquitos, lower, central and upper Ucayali”, which again suggests a very similar region (2011:37).

Of the lowland Quichua, who will play a pronounced role in this thesis both historically and ethnographically, Hudelson demarcates an area in the Upper Amazon Basin “one end of which lies near the mouth of the Pastaza River and the other near the mouth of the Napo River”, which he notes “nestles north against Ecuador’s Andes and its border with Colombia” (1984:34). The range so denoted is broad enough that many of the lowland Quichua-speaking peoples take on „regional“ names, as evidenced in the ethnographies that have been written – Whitten’s *Puyo Runa* (2008) and Uzendoski’s *Napo Runa* (2005) for example. What is worth bearing in mind is that, as Hudelson suggests, these regional distinctions are valid by way of orienting a group geographically, but beyond “minor cultural variations and dialect differences” (1984:62), such divisions tend to reify individual groups as isolated from the larger lowland Quichua cultural complex, which, as he notes, “seems unwarranted by the data” (1984:63). This follows clearly in line with what Whitehead describes as “the past regional scale and supra-ethnic character of Amerindian social organization” (1994:34) which has been regularly overlooked in the study of this region. The “failure to perceive”

this scale and character that Whitehead notes has “undoubtedly impeded our understanding of its history” (1994:34). This is not in any way to suggest a common or univocal history or cultural homogeneity to this region, but rather to take up a critical element of the historic representation of Amerindian societies: that there is a deep and dynamic history in these regions that must necessarily foreground intra- and inter-tribal, as well as intra- and inter-ethnic, social, economic, and political relationships that existed before, during, and despite contact with European cultures. These relationships can be understood as complex networks of both exchange and warfare, oftentimes with one leading to the other and vice versa. Such relationships are not solely political and economic, but have the potential to lead to exchanges of ritual and cosmological elements at the same time. Of these ritual or cosmological supra-regional systems, Wright suggests the concept of “mythsapes” (In Press), in the context of the Baniwa of the Northwest Amazon in Brazil, and closely related cultural groups in Venezuela. This concept is oriented toward both archeological evidence of particular rock art and landscape features, as well as place names found in ritual songs and chants. The concept of “mythscape” opens on to an analysis of landscapes as cosmological references, which have shared meanings for more than individually isolated tribal units, suggesting what can be understood as a supra-regional “*Kuwai* religion” in the Northwest Amazon. While the *Kuwai* religion as such is not present in the region under discussion in this chapter, the concept of mythsapes – as it relates to the presence of meta-regional systems of shared concepts and beliefs in Amazonia pre-contact and continuing for even centuries thereafter – highlights the shared space that ritual knowledge and power occupy with other political, economic, and material exchanges.

A. Taylor asserts “Geographically, ethnographically, and even historically, the western sub-Andean fringe is by no means a uniform whole” (1999:188). Understanding the region in an inter-related context of multiple contested points of exchange and friction does not imply uniformity. However, the degree to which cultural exchange does in fact impact and modify the performance and even persistence of cultural forms can tend toward a sense of homogenization if not carefully kept in context with specific historical events and situations. As A. Taylor goes on to note of the upper Amazon, even apparent „uniformity” in the contemporary sociopolitical organization of a number of ethnic groups of the region is in many ways belied by the range of sociopolitical configurations in the history of these same groups. These groups, A. Taylor notes, “at the end of the pre-Columbian period ran from the relatively small and „simple” societies... to large riverside tribes... with elaborate material cultures, extensive village habitats, intricate political and religious institutions, and a marked social hierarchy” (1999:208). This statement is consistent with work done by Fausto and Heckenberger (2007), which suggests that the historical complexity of particular sociopolitical formations in intra- and inter-tribal populations must not be measured against contemporary colonial or neo-colonial situations of particular peoples who, often for centuries, have been exposed to the pressures of missionization, disease, and economic exploitation. As this chapter endeavors to explore, the powerful process of ethnogenesis – among many other aspects of indigenous sociopolitical engagement – continues to display the dynamic, adaptive, and historically-generative capacity of many indigenous groups in Amazonia. However, this dynamism and generative agency of indigenous groups does not offset the political-ecological pressures of the ever-

encroaching modern State in league with neoliberal Capital, which do inestimable damage to indigenous lifeways in Amazonia and worldwide. As such, in order to contextualize the exchange networks that are key to a more thorough understanding of the transmission of the “ritual and ideational goods” of the ayahuasca shamanic complex (Langdon 1981:112), it is vital to hold the following two concepts together. 1) There was and is immense cultural exchange of both goods and ideas via indigenous trade networks within the Amazonian region outlined for this study. 2) This exchange, which exerted and exerts culturally transformative pressure in contact with other groups, has played a role in both producing cultural similarities and generating historical novelty for these cultural and ethnic groups.

Contact, Rupture, and Transformation

Before putting forward a history of contact, disease, missionization, and drastic transformation that this region has undergone as a prelude to understanding the situation of the exchange networks that extended throughout lowland Amazonia and much of the Andes, it is necessary to elaborate briefly on how to approach the historical character of this region, and Amazonia more broadly.

How to Do History in Amazonia

Whitehead points to the need to recognize the “past regional scale and supra-ethnic character of Amerindian social organization” (1994:34), in order to point to the “profound contrast between ancient and modern Amerindia” (1994:35). His point, which concurs with archaeological work being done in Amazonia more generally (Heckenberger 2004a; 2010; Heckenberger et al. 2008), is that the sophistication and heretofore unrecognized extent of Amerindian socio-cultural and political organization throughout Amazonia in the pre-Columbian era critically provides a context for

understanding the transformations and displacements that occurred through the history of contact, slavery, colonization, and the rise of the modern State. Whitehead also problematizes overly simplistic notions of „ethnic“ boundaries, suggesting that these “did not necessarily coincide with particular economic, political, or linguistic systems” (1994:37), and points to crafting systems and the extensive networks of exchange that substantially shaped economic and political life in „ancient“ Amazonia. This forces a re-engagement with contemporary indigenous ethnic boundaries, highlighting their historical contingency and distinctly political character. Simple notions of a „people“ about whom any given ethnography may be written describes less a stable „fact“ of Amazonia, and more a particular time and place in its historical and political uniqueness.³ This bears on the subject of this investigation directly. Any discussion of „worldviews“ and „cosmologies“ in terms of „spirit worlds“, alternative conceptions of human-plant, human-animal, and human-spirit relationships,⁴ and other non-techno-bureaucratic engagements with „natural“ and „cultural“ worlds must at all points be recognized as ongoing, dynamic, and often incomplete, fragmented, „open“ systems of engaging with, living in, and conceiving of the world, which cannot be disentangled from the political, historical, and economic lives and bodies of those doing this living, engaging, and conceiving.

Because of this chapter’s orientation toward indigenous networks of exchange throughout Amazonia and the Andes, it is also necessary to address the often too-drastic distinctions made between the lowlands and the highlands in terms of what

³ See especially Zarzar and Román (1983:22-25) for a concise discussion of the political, historical, ethnographic, and linguistic concerns bound up in identifying an „ethnic“ group

⁴ Cf. Viveiros de Castro 1992, 2002, 2004a; Descola 1992, 2009; and Descola and Gíslí 1996.

Whitten describes as “cultural orientations and religious-cosmological structures” (2005). Of the common refrain that Amazonia was considered marginal even during the early periods of contact, A. Taylor argues instead that “up to 1570 the southern part of the equatorial piedmont of the Andes was in fact inhabited, urbanized, and administered to a greater degree than the corresponding Andean and coastal zones” (1999:197). She continues, stating that even the rainforest region itself was not considered to be “an overgrown hell unworthy to be inhabited by Spaniards” (1999:197). The more profound “spatial, sociological, and symbolic distancing” (1999:208) later to be drawn between the Amazonian and Andean regions were, A. Taylor suggests, specifically a result of colonial history. Colonial pressures were responsible for the breakdown of regional networks, resulting in the isolation of previously interconnected political and economic organizational groups, which lead to far more insular forms of local political organization (A. Taylor 1999:208). This is, in large part, what gave rise to the kind of phantasmal historical moment described by Steward⁵ and Metraux in their historical-theoretical orientation to Amazonia (A. Taylor 1999:208).

Contact, Disease, Missionization, and Transformation

My intention in this chapter is not to give a complete history of the dramas of contact, the horrors of disease and drastic population decline, the tendencies toward ethnocide of the projects of missionization, and the profound adaptations and transformations that indigenous groups of this region underwent from roughly 1550 to present. However, without situating the succeeding material on regional indigenous networks of exchange within this overarching historical context, even if not to the degree

⁵ Cf. Steward 1963

that the density of the material might ultimately warrant, the resilient nature of these networks as they are perpetuated for over three centuries in the face of destructive historical forces might well be lost. I endeavor to point to political, social, and economic pressures occurring throughout the region, from the mid sixteenth century to roughly 1767 with the expulsion of the Jesuit missions, before continuing to an analysis of exchange networks. The period of nascent capitalism that ran from the post-Jesuit mission era to the beginning of the rubber economy (1769-1880) is incorporated below with a discussion of the substantial transformations of exchange patterns that occurred during the Rubber Boom.⁶

Contact, disease, slavery, and missionization cannot be understood apart from one another, as each is intimately related to the next. The primary source of contact for many indigenous groups with „white“ cultural outsiders were the Catholic missionaries, which of course immediately acted as the primary vectors for disease introduction to these same indigenous populations. It is the steep population decline that provides the clearest lens through which to view the colonial situation in this region, and as Whitehead suggests, the “overriding factor in the eventual European domination of this area... was undoubtedly the susceptibility of the Amerindians to introduced diseases” (1994:43). According to A. Taylor, “the decrease in population of the area between 1550 and 1780 is estimated to be 80 percent” (1999:238). Loss of life on that scale constitutes what is tantamount to a cultural cataclysm, a world-ending event. Whatever life was prior to 1550, and what life would be again after, would of necessity be so different as to be virtually unrecognizable. In an analysis of the mission period, which he

⁶ The historical periods used here are drawn in part from the work of San Román (1975).

dates from 1542-1769, the Peruvian historian San Román characterizes the mission *pueblo*, stating that it “was associated also, for the native, with the image of death”, as this site of contact “aggravated, of course, the effects of contagion” (1975:87, my translation). As part and parcel of the “Christianization” process applied to the indigenous groups with which the missionaries came in contact, otherwise mobile styles of life – not „nomadic” as such, but with periodic movements between different horticultural and hunting sites – were transformed, according to San Román, to lifestyles “normalized and sedentary” (1975:36, my translation). This made the control of native bodies, and thereby souls, more amenable to mission regularization and Catholic indoctrination. Of course, these „reductions” of human bodies into smaller spaces made disease outbreak far more deadly than it might have otherwise been.

Kohn, writing of the Ecuadorian Runa, notes that two-thirds of the indigenous population, by 1665, had died, with disease continuing to claim ever more lives even up to 1762, as the survivors continued to flee the missions and go deeper into the forest (1992:51). Citing Steward, he states that the “success of the missions was very relative” (1992:51, my translation), given this dramatic population decline and active fleeing of the mission sites by indigenous groups. Given the substantial population loss, however, Kohn does note that, although the Jesuits were not able to „pacify” the intertribal conflicts entirely, the mission locations did act as central places in which different indigenous groups began to generate relatively new cultural manifestations (1992:51-52). He states that “what emerged from this situation was a homogenized, Quichua-speaking culture” (1992:51, my translation), which incorporated aspects of several other indigenous groups, as well as highland traditions and even European cultural traditions.

It is important to note that the Ecuadorian Runa, in this sense, have been, from relatively early on, actively engaged in ethnogenesis, participating in a culture that is, by its very mode of origination – to say nothing of its geographical and historical locations in exchange networks – already made up of a heterogeneous mix of cultural elements.

Whitten, likewise of the Ecuadorian Runa, suggests that the “vague period sometime prior to the early nineteenth century is accurately conceptualized as Times of Destruction” (1976:208) by many Runa, particularly because of the extraordinary extension of disease, contagion, and resulting deaths. Speaking in particular of the Canelos-Puyo region of Ecuador, but certainly with resonance to the rest of Amazonia more broadly, he states that “cataclysmic population destruction of from 50 to 100 percent of various peoples resulted as measles, smallpox, chicken pox, and malaria repeatedly took their awful toll” (1976:10). While disease proves to be the focus, it is important to note, as Whitten does, that disease was able to spread not simply due to a naturalistic-biological accident of epidemiology. Rather, the spread of disease was facilitated in large part due to “the Spanish crown’s insatiable mercantile thirst for gold”, which he suggests “articulated well with the church’s insatiable desire for bureaucratic expansion” (Whitten 1976:207). It was the calculated intentions of both the Spanish State and the Catholic Church that actively produced economic and political situations – down to the very organization of indigenous bodies and the extraction of their labor, time, and even internal states of belief and understanding – that made possible the spread of disease in so destructive a manner. While it is certainly worth being aware of the historical role played by pathogenic contact between human bodies in terms of disease, the deaths of indigenous people were not abstracted from the political-

economic aims of the institutions exerting their influence in this region, and throughout Amazonia. Such aims could not be unilaterally imposed, however, as the town of Canelos, from which the regional Runa derive the designation, which was founded in 1581 by Dominican missionaries, had to be wholly relocated twice because of Jívaro attacks (Whitten 1976:207).

While the Dominicans had some influence in the Ecuadorian Amazon among the Runa near the Napo and Pastaza rivers, turning to the Peruvian Amazon near the Ucayali, Urubamba, and Pachitea rivers to the south, the Catholic missionaries who were most prominent in the cultural landscape were the Jesuits and the Franciscans, who approached the region from the north and south respectively (DeBoer 1981:31). Similarly to San Román and A. Taylor cited previously, Myers states that on the Ucayali there is archeological evidence that suggests large, complex societies were in existence in the pre-contact period, but that here, as elsewhere in the Amazon, the evidence points to a “clear trend – generally toward a reduction in numbers and societal complexity” (1974:138). It is important to bear in mind the early date of many of the stark population declines – as Myers notes, already in 1657 when the Franciscans reached the Setebo and other groups living near and around the Ucayali, it is very likely that these groups had already experienced significant population decline (1974:147). Though early reports on the status of indigenous groups by these missionaries may provide important descriptions of native life, “their observations on social organization and societal complexity can only be a pale reflection of the aboriginal condition” (Myers 1974:139). Again, the picture is complex. Both the Jesuits and the Franciscans were forced out of the Ucayali River region in the mid-to-late 1600s and again a century later

by the Setebo, Shipibo, and Conibo, but “the societies they left behind were very different from those which they had found” (Myers 1974:147). Disease so radically altered the demographics of the Cocama that though upon initial contacts with this group by the Jesuits in 1644 “there were thousands of them”, by the time the missionaries returned in the late 1650s to the same region, the population loss was on the order of seventy percent (Myers 1974:147). This fundamentally altered the balance of power on the Ucayali, and by the 1790s both the Conibo and Setebo were moving into areas formerly controlled by the Cocama (Myers 1974:154). This change would prove to be a critical marker for the continued history of the region, especially in terms of trade networks. The Conibo, who had long been pillage-oriented predators on the Pachitea and Ucayali, gained control of a significantly larger territory in terms of river passage. This gave the Conibo a distinct advantage in managing trade and all forms of passage in this region. As Myers notes, both the Cocama and Conibo were very likely sizeable chiefdoms at the time of Spanish contact (1974:155), but with the abrupt population decline of the Cocama, the Conibo moved into a position of remarkable political and economic power. Other, smaller Pano groups such as the Shipibo and the Setebo traveled these and nearby smaller rivers as well, and though, much later, these groups would begin to integrate into a more unified political entity, during this period there were a series of alliances and enmities declared between them, entirely un-reliant on – though not unaffected by – the missionaries and the Spanish. By the 1790s the two major forces on the Ucayali River were the Conibo and the Piro, and both played significant roles in the indigenous exchange networks throughout this region of Amazonia, reasons for which included their simultaneous access to missionary goods

and the historic trade with the Andean highlands. Though the Conibo always had something of an ambivalent relationship with the Catholic missionary groups – which is to say that at times they would talk “openly of killing the Jesuits” (DeBoer 1981:37), and occasionally doing just that – in the late eighteenth century they even requested their “own” missionaries of the Franciscans, to secure their access to trade goods, and especially iron implements (Myers 1974:153).

Interestingly during this period, the in-fighting between the Catholic orders over territory and access to souls for „Christianization“ produced a situation in which the Franciscans, who had founded the mission “San Miguel de los Cunibos” on the Ucayali, found the Jesuits attempting to establish themselves in the same region (Ortiz 1974:77). The Conibo managed to work this situation to their advantage, deriving iron tools and other trade goods from each group (DeBoer 1981:34). The Franciscans, however, desired to missionize as many indigenous groups as possible, as quickly as possible, and as such began to, somewhat prior to 1766, make gifts of iron tools to the Setebo and Shipibo as well (Ortiz 1974:181). The Setebo and Shipibo were consistent enemies, and though the Franciscans founded a mission at Santo Domingo on the Pisqui River to attempt to craft some kind of amiability between the two, this had little effect beyond putting in plain view of the Shipibo the gifts and trade that the Franciscans engaged in with the Setebo and the Conibo at the same time, destroying any sense of trust or alliance between the Shipibo and the Franciscans (Ortiz 1974:182-183). It was during this period that the rebellions initiated by Juan Santos Atahualpa – and Runcato along the Ucayali roughly two decades later – began to occur in the broader region. As Tournon suggests, beginning in 1740 there was a series of indigenous rebellions in

Peru, with one of the most well known being those led by Atahualpa, which began 1745 (2002:59). It was with this atmosphere of widespread resistance that Runcato was able, in 1766, to unite the previously fractious and conflict-prone Setebo, Shipibo, and Conibo into a unified group, enough to mobilize them to attack and drive out the missionaries (Tournon 2002:61-62). Ortiz, a historian of the Catholic Missions of the Pachitea and Ucayali Rivers, notes citing a letter from Padre Amich in 1766 that Runcato was able to convince groups of Conibo warriors and Shipibo warriors to dispatch significant numbers of priests and their accompanying "*cristianos*". Padre Amich lists, in what one takes to be something like astonishment, name after name of priests no longer living in the Ucayali region, and the missions that had been utterly abandoned or destroyed (Ortiz 1974:188-189). Inasmuch as it was the arrival of the missionaries that had re-ignited many of the conflicts between the Setebo, Shipibo, and Conibo over access to trade goods, Tournon notes that it was an "irony of history [that] the rebellion against the missionaries permitted the first unification of these same groups" in a longer-term political-cultural sense (Tournon 2002:63, my translation).

Though the Dominicans and Franciscans played a not-insignificant role in the missionization of the region, the most important mission was the one established by the Jesuits at Mainas (A. Taylor 1999:223). As A. Taylor notes, this was both due to its size, and the influence of its forms of reduction and missionization that greatly influenced the culture of other missions throughout the region (1999:223). Features understood to be common to many Jesuit missions had their origin here: the preference for situating indigenous populations on riverbanks, the forcible adoption of Quechua by groups from the Napo to the Ucayali, the abandonment of traditional dress styles, and even the

modification of traditional horticulture and agriculture from a primary orientation to subsistence to a new orientation toward trade crops. Each of these was a Jesuit legacy in the region, and had their origin in Mainas (A. Taylor 1999:223-226). These new socio-cultural arrangements and organizational structures were “particularly vulnerable to atomization and to the breakdown or restriction of intertribal exchange networks” which “were radically transformed or simply eliminated” (A. Taylor 1999:231). Given their positions between the highlands and the more extensive reaches of the lowlands through these extensive exchange networks, “the riverine village societies of the Napo and the Ucayali were the chief victims of this process” of atomization and disintegration (A. Taylor 1999:231). This is particularly important to emphasize, especially as this chapter later grapples with questions of ethnogenesis in just these two regions.

Exchange Networks in Amazonia

Following Myers, I suggest of the Napo and Ucayali riverine populations that the “most important ingredient” of common cultural patterns in the region was not a shared „Tropical Forest Culture” in terms of environmental determination, nor was it necessarily due to shared ancestries, but rather due to the “vast interregional trade network” which was made up of long distance trading routes along the major rivers, reaching to the Andes both prior to and after Spanish contact, which then intersected with regional exchange networks of interfluvial and forest groups (Myers 1981:19). As has been suggested of the Conibo case previously, engaging in warfare did not exclude continued trade relationships with other groups,⁷ and as Myers suggests, there were in fact groups of specialist traders working the rivers of the Amazon who commonly maintained forms

⁷ Cf. Whitehead (1994:38), for warfare being included as a form of exchange.

of treaty or alliance throughout these larger trading routes along the rivers, in order to provide for the continuation trade (Myers 1981:19). The rivers, unsurprisingly, are the key factor in making long distance trade possible. As Myers suggests, transport on water “provides the means for the transport of low value / high bulk goods” which, like pottery and other similar wares, would have made up the majority of the trade (Myers 1981:20). What is central to recognize from this is that while there is no doubt that European goods, especially iron tools and the like, had profound effects on indigenous groups, the desire for these goods did not necessitate new means of dissemination of goods throughout Amazonia. These networks were already in place, and while they certainly adapted themselves to demographic and political changes during European contact, the evidence suggests that “the European goods were merely added to a system already in existence long before 1500” (Myers 1981:23). Amazonian groups had long developed trade relationships with the highlands, often as a way of establishing social and political entanglements with highland groups (Zarzar and Román 1983:49-51). As Zarzar and Román make clear, many indigenous groups prior to European contact relied on these systems of exchange for any number of goods that would have been at least inconvenient, if not impossible, to procure locally – particular varieties of stone for hatchets, bits of jade and precious metals, cotton, salt, tobacco, hides, dogs, and even canoes of particular trees (1983:51). This is to say that the introduction of European goods into this network should not seem surprising – indigenous groups had been trading for uniquely crafted goods not available through local artisans for what were likely centuries. Zarzar and Román go so far as to suggest that these networks allowed for groups to develop specializations in particular trade items (1983:50), which

resonates with Whitehead's suggestion that even „ethnic“ boundaries themselves may not have necessarily coincided “with particular economic, political, or linguistic systems but could instead be founded on a craft technique or specialization that was sustained by being part of a wider system of exchange” (Whitehead 1994:37).

Where this leads for this chapter and for the investigation more broadly is to the notion that beliefs, ritual knowledge, and spiritual power were all also considered to be, in some senses, „trade items“, which were – not unlike curare, pottery, and salt – actively exchanged along these networks (Langdon 1981:101). While certainly particular plants or ritual artifacts may have moved as part of a more „material“ trade (Langdon 1981:106), it was the regional and supra-regional connections facilitated by these trade routes that made it possible for shamans and novices to travel over long distances to acquire knowledge and power from groups farther off. As Langdon notes, many shamans of the Sibundoy Valley “receive their training by serving as apprentices to shamans of the lowland Amazonia for extended periods of time” (1981:106). These „visits“ could last for many months, requiring significant time to fully learn the plants, proportions and admixtures, facility with particular visions, and other features of shamanic knowledge in order for the visiting shaman to be able to make use of the yagé rituals correctly once they had returned (Langdon 1981:109).⁸ Though this point will be returned to more fully later on, Langdon makes the remarkable assertion of Sibundoy Valley shamans that the yagé ritual ultimately becomes a manner of enacting a particular sensibility of indigenous identity, and that though the exchange networks under discussion here do finally break down, the “trading system of ritual knowledge

⁸ Cf. Wright (In Press, Chapter 3) for another example of extensive indigenous networks established for the training of shamans and the exchange of ritual knowledge and power in the Northwest Amazon

has persisted longer than that of economic items” inasmuch as “the core of their world view has persisted with the performance of the yagé ritual” (1981:112).

It only remains, then, before undertaking a more detailed look at the exchange networks on the Napo River and Ucayali River in their specificity, to address the more general situation of the region as a whole as backdrop against which to understand these two cases. By way of tracing the outlines of the trade network throughout this region, it will be simplest to cite directly from A. Taylor:

The Campa Antis were one of the poles of a vast trade network linking the great chiefdoms of the Ucayali, the Pano interfluvial groups, and the Urubamba Piro. Similar relations tied the Sibundoy Indians and the Chibcha to the western Tukano groups of the Colombian piedmont and tied the Quijos of the upper Napo to the Tupian Omagua. [A. Taylor 1994:199]

The locations and ethnic groups who resided in this extensive region highlight that indigenous exchange networks reached to a remarkable breadth of people and places.

A. Taylor, similar to Zarzar and Román, suggests that two different kinds of networks intersected here. The first were long distance trade routes along rivers, specialized in by riverine groups such as the Piro and Conibo, and the second were the intra-regional trade networks that included interfluvial and forest groups (A. Taylor 1994:199).

Interestingly, Zarzar and Román add a third category to this set of networks, that of trade between riverine indigenous groups and the missions (1983:56), which was a tertiary circuit of trade with its own benefits and, as has been elaborated, substantial costs. Echoing the previous statements on the far more fluid sense of relationship between the highlands and the lowlands that existed before that division had been concretized by colonial history, the specialization in trade-items by particular indigenous groups meant that lifestyles, goods, and cultural objects that often now differentiate an interfluvial group from a riverine, and lowland riverine groups from highland groups, were

“in fact much less evident than it is now” (A. Taylor 1999:208). This accentuates a component of the trade strategies of indigenous lowland groups highlighted previously, that of attempting to make use of exchange relationships as political force. A. Taylor notes of the Spanish *entradas* in 1616 and 1635 that the indigenous groups along the southern frontier “tolerated new settlements in hope of forcing the Spaniards into unequal trading relations, as they had done with the Inka” (1999:209). The strategies of exchange were not simply in want of iron tools, though certainly economic demand played no small role. These strategies must also be understood as distinctly socio-political devices meant to orient particular kinds of indigenous-Spanish relations, modeled on previous lowland-highland historical trade arrangements. As Spanish and mission incursions into indigenous territories increased, indigenous groups began to develop new inter-tribal political forms to adapt to the encroachment. A. Taylor notes that there was a sharing of defensive military and trade networks based on a Campa prohibition on intratribal violence, the scope of which was ultimately extended to other non-Campa groups, spreading to include the Piro, Amuesha, riverside Pano, and the Tupi of the lower Ucayali, among others (1999:241).

Exchange Networks on the Ucayali

The history of trade on the Ucayali is a varied one, involving 1) pre-Columbian exchange between the highlands and lowlands and the perpetuation of these contacts in varied forms from nearly 1550 through 1850 (Zarzar and Román 1983:13; A. Taylor 1999:199; Myers 1981:22); 2) warfare as a means of extracting, making available, and relocating both bodies and goods from place to place; 3) the integration of missionary goods and bureaucratic-political organizational tendencies into existing geographic-political structures (DeBoer 1981:31-34; A. Taylor 1999:221); 4) the radical changes in

local power dynamics with waves of population decline among different indigenous groups who by turn controlled different parts of the rivers and thereby the networks of exchange (DeBoer 1981:35; Zarzar and Román 1983:51); and finally 5) the concomitant changes in local indigenous socio-political organization styles, in general moving from more to less complex, based in large part on demographic collapse and the pressures of missionary reductions (Myers 1974:135; Zarzar and Román 1983:55-56). The Jesuits first made contact with the Cocama in 1644, and seven years later over seventy percent of their population was dead of disease (Myers 1974:147). This marked a substantial shift in the regional balance of power, as from the pre-contact era the Ucayali and adjacent rivers had in large part been the domain of the Cocama, the Conibo, and the Piro. The Piro had long maintained Andean trade contacts, traveling as far as Cuzco to obtain gold, a relationship which they continued to exploit from the mid sixteenth century on through the early nineteenth (Myers 1981:22; Zarzar and Román 1983:51). Indeed, in terms of trade itself as a means of exchange, it was the Piro who most excelled at the long distance trade routes among wide varieties of indigenous groups (Zarzar and Román 1983:56), marking them as the “specialists” suggested by Myers (1981:19-23). Trade, however, was not the only means of exchange current on the Ucayali during this period. DeBoer describes the Conibo position on the river as one of “middlemen”, whereby they actively plundered – for wives, slaves, and goods – other less powerful indigenous neighbors, and then traded these – both material goods and human bodies – to the missionaries for metal tools and salt (1981:31). Trade, as DeBoer notes, was “a vital mission activity”, and the Jesuits did their best to control salt deposits near Pilluana and Chasuta (1981:31-32). Trade in salt had, unsurprisingly, a pre-contact history

throughout the indigenous networks of exchange in the region, and the Jesuits, by securing access to such a critical resource, were able to position themselves within these existing networks. This gave them leverage over both salt and metal tools, two items of exchange that were certain to draw high demand throughout the extents of these exchange networks. Salt from the deposits they controlled reached as far as the Upper Napo (DeBoer 1981:31-32). The Franciscans were not blind to the degree of control this afforded the Jesuits, and had as their own explicit goals in the missionization process to secure access to their own salt deposits in the region, specifically from the Cerro de la Sal up the Perené (DeBoer 1981:32).

The expansion of Conibo power in the region was predicated on the Cocama population collapse. In the century after 1651 when the Cocama had been ravaged by disease, the Conibo expanded into their territory, taking on ever-greater control of the river traffic (DeBoer 1981:33). Although smaller groups did not submit in any particularly quiescent way, the resistance that the Conibo did encounter was on a scale that was relatively easily rebuffed by their larger, more well organized raiding parties (DeBoer 1981:33). A notable exception to this was the Piro who, already being experienced long-distance traders and a relatively powerful group in the region, managed to establish a presence on the Tambo River. From here they staged ambushes of such cost that it effectively “severed the link between the Conibo and the Franciscan missions, and... formed a barrier to the southward expansion of Jesuit missionary activities” (DeBoer 1981:35). The Conibo often traded in the bodies of their captives from these raids, offering indigenous persons to the missionaries as „goods“ in exchange for iron tools, salt, and the like. The Jesuits were happy to receive the human cargo, as they would

train them in the use of Quechua, in order to act as translators and interpreters for other groups in the region (DeBoer 1981:33). In a strange bit of irony, the Conibo rationalized their capture of slaves from other indigenous groups by way of „liberating“ them from a “life of savagery”, which, as DeBoer notes, is tantamount to the same attitude that the missionaries had toward their own efforts with the Conibo (1981:37-38).

Exchange Networks on the Napo

What can be described as the ayahuasca shamanic complex has its origins in the Napo River region. I continue here to make use of Langdon’s model in noting that material goods were not the only items to travel the exchange networks, and that ritual knowledge also traversed these routes (Langdon 1981:106). With this in mind, I turn now to address the situation of the lowland Quichua-speaking peoples of Ecuador as cultural middlemen and economic brokers between highland, and later colonial, cultural groups and other more distant indigenous groups of lowland Amazonia. Hudelson notes that the predecessors of the lowland Quichua, given their previous experience as “negotiators of both material and conceptual culture” and managing socio-political encounter with highland groups – including the Inca – positioned them to adapt to the arrival of the Spanish with Pizarro more effectively than they might otherwise have done (1984:59). This had, according to Hudelson, a dual effect. For one, because of the proximity to the Andean capital of Quito and the routes of passage to the lowlands maintained by the heterogeneous indigenous groups that made up the “lowland Quichua” of this era, these groups were “the most vulnerable to the Spaniards” plans for exploitation of the region” (Hudelson 1984:65). Population loss was intense, and the social fragmentation that such a decline brought with it meant that the group of „Quijo“ who were „pacified“ by the Spanish General Contero in the mid 1500s “consisted of

several distinct cultural groups that shared a lingua franca and had close trade relations” but were not, specifically, a homogenous ethnic or tribal unit (Hudelson 1984:65). However, the other side of this proximity meant that the lowland Quichua of this region developed “experience in living on the conceptual border between the white world... and the Indian world”, which afforded them a significant degree of “self-confidence” and cultural capital (Hudelson 1984:69). They were in a position to broker access to the material goods of the whites, on the one hand, and the forest products of the indigenous groups on the other (Hudelson 1984:69). This cultural capital,⁹ based on the “role of brokers” (A. Taylor 1999:235) provides some of the more substantial grounds for explaining the cultural impact that the ritual traditions of these groups had throughout the region. Whitten suggests for Quichua *yachaj*’s (2008:61), the crossing of thresholds and boundaries, and mediating between worlds, is in many ways the defining position of the shaman, as it is in many of the ritual and cosmological systems throughout Amazonia. Following this, it should not seem surprising that a political-economic situation as mediators and brokers between white and indigenous cultural worlds would lend weight to the shamanic traditions of the lowland Quichua so situated.

The Jesuit mission at Maynas (Mainas) held substantial sway throughout the whole of this region. The Jesuits, in large part, made use of the route through Archidona on their way to Maynas, and as such the lowland Quichua groups came into regular contact with them, both for trade and as paddlers for the long journeys (Oberem 1974:349). The extent of „Quijos” journeys were not limited to this, of course, and as noted previously of the salt deposits that the Jesuits controlled, the lowland Quichua

⁹ Cf. Bourdieu (1985) on cultural capital.

went as far as the Huallaga to trade for salt (Oberem 1974:349). Though this did not tie the Quijos into the Conibo/Piro exchange networks of the Ucayali in a profound way, the mutually implicative nature of regional trade networks as they extend to supra-regional areas can be clearly recognized. It is worth noting, however, the perhaps obvious parallel between the Quijos and the Piro in this sense, as each group maintained trade relationships with the highlands, the missions, and the lowland indigenous groups, albeit from points of access on the Napo and Ucayali rivers respectively. Though the focus of much of the trade between the lowland Quichua groups (Canelo, Quijo, etc.) and other lowland indigenous groups further downstream was on European trade goods, it bears repeating that the previously existing trade networks and the demand for indigenous trade products did not dissolve with European contact. In fact, it is interesting to note that many groups, the Shuar (Jívaro) in particular, traded with the Canelo for blowguns, a product the Canelo were well-known for producing. This is a particularly interesting parallel in that the Shuar according to Harner, even in contemporary history, are certain that the Canelos Runa have the most potent *tsentsak*, or spirit darts, which are in a sense the „shamanic“ equivalent to material blowguns (1972:119-123). The Shuar are not the only group to derive shamanic or ritual power and knowledge from the lowland Quichua. According to Oberem, many highland indigenous groups also “take their training among the Quijo or obtain ingredients from them”, a behavior which has been reported for centuries (1974:351). This echoes Langdon’s model of Sibundoy Valley shamans taking their training from the lowland Quichua as well, which suggests that this was not an isolated practice. The lowland Quichua – the Canelos, the Quijos, and those who would become the Puyo and Napo Runa – seem to have, throughout this period

and up until today, established themselves as mediators between the cultural worlds of the whites and indigenous groups, while simultaneously developing a reputation for potent ritual knowledge. Whitten notes that the “Canelos Quichua relational system” during the rise of the modern state in Ecuador in the early and mid 1900s provided “a meta-system of dynamic symbolic relationships” which has allowed the extension of Quichua cultural presence and even prominence to spread throughout both eastern Ecuador and on into Peru, such that this „mediatory“ position continues in present-day identity politics to play a powerful role (1976:213).

Exchange in the Rubber Epoch¹⁰

The site which was to become Iquitos was established in the eighteenth century as a Jesuit mission, though it was not until the 1840s that the Iquitos Indians settled there with their white *patrón* (Stanfield 1998:30), founding the city in its modern economic and historical context. Located near the confluence of the Nanay and Amazon rivers, and less than eighty miles from where the headwaters of the Ucayali and Marañón themselves converge, Iquitos has been, from the very beginning, located at a key geographical point for trade flowing through the Peruvian Amazon. Class and racial divisions, still evident today, were likewise present from the beginning, where a small white elite economically, socially, and politically dominated and oppressed the significantly more numerous indigenous and mestizo populations (Stanfield 1998:30). Though Iquitos was well situated for commerce, until the advent of the rubber economy, the city remained relatively small. By 1864, however, little more than twenty years from its founding, steamboats, factories, docks, and manufacturing centers were brought to

¹⁰ Portions of this section have been previously released in prior form on the web as part of J. Taylor 2010.

the city by British companies and the Peruvian navy, bringing rapid growth with them (Stanfield 1998:31). Goodyear's vulcanization process sparked the dramatic increase in demand for rubber throughout the world (San Román 1975:127), and Iquitos was inundated with thousands of new immigrants, furthering indigenous population decline through slavery and disease. This, as has been attested to previously, significantly altered the political and cultural realities of those who remained (Stanfield 1998:36). As Whitten notes, rubber "was the product to be sold on the world markets. But on the tributaries of the Upper Amazon the native peoples were the immediate prize and the target of the rubber-boom social malignancy" (1976:211). This was, in large part, because the *caucheros* systematically arranged their raiding and terrorism against indigenous peoples in an attempt "to control a jungle zone and maintain a captive labor force to exploit wild latex" (Whitten 1976:211). By 1905, Iquitos was a booming port town, where

Indians and partially acculturated cholos formed the working class, Chinese merchants and restaurateurs figured prominently among the petty retailers, while European merchants controlled the most lucrative wholesale trade. Along the muddy streets, one could see – along with the harried Indian porters and the pigs routing through garbage – newcomers from Germany, Brazil, Spain, Italy, France, England, China, Portugal, Morocco, Columbia, Ecuador, as well as a few from North American and Russia. [Stanfield 1998:108]

Notably, it was not only the swelling population, systemic racism, and the acculturative impact of European goods that so distinctly shaped much of what modern Iquitos was to become. The techniques of rubber tapping themselves, as they were practiced in the Amazon, played a significant role. Tapping a *Hevea* tree, which produced a finer quality of latex, was something that could be done sustainably, where a single tapper, working in relative isolation, could tend a few hundred trees at a time,

spread over many dozens of acres of forest. The trouble with this was that even with a hundred trees or more, *Hevea* trees, while sustainable, could only yield roughly 5-7 pounds of dry rubber per tree annually. *Castilloa* trees, while they had to be felled, killing the tree, could produce upwards of 200 pounds of latex in a matter of days. The *caucho* model of scouring the forest for these immense trees caused the vast majority of rubber tappers to be constantly wandering, untraceable, forever in search of these lucrative but highly perishable resources. As Stanfield says, "The mobility necessary for caucho collection resulted in a less stable lifestyle, one that proved highly disruptive for the caucheros, the environment, and Amerindians alike" (1998:24). When the Rubber Boom did finally collapse around 1912, it was due, again, to the details of harvesting the latex from the trees. *Hevea* trees are susceptible to a particular form of leaf blight that is common in the Amazon, making plantations of them unfeasible in the region, as the blight passes from tree to tree. However, in Southeast Asia, India, and Africa, this blight does not exist. Vast plantations of the sustainable *Hevea* trees were planted in these locations, and as they both produced a finer quality latex than the *Castilloa* trees and did not require anything like the same labor to acquire from the forest, the costs of the latex from these plantations so drastically undercut the Amazonian market that it simply could not compete.

In the short years after the expulsion of the Jesuits from this region in the late nineteenth century but before the significant arrival of the rubber economy, as San Román suggests, the Napo River had been somewhat forgotten in economic terms (1975:150). However, as the rubber economy found its way into this area right about 1900, the Napo River region returned immediately to playing a key economic role, with

the arrival of Ecuadorian, Peruvian, and even Colombian *patrónes* (San Román 1975:150). Hudelson, in an analysis of the spread of Quichua culture, notes with these arrivals “more than half of the Quichua men living near Loreto were chained and taken to work in the „rubber lanes“ on the lower rivers in Peru and Colombia” (1984:68). Lowland Quichua were “posted to work the rubber lanes” on rivers ranging from the Napo to the Putumayo, from the Pastaza to the Tigre, further extending traces of the Quichua cultural imprint (Hudelson 1984:68). While certainly the treatment that Quichua individuals received, as Hudelson puts it, was “far from ideal”, the knowledge gained as cultural mediators for three centuries prior to the rubber boom gave them a “clear advantage over less acculturated Indians”, such that they were able to fare better in terms of overall population decline than other indigenous groups (Hudelson 1984:68). Interestingly, however, with the relatively sudden collapse of the rubber economy in 1912-1914, many of the Quichua men who had been forcibly relocated to other areas and other rivers did not return home, but elected to stay (Hudelson 1984:68). Given the “power and prestige” of Quichua culture grounded in their long history as mediators and brokers on the Napo between „white“ and indigenous groups, what is fascinating about this dispersal is that though the Quichua who had relocated or been relocated were theoretically moving into alternative indigenous contexts, it was the groups into which they moved and began to inhabit who ultimately, and intentionally, acculturated to Quichua cultural patterns (Hudelson 1984:68).

It was the rubber economy that finally and most fully collapsed the long enduring indigenous trade networks throughout the region. The regional and supra-regional economies and networks of exchange that had existed prior to European contact had

managed to survive – or at least re-constitute themselves time and again – by incorporating European goods, a trade in indigenous bodies and labor, even turning the tendencies toward ethnocide of the Catholic missions toward exchange. Rubber would change that. San Román suggests that it was during this era, from 1880-1914, that saw the “forest fall beneath the dependency of foreign industrial capitalism”, noting that an economy of extraction, and the invasion of commercial capital, “established an active traffic with the external world” (1975:124, my translation). And just as the Catholic missionaries had come in step with the sword of conquest, so too did the Protestant missionaries arrive with incipient capitalism and the machete of the *cauchero* (San Román 1975:124, 140). The missions and *reducciones* had made indigenous groups of the region vulnerable to social atomization and collapse, but it was the radical dislocation of indigenous bodies facilitated by the capitalist rubber economy that made a return to previous forms of inter-tribal exchange networks finally untenable. Though this is in no way to suggest that indigenous groups did not subsequently re-establish new forms of exchange, during the period of the rubber economy and for long years after this was not feasible. What did occur, however, was a cultural exchange and mixing among indigenous groups that would have otherwise been far too remote from one another to have come directly into contact, based simply on this new enforced proximity in rubber camps (San Román 1975:154). It was just this cultural „*mezclado*“ that, in a sense, gave rise to the *ribereño* culture of the region today. As San Román notes of these mixing groups, “the current *ribereño* is a synthesis of these racial and cultural conglomerates, that the exploitation of rubber created” (1975:154, my translation). The question of *ribereño* culture and its relationship to ayahuasca shamanism, especially the

vegetalismo investigated by Luna (1986) and Beyer (2009), is taken up in a subsequent chapter, but it is very much to the point that the origins of the brew, the ritual traditions, and cosmological implications of the shamanic complex surrounding ayahuasca were dramatically affected by just this cultural mixing in the rubber camps (Gow 1994).

Ethnogenesis

Hill states that ethnogenesis “is not merely a label for the historical emergence of culturally distinct peoples” as the term may be more often used, but that it can be more fully characterized as “a concept encompassing peoples” simultaneously cultural and political struggles to create enduring identities in general contexts of radical change and discontinuity” (1996:1). This has particular resonance for the focus of this thesis on the Runa peoples of lowland Amazonia in Ecuador and Peru, as well as the contemporary Pano-speaking Shipibo-Conibo groups of the Ucayali. Neither the Runa peoples of the Napo River, the Shipibo-Conibo of the Ucayali, nor the *ribereños* in the areas surrounding Iquitos are descendants of a single historical „ethnic“ group. Rather, each of these groups is the product of that more complete characterization of Hill’s in terms of ethnogenesis: the struggle to create identity. For each of these groups this occurred during periods of catastrophic population decline from slavery and disease, the tendency toward ethnocide of missionization, the encroachments of colonial expansion, and the economic, ecological, and human depredations of the rubber economy. An analysis of identity in terms of *ribereño* mestizos near Iquitos is undertaken in the next chapter, limiting scope here in order to make clear the struggles and processes of ethnogenesis for indigenous groups of this region in particular.

In line with this chapter’s focus on exchange networks, it is worth noting the centrality of such networks to an understanding of what „ethnicity“ in a historical sense

means to the region. Hill points to the “concept of a „tribal zone” in the work of Whitehead and Ferguson, “as a sphere of interaction in which state-level expansion reduces multilingual, multicultural regional networks to territorially discrete, culturally and linguistically homogenous „tribes” (Hill 1996:7-8). It is vital to recognize that pre-colonial ethnic groups were not necessarily oriented toward particular territories or linguistic families, but were dynamic, evolving constructs in conjunction with trade good specialization, warring patterns, and kinship structures, among others which overlapped and mutually informed group identity as such (Whitehead 1994:37-38). This joins in a tight critical context with Hill’s assertion that “typologizing” models that assume “a basic dichotomy between isolated Indian populations and ethnic groups cannot be transformed at a later stage into a fully historical understanding of cultural identities” (1996:9). This dichotomy is one that delineates „ethnic” groups as those working toward a degree of integration with the nation-state, situating the formation of an identity as a particular political movement within a more or less contemporary political-historical field. Holding this kind of „ethnic” group as distinct from „isolated” Indian groups, as Hill argues, reifies old ideas of the „pristine” or „uncontacted” and „unacculturated” Indian, distinct from modern persons engaged in political identity struggles (1996:7-11). This orientation toward the process of ethnogenesis is critical in understanding the strategic nature of identity creation and development for both the Runa and the Shipibo-Conibo, especially as this decidedly includes ritual and religious contexts. Hill notes that religions can act “as cornerstones in the building of new identities” (1996:3). This resonates distinctly with Langdon’s suggestion that yagé ritual beliefs and practices have the potential to act as a profoundly important aspect of the maintenance of an

„indigenous“ identity, from the Putumayo through to lowland Ecuador, and by implication, on to wherever these shared ritual practices extend throughout indigenous groups in Amazonia (Langdon 1981:112). As Hill notes of his work with Wright, the Wakuénai phratries

had experienced a long history of interethnic relations with expanding colonial and national societies of Latin America and that this history was actively remembered through an array of narrative discourses and ritually powerful ways of speaking. [Hill 1996:147-148]

This suggests that ritual practices and beliefs have the capacity to produce a critical engagement with history from indigenous cultural, political, and economic perspectives that recall and even make explicit the “interethnic” context of indigenous identity creation and maintenance.¹¹

While the Shipibo-Conibo have themselves undergone a process of ethnogenesis, this has to a great extent already been described in the previous analysis of Shipibo, Setebo, and Conibo trade-and-pillage relationships, the efforts toward unification that the Franciscans attempted prior to the Rubber Boom, and the beginnings of integration which occurred during the Runcato-led rebellion against the missionaries. The eventual population decline of the Conibo led, as with the Cocama before them, to a flagging of their political power on the Ucayali, and they fell from prominence. The contemporary ethnic category „Shipibo-Conibo“ is as much an etic categorization as it is a particular ethnic identity, though certainly it is a category based on the realities of shared customs, beliefs, practices, living spaces, and language. Such cultural mixing was noted even in the late eighteenth century on the Ucayali, reported

¹¹ Taussig, in his work with yagé shamans along the Putumayo in Colombia, has also taken up this notion of ritual practice as a form of indigenous critical engagement with histories of colonialism (1987).

“by later travelers such as Marcoy, Herndon, and Raimondy as well as by later missionaries” (Myers 1974:153).

With the above in mind it is my intention here to elaborate more fully on the previously sparse analysis of Runa or Quichua ethnogenesis. Oberem states that the Canelo Quichua “are exceptional in being a group... consisting both biologically and culturally of a mixture” of other groups, ranging from Highland Indians to the Quijo, from the Z paro to the Shuar (Jíbaro) (1974:347). They are “distinct from their neighbors, even linguistically” and, according to Oberem, are “well aware of their homogeneity” (1974:347). The ethnogenesis that marks the establishment of „Quichua“ or Runa people near the Napo and Pastaza rivers of the Ecuadorian Amazon highlights the geographic, cultural, and historical role as mediators that indigenous Amazonians of this region have played, and continue in many ways to play today. The expansion of Quichua culture has, according to Hudelson, two historical points of origin, the first being Jesuit missionization, and the second an active enculturation of smaller, less politically powerful indigenous groups during, and especially after, the period of the rubber economy (1984:73-74). Of the “hundreds of other groups occupying the Amazon Basin when the first white colonists arrived in the sixteenth century”, the lowland Quichua of this region were in a unique position to both be inordinately affected by disease and slavery (Hudelson 1984:65). They were, however, also strategically placed to capitalize on the new relationships with Europeans, as they already had cultural models for living in the “buffer zone” between the “lowest riverine jungle and the Andean highlands” (Hudelson 1984:59). Though the predecessor groups to contemporary Runa were decimated, they shared enough cultural material, especially after the experience of

the Jesuit missions, to begin to actively constitute themselves as a political identity – as Quichua – if not immediately a political entity on the national stage. These groups, having had economic ties pre-contact, and having undergone „reduction“ to Jesuit missions, shared much of their cultural systems, pronouncedly in the religious systems of shamanism and cosmology.

It was not, however, the missions that solely produced these shared cultural aspects. As stated of the „Quijo“ who were „pacified“ in the mid 1500s, “this „tribe“ seems to have consisted of several distinct cultural groups that shared a lingua franca and had close trade relations” (Hudelson 1984:65). This resonates with the „tribal zone“ proposed by Whitehead and Ferguson noted previously, bringing to bear the notion that the „Quijo“ of this period were a potentially arbitrarily-isolated group of a complex regional network of interrelation, treated as a socially self-contained unit or tribe, where no such „ethnic“ division existed. Whatever the precise arrangement of historical factors that established the „Quichua“ ethnic group, as Hudelson notes, “the expansion of Lowland Quichua culture and language did not stop in the 1850s” (1984:67) despite the cessation of mission pressure toward the acculturation of other lowland indigenous groups. What is interesting to note is that this expansion of Quichua culture, as it has occurred under the historical agency of the Quichua themselves, has in large part occurred as a politically adaptive strategy of the *assimilated* smaller indigenous group. That is to say that adopting a Quichua identity of “„Indianness“ has proved an attractive alternative to total assimilation for neighboring Indian groups during the past three centuries”, which has meant that while other nearby indigenous groups are seeing a continued population decline and cultural loss, the Quichua are actually expanding (Hudelson 1984:59-60).

Whitten points to the intrusion of national power with the rise of the modern nation-state in Ecuador as an event which “revalidated the Canelos Quichua relational system by offering a new challenge” (1976:213). In effect, Quichua individuals traveled throughout eastern Ecuador and lowland Peru, “re-expanding and reconsolidating attenuated ayllu and alliance relationships” in such a way as to further and solidify the reach of their own cultural extents (Whitten 1976:213).

Finally, though, as A. Taylor suggests of this region more broadly, “what happened rather was a growth of formations characterized by a suspension or freezing of specific tribal memberships”, which she states was replaced by a shifting identity “based on inclusion in loose sociological networks” (A. Taylor 1999:234). As such, it is important to note that while ethnogenesis as a process should be understood as an ongoing struggle to generate and maintain identity, this is not an uncontested process even internal to a given „ethnic“ group, and other, alternative identities may well persist at the same moment. A. Taylor notes that multilingualism, so common in this region, and most definitely among the Runa,¹² “is perhaps the key to the continued transmission of submerged identities within these aggregates” (1999:234). Thus any statement of ethnic identity must be understood as a distinctly political act, one made in a historical context that often demands an „ethnic“ identity as part of legitimating, to an admittedly often limited extent, socio-economic and political resistance and mobilization. A. Taylor continues, however, to note that despite the potentially multiple nature of identity subsumed within larger political „ethnic“ aggregates, there is “a fundamental Indian-white split in these overall identities themselves that make original tribal affiliations

¹² Cf. Whitten 2005 on the common occurrence of multilingualism among Canelos Quichua.

largely irrelevant” (1999:235) in terms of relationships to colonial and neo-colonial powers. As such, it is a mistake to consider ethnogenesis as a single historical act of any particular tribe or cultural group – it is always a negotiated process, utterly bound up with historical and political realities.

Of Mediators and Brokers

In this chapter I have attempted to present the historical context of indigenous groups on both the Napo and Ucayali rivers in terms of their situation as cultural mediators and economic brokers between the highlands and the lowlands, between the Europeans and indigenous Amazonians further east. In doing so it has been necessary to engage with certain problematics of „ethnicity” in Amazonia as a term that is often assumed to reference a particular territorial or linguistic group, especially as these constructions of ethnicity have a tendency to reify cultural boundaries that were unlikely to have been the central points of demarcation for pre-colonial indigenous groups themselves. I have also intended to point to the heavy tolls of disease, slavery, and missionization on indigenous peoples, while at the same time noting the adaptations and historical agency of these indigenous groups. With such a radical population decline, it is impossible to suggest that there is a simple „balance” between catastrophe and agency. The exploitation and socio-economic marginalization of indigenous groups continues today, and if the historical and political motives are not identical, it would be absurd to suggest an absence of genealogy between the situations. What is striking in this is not that indigenous groups developed their own cultural responses and novel formulations despite these pressures, but that these persisted, in changing but undeniable forms, for centuries. Indigenous exchange networks collapsed, but were consistently reconstituted or freshly established, from 1550 on through nearly 1880, all

the while adapting to cataclysmic loss of life, vicious power struggles, wave upon wave of disease, European trade goods, slavery, and missionization.¹³ It was not until the rise of the proto-modern nation-state and nascent capitalism of the rubber economy that these networks ultimately collapsed, and even then they found expression in the continued exchange of ritual knowledge and power from group to group along similar, if not identical, routes and relationships. In the next chapter I follow Langdon's model of approaching the exchange of ritual knowledge and power as part of this history of trade networks, with the recognition that the trade of ritual plants, stones, artifacts, and knowledge as "trade items", "is dependent upon certain cultural and political considerations" (1981:101). That is to say that the ritual power of Quichua shamans may be understood to be grounded in, if not reductively wholly ascribed to, the geographic and political brokerage that the lowland Quichua were known for, and the cultural capital which this position entailed. The ayahuasca shamanic complex described here originated on the Napo River with just these shamans, and it is to this origin, and the spread of this complex, that I turn in the next chapter.

¹³ Cf. Sweet (1977) for the collapse and redevelopment of indigenous exchange networks in the middle Amazon valley as these responded to missionization, disease, and slavery.



Figure 1-1. Map of the Napo, Iquitos, Ucayali region.

CHAPTER 3 ORIGINS OF AYAHUASCA

Langdon suggests that ritual knowledge and power, as well as ritual artifacts and materials, were traded as part of the far more elaborated exchange networks throughout both pre- and post-contact indigenous communities in both the Peruvian and Ecuadorian Amazon (Langdon 1981:101). This use of the “concept of „trade items” to include both beliefs and artifacts” (Langdon 1981:101), is central to the historical argument set forward here. It is my contention that there is something about the ayahuasca brew and the rituals surrounding it that have situated it historically as an item of exchange likely to spread along the riverine populations of this region. I argue that is significant that it is ayahuasca, as opposed to other psychoactive plants, that is the central component of the shamanic complex that has, over the last three hundred years, become pervasive. Indigenous exchange networks were robust and resilient routes along which goods, persons, and ideas were capable of passing from the highlands to the lowlands, from missions to interior indigenous groups. In tracing the origins of this complex of shamanic traditions, I have as my target less an attempt to produce a kind of „genetic history” of these practices and beliefs, than to make clear the ways in which this complex has both adapted and remained consistent as it has traversed these exchange networks, in order to situate its place as a means of ritual healing and identity-making.¹ Part of the difficulty with the academic literature on the subject of ayahuasca has been a consistent confusion of terms between brews made specifically from the *Banisteriopsis caapi* vine, without admixtures, and brews made with admixtures, most famously those with Dimethyltryptamine (DMT)-bearing plant additives. I begin by describing differences

¹ Cf. Langdon (1981:112-113) as to the place of the “yagé cult” and its role in ethnic identity

between particular uses of the vine in different indigenous contexts in the Northwest Amazon in order to disentangle these potentially confused vine brews and the cultural contexts within which they are found. By drawing this distinction it will then be possible to engage more directly with Gow's potentially over-reaching assertion that ayahuasca shamanism is of such recent origin (1994), while still recognizing the utility of much of his critique of the assumptions underlying the previous anthropological crediting of its antiquity. Following this, I outline the dispersal of the ayahuasca shamanic complex throughout this riverine region, suggesting the importance of rivers in all facets of life – material, discursive, and otherwise. Rivers and mediation highlight issues of *mezclado* and cultural mixing as these inform the use of ayahuasca to establish spaces of encounter between worlds. Finally, I address concerns raised in the anthropological literature on ayahuasca tourism as a form of globalization, as this presents a new site of encounter between worlds, with all the ambivalence this has historically entailed.

“Ancient Indigenous Tradition”

Vine, Additives, and Plant Knowledge

Due to dramatic population decline as a result of disease and slavery during the post-contact era, the Runa as they are constituted today were formed directly from the survivors of other indigenous groups, many of whom had undergone similar histories of missionization and the forced acquisition of the Quechua language. As Kohn notes, predecessors of the Runa “encountered new diseases on a scale never seen”, and as such were actively engaged in the search for new remedies (1992:52, my translation). Because of the intensity of cultural contact „facilitated” by the *reducciones*, these peoples would have had an opportunity to exchange knowledge of medical systems, plant and forest remedies and their cultivation techniques for a wide variety of illnesses,

in a much more rapid way than would have been the case prior to European contact. Similarly, even Old World remedies would have been made available in the midst of these cultural exchanges, at least to some degree. This suggests the potential for extremely rapid changes, advancements, and discoveries in ethnomedical knowledge (Kohn 1992:52). As Highpine notes, “present-day Napo Runa are renowned in Ecuador among scholars and other Indian groups alike for the number of different plants they know”, with an estimate of upwards of 1200 different forest medicines (2012:17). This is especially remarkable once understood in context.

As both Highpine (2012:17-18) and Kohn (1992:54) state, the Waorani are a forest-dwelling group in the Ecuadorian Amazon which had, until recently, been relatively uncontacted (though of course not *unaffected*) by Euro-Americans or even the reaches of the modern state of Ecuador, given what is often described as their „fierce“ demeanor and behavior toward outsiders. Because of their relative isolation, it was assumed that there would be a substantial reserve of traditional medicinal knowledge of plants by many of those who hoped to interact and work with this group (Davis and Yost 1983; Davis 1996). However, upon engaging with the Waorani and beginning to catalogue their ethnobotanical knowledge in terms of plant remedies, researchers were only able to gather 35 medicinal plants. Kohn suggests that Davis and Yost “concluded that these indigenous people use few medicinal plants because in large measure they had escaped the ravages of illness and epidemics that had affected the more contacted groups, like the Runa” (1992:54, my translation). This is not to suggest that relatively more isolated indigenous groups did not, in all cases, maintain robust ethnomedical systems of plant and forest remedies. Instead, it is important to note that a group

relatively geographically-near the Napo Runa, but who had not been in a historical situation to interact directly with European cultures, did not in all cases find it necessary to master such a remarkable range of plant medicines as the 1200 estimated of the Runa. Kohn goes so far as to state that the “typical image of natives as depositories of an ancient knowledge of plant medicines” may well be, in effect, “a sentimental vision of indigenous people as lords of nature” (1992:55, my translation). Whatever the facts of any particular ethnic group throughout Amazonia, what this does serve to highlight is the particular historical contingency of the Napo Runa’s extensive ethnomedical system of knowledge. Rather than expecting the Runa, or any other indigenous group, to maintain a “static *corpus* of ancient medicinal wisdom”, it is more effective to recognize the experimental, dynamic nature of indigenous medical knowledge as a system that builds on, adapts, re-invents, and extends more „traditional“ plant knowledge in the face of changing historical-political situations (Kohn 1992:55, my translation). Indeed, as Highpine notes, the Napo Runa discovered these many hundreds of plant remedies “within only a century or so of the introduction of European diseases” (2012:19). She continues, stating that though malaria had been problematic for thousands of years around the world prior to its introduction to the Amazon, within twenty-five years of its arrival, “the first plant medicine for malaria, quinine, was discovered by indigenous people in Ecuador” (Highpine 2012:19).

This is meaningful for the origins of ayahuasca, as it makes clear that the Napo Runa plant specialists were already very familiar with local flora, to a degree that seems likely to have outstripped other indigenous groups of the same region. Before continuing on to a more thorough discussion of Runa conceptions and uses of ayahuasca in line

with their understandings of plant medicines more broadly, it is necessary briefly to disambiguate ayahuasca in terms of the *vine* alone, from ayahuasca in terms of the *brew* which is often prepared with a wide number of additives. Brabec de Mori suggests that the linguistic and ethnomusicological evidence points to the Napo River region as the origin of the ayahuasca brew – with its wide array of additives – as distinct from beverages (both decoctions and infusions) made from the vine alone (2011:24). This leaves open the wide variety of other uses that the *caapi* (ayahuasca) vine had and has in other parts of the Amazon. This is a necessary qualification, as it paints a more historically nuanced portrait between the poles of the argument suggesting an „ancient indigenous origin“ for ayahuasca, or the „very recent origins for ayahuasca“, both of which are positions taken and argued in the broader anthropological literature.²

Highpine suggests that the ayahuasca shamanic complex as outlined for this region began originally with the use of the *Banisteriopsis caapi* vine on the Napo River, where many different components were added to the brew, though these were not added for their DMT-visionary effects (2012:1). She suggests instead that DMT-containing additives *Psychotria viridis* and *Diplopterys cabrerana* were added to the brew, much in the manner which other plants were added, but in other geographic regions – near and around Iquitos, Peru and on the upper Putumayo River, respectively (Highpine 2012:1). It was from these secondary locations that the DMT-containing brew disseminated, though with the ritual components, practices, and cosmological referents of Quichua³ shamanism continued as part of the transmission of the complex

² Cf. Brabec de Mori (2011), and Beyer (2012a).

³ „Kichwa“ and „Quichua“ are used in the literature to specifically refer to Quechua-speaking peoples of lowland Ecuador, or the Quechua language spoken in this region. The spellings are indicative of

surrounding the use of the vine. Indeed, if the DMT-additives were crucial to the Quichua uses of the brew as it was made use of on the Napo, this mixture “would likely be used everywhere in Ayahuasca brews” (Highpine 2012:20). This, however, is manifestly not the case, as Highpine produces a lengthy list of indigenous groups who make use of the vine alone, and for whom cosmological references to the brew imply symbolism for the vine alone, and not the DMT-admixture leaves (2012:5). As she notes, *chacruna*, the word very commonly employed throughout this region to describe the *Psychotria viridis* bush, in the Quichua dialect used in many parts of the Napo River, “means simply „mixture””, being a “generic term for admixture leaves” (Highpine 2012:8-9). The purpose of many of these admixtures was to “brighten or clarify” the visions in some cases (Highpine 2012:8-9), or rather to bring visions of the plants so added, to learn of them and how to make use of them practically and medicinally (Highpine 2012:19). Indeed, it is just this practice of adding different plants to a decoction of the ayahuasca vine that Highpine suggests led to the „discovery” of the ayahuasca-and-DMT-additive brew that has become the subject of so much popular and scholarly attention. Raw „trial and error” mixing, as a means of discovering a synergy like that of the MAOI effects of the *harmine* and *harmaline* beta-Carboline alkaloids in the *caapi* vine with the DMT of both *P. viridis* and *D. cabrerana*, is distinctly unlikely to have produced a brew of this sort. Highpine contextualizes this stating that there are upwards of 80,000 catalogued plant species in this region of the Amazon, with an estimated million more potentially uncatalogued (2012:18), numbers that make largely random

particular political configurations in line with either establishing indigenous identities distinct from Peruvian and Andean Quechua speakers, or, as in the case of „Kichwa” as a re-spelling of the word in order to avoid the Spanish, and thereby colonial, spelling.

processes of discovery unlikely. Relatedly, trial and error as a mode of finding medicinal plants for particular illnesses seems an implausible source for the rapid growth of medicinal plant knowledge as suggested of the Napo Runa during the years of European contact (Highpine 2012:19). In terms of the ayahuasca brew containing DMT additives, it is important to recognize that the common statement in much of the more popular literature about ayahuasca – that DMT is not active without the MAOI of the vine – is true, but misleading. While DMT is not active orally, the plants that contain it, in this case the *P. viridis* and *D. cabrerana*, are themselves psychoactive alone through other compounds (Highpine 2012:21). As such, adding these plants to the brew fits within the overall pattern of adding potentially useful plants to the ayahuasca brew to learn more of them. This implies that there is “no mystery to how the synergy between *B. caapi* and the DMT-containing admixtures was discovered” (Highpine 2012:21).

Ancient or Modern Origin

As noted previously, in an pivotal article on the origins of ayahuasca, Gow argues that ayahuasca shamanism is in large part a relatively recent phenomenon, one that has its origins in the Catholic missions, and has “evolved as a response to the specific colonial history of western Amazonia” (1994:91). It is his contention that the curing rituals of ayahuasca shamanism were a product of the cultural exchange that occurred as a result of missionization, and were not part of an “unbroken pre-Columbian cultural tradition” as is a common suggestion in some of the literature (Gow 1994:90). He notes here Chaumiel (1983) and Harner (1972) as examples of ethnographies that stipulate just this idea, though as noted previously, the same can be found in the work of Luna (1986) and Narby (1998) among others. Indeed, as Beyer notes, “the claim that the ayahuasca drink has been used for 5000 years has become formulaic” in much of

the popular and even academic literature surrounding the brew (2012a). In many ways this contention by Gow is a necessary corrective to the de-historicized nature of the rhetoric surrounding ayahuasca use in the Amazon, but the argument also proves to be somewhat overreaching. This is perhaps in large measure simply because there is a lack of clarity around exactly which uses of ayahuasca are under discussion, and, as this thesis has set as its target, misrecognizes the missions and the rubber economy as the sole modes of transport for the ideas and practices bound up in this shamanic complex. In effect, it is necessary to be clear when discussing ayahuasca whether one means preparations based solely on the vine, or whether the ayahuasca under discussion is that with DMT additive plants. Vine-only brews are widespread throughout northwest Amazonia and have documented uses in hunting, warfare, and more complex group rituals among a number of indigenous groups.⁴ Similarly, focusing so expressly on the missions as sites in which this form of shamanism was developed, and relying largely on the explanation of the rubber economy to account for its spread as described in the previous chapter, leave the extensive indigenous trade networks almost entirely unexamined. As Langdon has suggested, these must be taken into account to understand the flow of ritual materials, practices, and beliefs (1981). These two critiques can then begin to account for problematic assertions on the part of Gow, such as looking for the evolution of this form of shamanism “in the historical context of [the] missions, not in the contemporary cultures of traditional indigenous peoples” (1994:108), or that “the origins of ayahuasca shamanism should be sought in the origins of mestizo as a social category” (1994:105). This is not to suggest that “mestizo as a

⁴ Cf. Highpine (2012:5) for a more complete listing.

social category” does not play a profound role in the elaboration of ayahuasca shamanism, nor that the missions did not play a substantial part in its spread. Instead it is to re-insert the historical agency of indigenous peoples into the history of ayahuasca shamanism of this region. Much of this chapter will, however, continue to rely on Gow’s robust scholarship, and these critiques are not meant to deny the distinct relevance and pertinence of his insights. Indeed, his assertion that ayahuasca shamanism of this region “responds directly to the lived experience of illness among mestizo and native people in western Amazonia and to the historical circumstances of their affliction” is a central orientation to both this chapter and the investigation as a whole (Gow 1994:111).

Beyer poses the question of just why is it that the rhetoric of an „ancient“ origin of ayahuasca use in indigenous tradition has become perpetuated in so much of the popular and academic literature with so little foundation. While he does not offer lengthy evidence for the statements, I argue that his two answers are compelling. First, he suggests that invoking the “resonant trope of a millennia-old indigenous wisdom” is a potent way to legitimize ayahuasca use in popular contexts (2012a). Second, he points to the “odd affectation of European colonialism that indigenous people are without history”, looking to the non-Euro-American „Other“ for some kind „innocence“ that has been lost as part of a techno-bureaucratic and self-consciously „modern“ world (2012a), a critique distinctly echoed by Brabec de Mori (2011:27). These critiques sound a trenchant insight, especially in the face of the dearth of evidence to suggest that ayahuasca – in terms of the brew with DMT additives – has an „ancient“ history behind it. The difficulty is that ayahuasca, unlike many other psychoactive plants in the Amazon, requires no special paraphernalia to drink – a bowl or cup, no different from

any other drinking vessel likely to be found in the archeological record, is all that is needed (Beyer 2012a). Beyer points to what is known as the “Quito Bowl”, which is the evidence upon which virtually all claims of the antiquity of ayahuasca-DMT combinations are made (2012a). This archeological research was carried out by Naranjo (Beyer 2012a), who, as Brabec de Mori notes, entirely avoids associating this archeological evidence with ayahuasca use in his later work (2011:24). Citing critique of Naranjo’s earlier work, Beyer states that the presence of this bowl suggests only that “people in the Ecuadorian rainforests began producing small ceramic vessels about 2400 B.C.”, which says nothing about what these bowls were used for (2012a). This is not to say that these drinking vessels did *not* hold ayahuasca brews, but rather that there is no evidence for what they held at all, making anthropological claims about the ancient origins of ayahuasca on this sparse archeological data highly problematic. Beyer notes that the Inca, who had reached Ecuador by the late 1400s, were well known as keen observers, especially of plant uses, but had no record of ayahuasca (2012a). This echoes the fact that Europeans who arrived in the area in the mid to late 1500s regularly reported the use of psychoactive snuffs, and their continued use caused “sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spanish missionary priests” to write “vivid and horrified descriptions” of ritual usage of DMT-containing snuffs from *Anadenanthera* seeds (2012a). Likewise, missionaries and travelers throughout the region commonly reported tobacco use in ritual contexts, but ayahuasca brews are notable in their absence, given their nigh-ubiquity in the region today.

There is as yet no absolute consensus on the origin point, either geographically or historically, for the use of ayahuasca, in the context of the shamanic complex of

beliefs and ideas for this region. Scholarly agreement, though, has begun to solidify around the idea that “western Tukanoan populations or their predecessors” probably were among the first to discover and make use of the brew, likely somewhere along the Napo River (Brabec de Mori 2011:24). Brabec de Mori has put forward an interesting ethnomusicological argument in terms of the spread of ayahuasca. Brabec de Mori constructs a close analysis both of word usage and song-structures of the *ikaros* of multiple ayahuasca-using groups throughout the region. These *icaros* (*ikaros*) are songs specifically linked to the ritual practice of ayahuasca shamanism. Brabec de Mori notes that the “song structure called *ikaro* is truly recognizable between the Napo and the Urubamba rivers” (2011:42), suggesting that it is “a unique phenomenon in the region’s musical landscape” (Brabec de Mori 2011:43). His point is that all other ritual songs, healing songs, cosmological songs, and the like which do not intersect with ayahuasca rituals tend to be unique to the particular indigenous group, sung in the language of the group (Brabec de Mori 2011:36). This provides evidence, by contrast, for the markedly different musical structures of the songs known as *ikaros* (Brabec de Mori 2011:42-43). He notes of *ikaros* that the “uniform structure indicates a relatively recent introduction of these songs, because other musical phenomena show very high variations” between indigenous groups (Brabec de Mori 2011:43). This is a telling analysis, one which is not, to my knowledge, duplicated anywhere in the literature on the origins of ayahuasca, and which presents a compelling case for the relatively recent dissemination of the ritual complex of practices and beliefs surrounding the use of ayahuasca in this region.

A Complex of Shared Beliefs and Practices

Ayahuasca shamanism in this region should not be treated as a closed system of shamanic belief and practice, one that must manifest some set of identical features in all

historical or geographical locations in order to be recognized as such. What is described as „ayahuasca shamanism“ in this region should be understood as an open and dynamic complex of shared ritual practices and beliefs, with enough resonance between its manifestations in different contexts throughout this region to be recognizable, without being exclusive of novel interpretation, practice, and the incorporation of differing cosmological elements in different times and places. That said, it is nonetheless necessary to outline the particular features that are common to this complex. Following the work of Gow (1994), Whitten (1976, 2005; 2008), Brabec de Mori (2011), Highpine (2012), Luna (1986), and Beyer (2009) among others, I suggest the following practices and beliefs as a general outline of those most central to „ayahuasca shamanism“ in this region: 1) the drinking of ayahuasca brews, with admixture (both DMT-containing and other) plants, 2) a particular focus on healing, as opposed to other forms of ritual practice,⁵ 3) the singing of *icaros*, or power songs as a recognizably distinct song-structure in this region of the Amazon,⁶ 4) the use of Quechua words for significant cosmological elements, such as *supay*, *shitana*, and *banku*,⁷ 5) the centrality of anacondas, rivers, and the water-world to discourses of power and seduction,⁸ 6) a concern for building and maintaining relationships with the „mothers“ or „owners“ of particular plants, as well as the „spirits“ more generally, both beneficial and malevolent, of the forest, plants, stones, and rivers, (which can be understood in contradistinction to

⁵ Cf. Gow (1994:110)

⁶ Noted by Brabec de Mori's ethnomusicological analysis previously (2011).

⁷ Cf. Brabec de Mori (2011:34-35); Highpine (2012:11-12)

⁸ Cf. Luna (1986); Luna and Amaringo (1999)

a quasi-„priestly“ orientation toward divine beings or deities),⁹ 7) the use of leaf-rattles as forms of percussion, as tools to direct and manage wind, breath, and „energy“ as such in a ritual space, and 8) the pathogenic invasion by spirit darts, and the shamanic incorporation of the same.¹⁰ Other shamanic elements common to this complex, but not particularly identified with it as distinct from other Amazonian shamanic systems, are the prevalence of diets, fasts, and sexual abstinence as means to gain power; the invocation of „divine“ power, either from indigenous traditions or Catholicism; sucking and vomiting of pathogenic elements during treatment; the power of the breath, especially as manifested in and through tobacco smoke; and the recognition of soul loss and the attempt to divine the location of absent souls.¹¹

It is important to note again that this is not an exhaustive list, nor is it exclusive. I have outlined certain elements of the ayahuasca shamanic complex that I see as central to locating its multiple manifestations in the region, but these are not meant to be definitive. Relationships with spirits of the forest and rivers is a feature of many Amazonian shamanic systems, for example, but this plays such a central role in the cosmologies of ayahuasca shamanism that it would be an oversimplification to assign it a place as solely bound up with Amazonian shamanism more broadly. In line with this, the ayahuasca shamanic complex as outlined here finds engagement with forest, river, mountain, plant, tree, and stone spirits among its many manifestations, using related

⁹ Cf. Gow (1994:94,107)

¹⁰ Cf. Harner (1972) on *tsentsak* among the Shuar/Achuar (Jívaro); Beyer (2009) for more on *virotas* throughout the region.

¹¹ Soul journeying does not play an especially prominent role in terms of retrieval in ayahuasca shamanism – allies and intercessors are made use of, whereas in other forms of Amazonian shamanism, the soul-journey may be undergone by the shaman him or herself.

concepts and even identical Quechua words regardless of the particular language of the people involved. What is remarkable about this is not that „divine“ elements¹² are ignored, but rather that these elements are those that vary from place to place. While certainly Catholic Christianity has inserted any number of saints, apparitions of the Virgin, and the like into the cultural consciousness of many groups in this region, not all indigenous and mestizo groups invoke the „divine“ in terms of Catholicism. Often even when they do, powerful „traditional“ spirits and deities may be invoked at the same time.

As Highpine notes, the complex of beliefs and practices described here as ayahuasca shamanism “originated on the Napo River, it originated as a vine-only practice” (2012:29), suggesting that the synergy of the DMT-admixture plants (esp. *P. viridis*) with the vine was discovered near Iquitos, Peru (2012:1). Indeed, she goes on to state that “ayahuasca’s history of use by humans is much older than the DMT-containing brews” (Highpine 2012:29). The spread of the complex down the Napo River to Iquitos positioned the DMT-containing brews to begin to migrate back up the Ucayali River, toward the Urubamba. It is in this region on the Ucayali and Bajo Urubamba that an interesting, and at least apparent, contradiction manifests. Both in Gow’s work with the Piro and Brabec de Mori’s work with the Shipibo – both indigenous groups who live, and historically have lived, in this region for centuries – the practices of ayahuasca shamanism are reported by indigenous shamans of both groups to have been learned by them from other indigenous or mestizo shamans nearer to Iquitos (Gow 1994:96-98; Brabec de Mori 2011:30-31). This may not seem immediately surprising, until it is taken

¹² Any notion of „divinity“ or „deity“ as differentiated from animal, plant, forest, and river spirits proves to be an irreconcilably fraught distinction. My intention here is not to construct an unnecessary and cumbersome division between these, but rather to highlight what I take to be a tendency toward the particular manifestations of practices and cosmological relationships.

into account that ritual knowledge and power is, in this region, almost universally ascribed to the forest, the *sacha*. As Gow notes, “everyone in western Amazonia agrees that the source of illness and curing, like the source of ayahuasca, is the forest” (1994:98). Indeed, urban shamans of Iquitos or Pucallpa point to their experiences of study and learning with forest-dwelling indigenous groups as a sign of the authenticity and potency of their own power (Gow 1994:96). However, Brabec de Mori states that insofar as his research has shown, there are no cases of Shipibo shamans stating that they went to study ayahuasca shamanism with more remote forest groups, but rather that each *ayahuasquero* went toward larger urban areas, particularly Iquitos, to study with shamans there, only returning to more remote areas later, as practitioners (2011:30). It seems that urban shamans reference forest shamans as the „true“ source of power, while the inverse is the case for forest peoples, showing – by their actual travels to learn, if not in discourse directly – that the respected sources of ritual knowledge and power are toward the urban areas (Gow 1994:97).

It is possible, of course, that this is simply another example of the common trope in Amazonian shamanism, where the most powerful shamans are always „somewhere else“. However, as Gow notes, this does not get us very far (1994:97). A note made by Brabec de Mori, I believe, sheds more light on this. The Kukama (Cocama) are a riverine people who saw drastic population decline chronologically before the Conibo experienced a similar loss on the Ucayali River. They are situated nearer Iquitos than the Shipibo-Conibo, both today and historically. Brabec de Mori states that the Shipibo with whom he worked recognize the Kukama as “very powerful and dangerous *ayahuasqueros*” (2011:30). The Ash ninka who are more remote from the urban center

of Iquitos, however, are “admired and feared by most Shipibo for their abilities as herbalists, rangers, and warriors” and their *brujos* are “regarded as powerful... due to their vast knowledge of plant and animal magic” (2011:30). The Ash ninka, though, are not associated with ayahuasca shamanism by the Shipibo according to Brabec de Mori. If that is the case, then the seeming contradiction between the forest shamans as sources of power and the urban shamans as sources of power, each pointed to by the alternate group, may in fact be a residual effect of their being two different forms of shamanic power operative in the region – more „traditional“ forest shamanism, and the „healing“ powers of the *ayahuasqueros*. I would argue that the common notion of the most powerful shamans being elsewhere is, in fact, the case here, but not as a simple truism – it presents rather as a historical effect of the expansion of the ayahuasca shamanic complex throughout this region. Forest shamans *are* a source of ritual knowledge and power, a form of knowledge and power not immediately available to many urban or peri-urban *ayahuasqueros*. However, ayahuasca shamanism has been developed historically in situations of contact, mediation, and exchange, and as such those most capable and experienced with this form of shamanism are, still today, those at an intersection point between worlds. Today, the more urbanized locales of Iquitos and Pucallpa are those points of contact more than on the Ecuadorian Napo River as was the case in centuries past, and as such the *ayahuasqueros* that are known to be powerful are now resident in these urban zones. I suggest that it is less a question of *who* has ritual knowledge and power, but rather *what kinds* of ritual knowledge and power each group has access to, and why these might be held in higher esteem.

A Space of Encounter between Worlds

Ayahuasca is unique from other psychoactives made use of in this region (Datura and tobacco in particular), in that it opens a particular kind of „space of encounter“ between worlds. Highpine suggests that in addition to the more commonly recognized uses in healing ceremonies and divination, ayahuasca has a “role as *mediator and translator* between the human world and the plant world” among the Napo Runa (2012:11, emphasis mine). She goes on to present the argument that ayahuasca, among Napo Runa ritual specialists, teaches about other plants and makes possible relationships and communication between humans and plants (2012:11).¹³ This notion is echoed by Swanson’s work with the Napo Runa as well, in which he states that “according to Runa thinking drinking Ayahuasca allows human beings to communicate with plants” (N.d.a). As noted previously, Whitten suggests of ritual specialists of this region, that the defining position of the *yachaj* or shaman is the crossing of thresholds and boundaries, and mediating between worlds (2008:61). The Runa of this region have, historically, played a pronounced role as cultural mediators between the Andean highlands and Amazonian lowlands, between the „white“ world of European contact and the indigenous worlds further downstream. It is my assertion that this resonance is not arbitrary. The shaman as a mediator, ayahuasca as a translator, and the historic position of the Runa people as cultural brokers are each in their way understandable through this same image of a „space of encounter“, where the borders between worlds may be between human and spirit worlds, between humans and plants in particular, or

¹³ The vine brew is thought to teach of other plants in large part by adding these plants directly to the mixture, as this allows, during the ritual visionary experience, the spirit of the plant – and ultimately the song of the plant as well – to become known to the specialist.

between different human cultural worlds. Whitten notes of shamans in this region, both Runa and Achuar, that they control “the process of syncretism. In this control lies the interface between cultural continuity (or reproduction) and cultural change (or transformation)” (2005). He notes that the *yachaj* “continuously reproduces cultural knowledge, continuously transforms that very knowledge, and imbues it with novel insights” (Whitten 2005). This allows the shaman (*yachaj*) to simultaneously enforce and transcend boundaries between cultures. If this is the case, then the affinity between the position of the shaman as a mediator and ayahuasca as a “translator between the human and plant worlds” (Highpine 2012:1) becomes readily apparent.¹⁴ Just as the shaman’s position suggests a specific kind of cultural agency, and the brokerage relationship of the Runa to other groups both highland and lowland points to their historical agency, so too is ayahuasca credited with its own kind of ritual agency. Rather than being a passive component of a strictly human dynamic, ayahuasca, long translated from Quechua as “vine of the soul” is according to Highpine, perhaps better translated as “vine *with* as soul”, suggesting that the vine manifests agency as ascribed to any other such „being“ with a „soul“ (2012:3). This seems to be the case in Napo Runa thinking, as ayahuasca is not understood to merely „alter consciousness“, but rather to actively *teach* shamans of other plants, and techniques for deepening these human and other-than-human relationships (Highpine 2012:10).

A Cultural „Mezcla“

Throughout this region, and perhaps most especially in the urban centers of Iquitos and Pucallpa, being mestizo is “is a complex identity, a form of hybridity,

¹⁴ It is worth noting that „translator“ and „mediator“ describe both ayahuasca and the ritual specialist, being facets or features of both, rather than strict characteristics.

contradictory and ambivalent” (Beyer 2009:294).¹⁵ Though ostensibly referring to those of „mixed blood“, the reality is that „mestizo“ covers a wide range of persons, from acculturated indigenous peoples to the varying mixtures of white and indigenous lineages, and pertinent to life in Iquitos, the varying shades of the color of skin (Luna 1986:31). This hybridity echoes the city of Iquitos itself in some ways, situated as it is on the river, which is the essential mediator between city and forest. If the river negotiates the bounds of city and forest, the mestizo identity negotiates the boundaries between indigenous and white, in some cases incorporating both, and in others marking them as distinct (Beyer 2009:307). The river being the dominant feature, it is perhaps no surprise that a term often interchangeable with mestizo is *ribereño*, or “riverbank dweller” (Beyer 2009:296). In reality, *ribereño* culture is composed of a broad range of people of many different ethnic or historical origins, all living in very similar ways. Speaking Spanish, wearing European clothing, making and working in swidden gardens, hunting, fishing, foraging in the forest, and traveling the river in *peque-peque* and/or dugout canoes are all the hallmarks of *ribereño* culture in the Peruvian Amazon (Beyer 2009:297).

Though the majority of the population of Iquitos is culturally mestizo, a segment of the population does self-identify as indigenous. Shipibo women can often be seen selling handcrafts and wares by the side of the street (Fotiou 2010:29), and a number of successful Shipibo shamans have migrated upriver from Pucallpa to be nearer the tourist clientele (Fotiou 2010:121). There are other indigenous groups that have historically lived – and still live – nearer Iquitos than the Shipibo, but the Shipibo who have migrated to Iquitos are particularly relevant in the discourse surrounding

¹⁵ Portions of this paragraph and one following it have been released in modified form in J. Taylor 2010.

ayahuasca shamanism. Having a reputation as the most powerful *ayahuasqueros* (Fotiou 2010:29), Shipibo shamans are sought out by both Westerners and mestizos alike.¹⁶ Though many of the healing techniques made use of by Shipibo shamans are similar to those used by mestizo shamans,¹⁷ the foundational cosmologies and theories through which many Shipibo shamans conceive of and perform their work differ in significant ways from those of mestizo shamans. However, what marks out difference between indigenous and mestizo in the daily life of Iquitos is not necessarily visible characteristics, nor the claims to „blood“ or lineage. As Beyer states, “some Indians have European ancestors, and many mestizos do not. The criteria defining these two groups are cultural, and, increasingly, socioeconomic” (2009:295). This is not to suggest that indigenous identities are so porous as to become undifferentiated from mestizo identities, but rather that these identities may be defined more by those living them, than by externally ascertainable or assignable criteria.

In line with this, Gow points to two orienting factors in the ayahuasca shamanic complex of this region: “the „mixed blood“ status of mestizos” and the “spatial axis that runs from the city to the forest” (1994:91). This is to highlight the spatial and social relationships that structure popular understandings of ayahuasca shamanism. In effect, Gow states that “ayahuasca shamanism is about relationships to the forest and how one lives in relation to the forest” (1994:98) with the intertwined notions of which socio-cultural groups live where, and what these geographical or spatial orientations suggest in terms of ritual or political-economic power. As Gow suggests, the category of *mestizo*

¹⁶ However see Brabec de Mori (2011) for the resistance to this identity as ‘ayahuasca shamans’ among certain Shipibo groups.

¹⁷ Cf. Arévalo (1986)

in this region operates in a field that finds its rhetorical poles at „white“ and *indio*, with all the historical accretion these entail (1994:101). The „white“ pole is bound up with the urban centers of official techno-bureaucratic political and economic power, while the *indio* is understood to be poor or marginalized in economic and political terms, but to have access to not only forest product commodities but also to the ritual power considered to be a property of the remote forest (Gow 1994:98-101). Mestizos are located, rhetorically if not in fact, socio-spatially between these poles, acting as a “potential switchpoint for knowledge from both domains” (Gow 1994:101). This situation „between“ these discursive poles, whether spatial or socio-political, makes mestizos “the most powerful ayahuasca shamans”, in that, again, a question of mediation and brokerage between worlds factors into this question of ritual power (Gow 1994:102).

Cultural mixing occurred at an unprecedented level in the context of the mission *reducciones*, and the present-day Runa are in many ways still actively engaged in a process of ethnogenesis that began centuries ago, after drastic population decline due to disease and slavery.¹⁸ However, “pre-conquest Napo was a society with much interchange between unrelated groups”, a society that Highpine describes as “multiethnic, cosmopolitan”, and one in which “people routinely interacted with strangers” (2012:23). This suggests that as profound an impact as European contact, slavery, missionization, and later the rubber economy all had on the indigenous groups of this region, the cultural exchange that was precipitated by these events was not without historical antecedent, even if the scale, violence, and forcible manner of much of this exchange did prove to be radically different in the post-contact context. This is

¹⁸ Cf. Highpine (2012:16) and Kohn (1992:49-50) for more elaborated lists of indigenous groups absorbed by the Runa through this process.

important to note because, as Highpine affirms, the ayahuasca shamanism practiced by the mestizos of Iquitos “is primarily derived from Napo”, and that this exchange has been, in large part “in one direction only” (2012:24). Luna describes *vegetalismo*, or mestizo ayahuasca shamanism, as “a shamanic modality that integrates indigenous ideas, popular Catholicism, and European esotericism” (1986:125). There is absence of any “discernable Catholic influence on Ayahuasca shamanism in Ecuador” (Highpine 2012:25) and, within the scope of the research I am aware of, no mention whatsoever of the esoteric components of *vegetalismo* in the ayahuasca shamanism of Napo Runa practitioners. This brings back into focus a previous assertion of Gow’s: that ayahuasca shamanism originated in the *reducciones* (1994:92) and that it is to mestizo cultures that we should look for its continued elaboration (1994:105). Highpine describes the evidence for this origin point in the missions as “extremely weak” (2012:25), which does, ultimately, echo Gow’s own trepidation for the account he puts forward, where he describes the evidence as “sketchy and tentative” (1994:105). Highpine describes the ayahuasca shamanism of the broader region outlined here as being derived from “the „classic“ style of Ayahuasca shamanism” of the Napo region, one which is, however, no longer “rooted in any specific tribal culture”, and which can even be “transferred across cultures from one individual to another” (2012:24). If it is the case that the particular complex of practices and beliefs described here as „ayahuasca shamanism“ did in fact begin in the Napo region, and move later down toward Iquitos, then the subsequent absorption of Catholic practices, esoteric practices, and even alternative botanical admixtures to the brew would all make sense in context with the open, dynamic, and transferrable nature of this particular shamanic complex (2012:25).

Rivers and Ayahuasca

Though recent research has in some ways eclipsed an association of the origins of ayahuasca shamanism specifically with the missions and the rubber economy, these elements nevertheless played a pronounced role in its eventual dissemination.

Borrowing a term from Taussig (1987), Gow describes ayahuasca shamanism as a form of „historical sorcery“, suggesting that only mestizos can in fact return to the “beginning” of this history (1994:104). This, he argues, is because they are the only “category of people in Amazonian imagery whose origin lies in history”, being descendants from the „mixing of blood“ between whites and Indians (Gow 1994:104). In a move that seems to be particularly apt even in light of more recent research, Gow suggests that the rivers, in particular, act as a “spatial category that connects the forest and the city”, and by social extension, the worlds of the whites and the Indians (1994:104). The association of ayahuasca shamanism with the rivers is defensible in historic terms, but this association does not end with only a historical-geographical situation. The *muraya* shamans, *bancos* who are the “maximally powerful” seats of the spirits, and who have become “no longer human” because of such a “continuous contact with the spirits”, are often recognized for their mastery in particular relationship to the rivers (Gow 1994:104-105). The *muraya* shamans can “enter the river and visit the villages of the river spirit people”, a capability marking them as the “supreme source of curing knowledge” (Gow 1994:104-105).¹⁹ This capacity to cross boundaries between worlds is directly related to the knowledge of where the ayahuasca vine is said to grow, and its patterns of cultivation or extraction. The ayahuasca vine grows both as a cultivar and wild in the

¹⁹ Cf. Luna and Amaringo (1999:82-85)

forest, and the most powerful vines are those that are said to have been planted in ancient garden plots, no longer in current use (Gow 1994:105; Beyer 2012a). This is important in the sense that like the rivers, and like the shaman, the very locations in which ayahuasca is said to grow echoes the traversal and mediation of boundaries and borders between socio-spatial poles. Gow notes as well that the winding and twisting of the vine is said to be “iconic of the winding paths of rivers”, and that the “opacity and clarity of water is iconic of different states of ayahuasca visions”, which are often “likened to seeing underwater” (1994:105). It is possible to recognize in ayahuasca a set of historical, biophysical, geographical, discursive, ritual, and phenomenological resonances between the ayahuasca vine, the shaman, and the rivers. This is furthered by noting that for many forest and interfluvial indigenous groups – even those living in this region and who do in fact make use of ayahuasca – their ritual modalities of practice and belief do not consistently situate ayahuasca in similar ways to the shamanic complex under discussion here.²⁰ Those indigenous and mestizo groups who live on the rivers and can be described as participating in a broadly *ribereño* culture are those to whom this complex has spread most immediately, and for whom the shared concepts most readily work themselves into the cultural contexts of day to day life.

The complex of practices and beliefs described here as ayahuasca shamanism are explicitly associated with the use of the Quechua language as a “prestige language and technical vocabulary” for ritual and cosmological terminology and for the composition – though perhaps „reception“ might fit emic categories more precisely – of *icaros* (Beyer 2012a). Amazonian Quechua already had significant dispersal prior to

²⁰ Cf. Gow (1994:110) for a brief overview of indigenous groups who make use of ayahuasca in this region but do not share in the beliefs and practices of ‘ayahuasca shamanism’ as described here.

contact, and should not be considered a consequence of Andean political-economic pressure or military invasion,²¹ nor of missionary activity or the rubber economy, though these did play a role in extending the language to other groups. However, the Quechua language continued to be a bearer of cultural capital for other indigenous groups, and it has remained distinctly associated with the ritual potency of Napo River Runa shamans. Beyer suggests that this may well be because the Napo Runa “are reputed to be in particularly close relationship with the plants” (2012a). The question that Beyer asks and which has bearing on an understanding again of the rivers of the region, though, is how ayahuasca, both as a vine and as a component of ritual practice, were actually spread (2012a). Beyer suggests that “itinerant herbalists collecting and selling medicinal plants from the Pacific coast to the lowland jungle” have long made use of a landscape “threaded with riverine highways navigable over long distances in dugout canoes” (2012a). Following Highpine, Beyer suggests that there are “virtually no plant species in the Amazon that are widespread without having been spread by humans”, which suggests that the ubiquity of ayahuasca throughout this region and much of northwest Amazonia may be similar to the spread of tobacco but on a much smaller scale.²² If this is the case, then it makes sense to view the spread of ayahuasca as part of a regional and supra-regional system of exchange, both of materials goods and ritual practices/beliefs, as “shamans have always been nodes in this interethnic network of social relations” (Beyer 2012a).

²¹ See Whitten (1976:21) and Highpine (2012:11-14) for a more thorough analysis of the origins of Amazonian Quechua.

²² Cf. Wilbert (1987) and Schultes (2001) for more thorough analyses of the immense geographic area throughout which tobacco has been historically spread by human activity. See Rindos (1980) as a foundational article on the co-evolutionary agency of plants with humans, albeit in the context of agriculture.

Globalization²³

A thorough discussion of the globalization of ayahuasca is beyond the scope of this chapter, and ultimately beyond the scope of this investigation, insofar as that topic reaches far beyond the historic and geographic confines of the Napo and Ucayali rivers. Labate and Jungaberle (2011) have put together a rigorous and highly nuanced volume that analyzes the „internationalization“ of the brew of this vine, beginning in the region under discussion here, but ultimately extending to both rural areas and densely populated urban centers of Brazil, to the United States and the particular constellation of legal forces and resistances that are arrayed around the subject of the DMT-containing brew, and to the establishment of Santo Daime churches of Brazilian origin in different cities of Europe. However, it is not my intention to attempt to summarize or even engage with such a broad range of subjects, but rather to address the particular ways in which this „internationalization“ or globalization process has impacted the Amazonian region under discussion here. However briefly, it is necessary to point to the ways in which the rise of ayahuasca in Euro-American imaginary, and the concomitant influx of persons and money that this has brought about, have altered or are altering the landscape of ayahuasca shamanism of the region. This is particularly relevant insofar as it is possible to see the phenomenon of ayahuasca tourism as perhaps yet-another-mediation between worlds in terms of the ayahuasca brew and the indigenous and mestizo groups who make use of it in these settings. While it is implausible to flatly deny the neo-colonial aspects of some, if not all, ayahuasca tourism, to suggest a simple

²³ Portions of this section have been released in modified form in J. Taylor 2010.

space of exploitation is to deny the particular historical agency of the indigenous and mestizo persons engaged in this economic – and one could argue, political – enterprise.

Brabec de Mori effectively sums the situation of the effect of globalization on indigenous and mestizo shamanic systems:

Many *médicos* are shifting their main occupation from curing patients or producing and countering sorcery to providing spectacular experiences for visitors from the West. The change itself does not pose a problem, as Amazonian people have always been „modernizing“ themselves flexibly and at a high pace, leaving behind our „modern Western society“ as surprisingly conservative. [2011:43-44]

This echoes Proctor’s study among the Shipibo as well, where younger shamans have as their focus an intention to train with ayahuasca not as a means of acquiring a more robust knowledge of a cosmopolitical ecology and more „traditional“ indigenous shamanic practice, but rather with the economic motive of working to hold ceremonies for tourists (2001). As Brabec de Mori suggests, younger shamans “often do not even know how to cure certain problems. They are trying to bring to perfection the visionary experience of ayahuasca” (2011:44). They do this to the exclusion of mastering the more extensive system of “Amazonian medicine”, making them incapable of countering “virulent illnesses among local people” (2011:44). While Brabec de Mori does not condemn this practice – as I, in kind, do not – he does suggest that “a more spiritually oriented use of ayahuasca”, catering to a markedly different and often Euro-American clientele, has the potential to, albeit unintentionally, supplant a “system of pragmatic curing”, that “was preserved, developed, and kept self-reproducing despite epidemics, conquest, missionary conditioning, and rubber slavery” (2011:44).

Marlene Dobkin de Rios – a medical anthropologist whose work has been foundational in the study of ayahuasca, especially in and around the city of Iquitos – has

been one of the most strident critics of „drug tourism“. Her critiques of this phenomenon provide some of the greatest challenges to any possibility of meaningful cross-cultural healing in shamanic experience, especially in Iquitos. One of the most difficult critiques to grapple with is the doubtful authenticity of the practitioners she has labeled „neoshamans“ (2009:128).²⁴ These men or women often have no formal shamanic training, and have not undergone the rigorous traditional diets and apprenticeships, but nevertheless offer what they at least profess to be „ayahuasca“ to unwary tourists. Those that she describes as „neoshamans“ are, by and large, opportunists with little interest in healing, oriented almost exclusively to the profits to be made in tourist encounters. It is an enduring and unsolved problem, a phenomenon still readily found in Iquitos, which has the potential to leave long-lasting psychological and emotional damage in its wake. Dobkin de Rios has also pointedly described ayahuasca and drug tourism as “merely a footnote to drug trafficking around the world” (2009:169), suggesting that Westerners seeking out these experiences are “urban educated men and women who tour Latin American simply to get high” (2009:167). She has asserted that the majority of Western motivations for seeking out ayahuasca shamanic experience stem from “psychological states such as low self-esteem, values confusion, drug abuse... and chronic consumerism” (Dobkin de Rios 1994:16). Between the charlatanism of certain *ayahuasqueros* and the purported “empty self” (Dobkin de Rios 1994:16) of the ostensibly „Western“ seeker, these critiques seem damning for any hope of engagement between healer and patient.

²⁴ This use of the term ‘neoshaman’ should be understood as distinct from its use in terms of members of technobureaucratic cultures participating *as* shamans, such as in Michael Harner’s *Core Shamanism* (Harner 1990).

She suggests:

Unlike some anthropologists, who hope for a mutual learning experience culturally to occur between people who differ ethnically..., I think that there is little hope for communication between the drug tourists and the Amazonians. The Amazonians' tradition of ayahuasca use is linked in a matrix dealing with the moral order, with good and evil, with animals and humans, and with health and illness, which has little correspondence or sympathy with the experiences of people in industrial societies. [Dobkin de Rios 1994:18]

While there many instances of the charlatanism she describes, and certainly an “empty self” may describe a number of Western seekers, this leaves, as Fotiou suggests, little space for any valid or meaningful spiritual experience (2010:126). This is problematized by the substantial number of reports of the efficacy of these cross-cultural shamanic healings. Interestingly, research suggests that cross-cultural healing and the facilitation of personal transformation is not only viable, but accomplished with some degree of regularity, in these ayahuasca shamanic ceremonies (Fotiou 2010, Winkelman 2005), raising the question of how to reconcile this with the critiques that Dobkin de Rios leverages. If a shared „healing myth“ does not exist between the healer and the patient, if the patient’s motives may not in all cases be „pure,“ and the healer’s authenticity and ethics are sometimes in doubt, it is difficult to account for the consistency with which healing does seem to be effected.

Though an answer may not be easily suggestible, there are a number of ways in which these critiques can be addressed, if not completely closed. The potential charlatanism of untrained „neoshamans“ is something that has been attested to by a significant number of anthropologists and even other well-established shamans. In an

interview, a well known Shipibo shaman, Guillermo Arévalo,²⁵ describes what he calls “folkloric shamansim” (Dobkin de Rios 2005:203). He opposes this to traditional shamanism, suggesting that “folkloric shamanism” has been designed to appeal to Western sensibilities, for the purposes of extracting money. However, by that same token, Arévalo himself is the owner and operator of an ayahuasca lodge and retreat by the name of “Anaconda Cosmica,” which is well known for its involvement with Euro-American and other „foreign“ seekers, having been the subject of a number of articles, and even two feature-length documentary films.²⁶ In many ways, the “authenticity” of a given shaman may simply be something that has to be decided in a similar way to that of indigenous societies: effectiveness. Arévalo, in a separate interview, suggests that “right now, in the Amazon, we can’t say that there’s any pure tradition. It’s mixed” (Beyer 2009:281), and as Fotiou suggests, some of the concerns over charlatanism in ayahuasca shamanism are based in “critiques that themselves suffer from naive notions of authenticity” (2010:3-4). This is not to downplay the reality of the harm that can be brought about by those who attempt to make use of powerful psychoactive substances without the proper training, especially when they are called on to act as the leader or safeguard in these situations. Such actions can have very real and very dangerous consequences for those involved.²⁷ Rather, it is to suggest that establishing authenticity in shamanic practice has traditionally been a problematic endeavor, even for indigenous

²⁵ Cf. Cárdenas Timoteo (1989:107, 278-282) for Arévalo’s involvement with Proyecto AMETRA (Aplicación de Medicina Tradicional) as part of his work to sustain and develop Shipibo medical and ritual traditions.

²⁶ Documentary films: *Other Worlds* and *Vine of the Soul*

²⁷ Cf. Beyer 2012b for his proposals to mitigate some of the simple physical dangers of „retreat centers“ in emergency situations following the death of an ayahuasca tourist in 2012.

communities. Ultimately, it is those shamans who cannot heal, who diagnose illness incorrectly, or fall prey to other tell-tale signs of fraud or even sorcery, who are castigated, and suffer the loss of their clientele. That this kind of self-regulation can prove effective in indigenous communities does not suggest that the transient nature of the tourist's involvement affords the same opportunity for this kind of systemic self-correction. It may however imply that opportunism is not a phenomenon that is wholly new to tourist-centric shamanic practice, either.

In his case study of the attendees of an ayahuasca retreat in Brazil, Winkelman found that for many Western seekers, the motivations they gave for their desire to participate in an ayahuasca shamanic retreat were distinctly different than the consumerist-oriented "empty self" previously noted. He states of these motivations and intentions that the primary reasons included:

establishing spiritual awareness and relations and personal spiritual development. For many, the motivation included emotional healing, and for some, assistance in dealing with substance abuse issues. Others expressed the desire to get a personal direction in life, to engage in a personal evolution. Only one respondent mentioned hedonistic reasons.... [Winkelman 2005:211]

This suggests that while the hedonism supposed of those who would "tour Latin America simply to get high" (Dobkin de Rios 2009:167) may hold for some seeking out these experiences, many others have motivations more in line with healing and personal transformation, hallmarks of many spiritual pursuits. While Fotiou (2010) and Winkelman (2005) have some of the clearest data on the subject, a diverse range of anecdotal accounts can be put forward from many internet forums²⁸ and even feature-length documentaries (such as *Vine of the Soul*) that all suggest similar patterns of a

²⁸ See <http://www.erowid.org/> and <http://www.ayahuasca.com/> as prototypical examples.

desire for healing and transformation as the primary stated intentions for participating in these experiences. Guillermo Arévalo has stated of his personal experience with „ayahuasca tourists“ that:

Principally, these tourists come to try to resolve personal problems. They say it is a self-encounter. They want to find the solution to their own problems and then to liberate themselves from those problems or the psychological traumas that they suffer. Others look for spiritual responses. They want to know the true spiritual path. [Dobkin de Rios 2005:204]

These statements make it difficult to countenance the suggestion that a desire to participate in an ayahuasca shamanic ceremony is purely the product of a consumerist-driven need to fill an “empty self” with goods and experiences. In many ways, this discourse describes many of the same themes that have been elaborated in the anthropology of pilgrimage, especially as it is compared to the modern tourist. The questioning of the sincerity and authenticity of motivation that seem to be at the core of the critique of this kind of shamanic tourism are very resonant with many critiques leveled at tourism more broadly, and are subject to much the same problematization.²⁹

A Question of Mediation

While the potential authenticity of a spiritual encounter in the guise of ayahuasca tourism must at least be accepted as possible, this does not close the door on Dobkin de Rios’s critiques of this phenomenon’s resonance with „drug tourism“ more broadly, nor does it stifle concerns over the economic and cultural impact of Euro-American money and expectations on indigenous and mestizo communities in the region. This, perhaps, is not surprising though. As suggested in this chapter and the previous one, the historical agency of indigenous groups throughout this region when placed in

²⁹ Cf. Morinis (1992) and Ivakhiv (2003) for more extensive treatments of pilgrims and tourists.

confrontation and engagement with Euro-American points of contact has shown indigenous peoples to be consistently capable of generating novel and effective strategies to survive and often thrive in changing circumstances. However, that agency does not, and should not be imagined to, mitigate the colonial and now neo-colonial harm inflicted on indigenous and mestizo groups of this region by this same contact. Ayahuasca shamans throughout this region who particularly cater to tourists can, I argue, be understood as occupying a position not dissimilar to the historic position of shamans as mediators, brokers, and translators between worlds. That this mediation is ambivalent is entirely in keeping with the nature of shamanic mediation in Amazonian indigenous cultures more broadly.

It is this theme of mediation in particular that I take up in the next chapter. By highlighting ethnographic evidence from the literature with regard to the use of tobacco, *Datura*, and ayahuasca among the Napo Runa, the mestizos of Iquitos, and the Shipibo-Conibo on the Ucayali, I present a more nuanced image of just what this „mediation“ might mean in ritual contexts for each of these groups. This effort is not an attempt to produce a closed schema any more than the outlining of the particular facets of ayahuasca shamanism are intended to in this chapter. Rather, I suggest that each of these plants plays a particular role in the ritual practices of ayahuasca shamanism, which, among other perspectives, may be meaningfully analyzed in terms of mediation. I present evidence that ayahuasca is understood in emic discourse of these groups – each of which practice a variation of the shamanic complex outlined here – as that plant particularly suited to a role of mediation-as-translation between worlds.

CHAPTER 4 PLANTS AND MEDIATION

A Spectrum of Mediation

A Runa man walks into the forest,¹ a morning's walk distant from his home and the *chagra* in which his wife tends to the manioc plants. Perhaps he has already been to the shaman, the *yachaj* in Ecuadorian Kichwa, to have the smoke of *mapacho* cigarettes blown over his head, his hands, and his feet. Maybe it was not enough. And maybe the shaman has drunk ayahuasca already, and the spirits came, but, for this man in this case, there was no healing to be had – no pathogenic object to be sucked from the body, no sorcery to remove and send back to its source. It could be that for the man, it is not an illness to be healed, but knowledge lacked, or power needed, that motivates his steps along the path into the forest. He reaches an overgrown place, a *chagra* that has been abandoned for a decade or more, not old growth but re-growth, and there he finds a *Brugmansia* plant, *wanduj* in Kichwa. For if tobacco can cleanse the body and build relationships between the human world and the spirit world, and if ayahuasca can translate between humans and spirits to teach of plants that heal and spirits that instruct in song, then *wanduj* sets one on a quest, a journey into a space where one either returns with power, or does not return at all. There are different plants for different needs in the Runa rainforest. There are different degrees to which one might need to enter into the world of the spirits, varying purposes to which certain plants are suited – not all psychoactive plants act in similar ways, nor do they make available similar possibilities in ritual space. Beyer suggests of tobacco, ayahuasca, and *toé*

¹ Cf. Whitten for a complete elaboration of a Runa man's complete journey into the forest to drink an infusion of a *Brugmansia* sp. (2008:82-88).

(*Brugmansia* spp.), that these three “embody the three primary functions” of protection, teaching, and power, respectively (2009:197). While I follow Beyer’s lead in understanding this context for these psychoactive plants and their uses in the geographic and cultural region of this investigation, I am interested in this chapter in focusing more specifically on understanding these plants in terms of the theoretical device of mediation. Without suggesting that these plants can only be understood in this way, or that „mediation“ as such is a perfect lens for analyzing these plants, I do suggest, given the historical and ethnographic evidence presented in the two previous chapters, that mediation is a powerful orientation toward understanding shamanism in this region, and the shamanic use of these plants in particular. To this end, I suggest that there is a spectrum of mediation with „spirit“ worlds that certain plants in this region of the Peruvian and Ecuadorian Amazon make available. These range from tobacco with respect to contact and the establishment or maintenance of relationship with spirit worlds; to ayahuasca with regard to translation as the simultaneous presence in multiple worlds, and bridging a space between them; and finally to *Datura* and the transport across the boundaries between worlds, for the purposes of acquiring power or knowledge worthy of risking death.

It is not difficult, in a survey of indigenous religious traditions throughout Amazonia, to find instances of ritual practice and belief that suggest the idea of mediation between worlds. Indeed, in many cases, this is definitively the position of the figure of the shaman, insofar as ethnographic analysis relates it (Whitten 2008:61). It is not my contention that the Runa near the Napo and Pastaza rivers, the Shipibo-Conibo of the Ucayali River, or the mestizo shamans near and around Iquitos are unique in this

regard – nor, in many ways, is their use of particular plant psychoactives. While these groups do manifest certain cultural variations with regard to these plants that are, to some extent, unique in Amazonia, elsewhere there are similarities of shamanic practice and belief such that suggesting an absolute distinction would be unwarranted. Similarly, in this region and of these ritual specialists, I am not interested in attempting to divine where it might be possible to find traces of the „Amerindian Perspectivism“ of Viveiros de Castro (2002; 2004a; 2004b), or the revived and reimagined Animism of Descola (1992; 2009; Descola and Gíslí 1996), as grand theoretical models. Doing this, only to then work from these to discuss „mediation“ from a theoretical vantage point while picking and choosing ethnographic data to match, seems like an unnecessary truncation of lifestyles and worldviews into sometimes cumbersome and often imprecise molds. Rather I am interested in following this trope of mediation, and its particular fit with the political and economic histories of the Runa, the Shipibo-Conibo, and the mestizo shamans near Iquitos, as cultural mediators. This historical fit lends particular power to the notion of mediation in ritual contexts for these groups. In line with the historical analysis situating these groups within robust exchange networks of pre-Columbian origin, it is my contention that the ritual use of ayahuasca as part of the complex of beliefs and practices, in context with the related uses of tobacco and *Datura*, is particularly suited to this notion of mediation both between human cultural worlds, and between human and spirit worlds.

Human Plant Relationships

To speak of plants and the social roles they play among the Napo Runa, the Shipibo-Conibo, and *ribereño* mestizo groups near and around Iquitos, it is necessary to recognize that within these cultural contexts plants and trees are not considered to be

beings so dramatically different from humans and animals. Writing of indigenous groups within this cultural region, Karsten et al. state, “even the plants are in a way human, namely, in so far as the spirits that animate them may temporarily take human form” (1964:79). These relationships between humans and plants are not, in a broad sense, the arbitrary application of a „universalized“ animistic philosophy. Rather, specific relationships with plants, as they are made use of and integrated into social life, suggest a dynamic process of relationship-building with plants in the lives of individual human healing and ritual specialists. Reichel-Dolmatoff notes of the use of particular psychoactive plants as they are made use of in Amazonia more broadly that they are never used or combined casually, but rather the process “is carefully controlled in order that specific effects will be produced in the user” (1975:200). This sentiment is echoed by Wilbert as he notes that rather than “being just followers of the motto „more is better“”, shamans throughout Amazonia are “known for their empirical knowledge of the psychotropic properties of botanically derived drugs”, especially when it is important to understand the precise modes of “mixing and dosing them to achieve a variety of desired effects” (Wilbert 1987:145). This is to say that knowledge of plants in general cannot be understood without the recognition that all knowledge and relationship with plants are, ultimately, with specific plants, for particular uses, understood in ways that have a distinct cultural „fit“. Psychoactive plants, in particular, provide an interesting orientation for insights into human-plant relationships, in this region and beyond. These plants virtually never have any other more functional or utilitarian use associated with them – neither food nor material goods are commonly made from them. Of plant biological processes, Schultes states that the „special substances“ of psychoactive

plants are not generally understood as part of the life of the plant (Schultes et al. 2001:20). Though it has been suggested that the psychoactive principles in many of these plants, because they contain nitrogen, may be akin to uric acid in animals, a waste product of metabolism, Schultes et al. argue against this concept, noting that not all plants function in this way (2001:20). And while many of these plants are toxic in large doses, they are not toxic to many of their major predators, which suggests that „toxicity“ may be a plausible explanation for some cases, but certainly not for all (Schultes et al. 2001:20). The absence of a functional „use“ in utilitarian terms for psychoactive plants in human social life, as well as the uncertain status of the action of the psychoactive chemicals in the biology of the plants themselves, make these human-plant intersections all the more novel as a point of articulation in an understanding of human-plant relationships in their specificity.

***Sacha Ambi* – Medicinal Plants among the Runa**

As Kohn notes of Runa classificatory systems for plants and other sources of medicine, “substances that produce dramatic physiological effects are **ambi**: medicinal herbs are known as **sacha ambi** (forest medicine)” (1992:7-8, my translation). It is the personal experimentation, the immediate experiences and intimate understandings of plants, Kohn suggests, that provide for such a dynamic and adaptive system of medicinal herbs among the Runa (1992:77). Such intimate understandings of plants are not won simply through traditional lore surrounding particular plants, though this undoubtedly plays a role. The social nature of human-plant interactions, particularly in ritual contexts among the Runa, are bound up in the establishment and maintenance of personal relationships. The ways in which plant-persons are conceived of in ritual space are highly culturally bounded, and „relationships“ with plants may well be of a

generational character where grandparents instruct grandchildren about landscapes and the plants that grow there. However, knowledge of plants and their place in individual lives must also be won on a personal level. Swanson notes of ritual contexts in particular, “the name of a plant species is often followed by the Quichua term *runa* (man) or *warmi* (woman), suggesting that they are persons of some kind” (2009:38). These persons are *supai*, which may be translated variously as „devil“ or „spirit“, but can invoke a somewhat “frightening, deceptive, or dangerous” connotation, while simultaneously being recognized as “attractive and regarded as sources of life” (Swanson 2009:38). These relationships with plants are not disembodied affairs, relegated to some wholly other transcendental spirit world. Indeed, among the Runa around the Napo region, the flowers of the *Grias neuberthii*, or the *pitón* in Kichwa, are given to young girls to hold in their mouths (Swanson N.d.c). These flowers are thought to have a taste that makes the flavor of *chicha* more delicious, and the girl is thought to, quite literally, take on the flavor of these flowers throughout her young life. As a woman who has come of age and whose making of *chicha* is a sign of her sensuality, the beverage is thought to take on the flavor of these flowers to the extent that the woman has absorbed the scent and flavor of the blossoms, such that she now produces the taste and smell herself (Swanson N.d.c). The same plant, whose leaves are long and do not readily fall, is also used in the washing of women’s hair to maintain its strength and beauty (Swanson N.d.c). In this way the *pitón* plant is taken into the body of a woman, shaping her as she incorporates it through her lifetime, building a relationship with the plant that is not solely one of spirits and myth, but with the very bodies of both the plant and the woman.

According to some ethnobotanical sources, the Runa living near and around the Napo River know and use in the neighborhood of 1200 medicinal plants (Highpine 2012:17). This number is in large part representative of the early and frequent contact that the predecessors of the contemporary Runa had with Europeans and their diseases, making the acquisition of knowledge of such a vast number of plants a necessity to find remedies for survival. Nevertheless, this number reflects a profound engagement with the lives and ecological spaces of flora in Runa lifeways and orientations to the world. However, finding a plant remedy among the extraordinary biodiversity of this region makes the plausibility of simple methods of trial-and-error unlikely sources of insight – as Highpine notes, “giving sick people random plants to see what helps them... is not an effective way to discover plant medicines” (2012:19). Napo Runa ritual specialists themselves routinely suggest that it is ayahuasca that has taught them which plants to use, and for what illnesses. The plants, once found, are often taken with an ayahuasca brew in order to build a relationship between the healer and the new plant (2012:19). As Swanson notes of healing and plants in Runa thinking, the ingestion of a plant facilitates the building of relationship – it is in this ingestion that “the strength of their character” is transmitted to the patient, rather than a chemical property as might be expected of a biomedical remedy (N.d.d). This personal relationship with plants is bound up with relatives, memory, and time, such that human-plant relations are also familial and even generational relationships, where in order to engage with the „runa²-nature, or personhood, of a plant, it must be known through dreams or visions, and „remembered“ through a family history of relationship (Swanson N.d.d).

Plant Teachers in the *Vegetalismo* of the Mestizo Shamans of Iquitos

Vegetalistas are plant specialists who, as shamans, “use a series of plants called *doctores* or plant teachers” as part of the complex of mestizo shamanism known as *vegetalismo* (Luna 1984b:135). *Vegetalismo*, or the “science of the plants” (Luna 1984b:142), as a form of shamanism, is specifically oriented toward healing (Luna 1986:32), and is closely associated with the drinking of ayahuasca. Still, while ayahuasca may play a dominant role in ritual space, this is less because ayahuasca is considered „sufficient“ for healing, than it is because the brew of this vine „teaches“ the shaman of the other plants. Many mestizo shamans who practice this ritual tradition are known as *tabaqueros* and *ayahuasqueros* (ritual practitioners who specialize in the use of tobacco and ayahuasca, respectively), while others are known as *paleros*, specialists who work in large part with the barks of tall, straight trees which are thought to be particularly powerful (Mazzatenta 2003:169-171). Though these barks are generally not psychoactive, they do contain many bitter alkaloids that are thought to strengthen the body of one who drinks it, transmitting its power to the specialist. The *remocaspi* tree (*Aspidosperma excelsum*, *Pithecellobium laetum*), is thought to be able to “bestow sublime wisdom on those who have prepared themselves properly”, though failure to adhere to the diet can, likewise, bring the wrath of the tree (Luna and Amaringo 1999:54). Regardless, whether the plant is an herb or tree, if “certain conditions of isolation” are met and a “prescribed diet” is followed, practitioners of *vegetalismo* suggest that the plants “are able to „teach“ them how to diagnose and cure illnesses”, by giving the shaman powerful songs, or *icaros* (Luna 1984b:135). Through the power of these *icaros* the spirits of particular plants can be invoked in ritual spaces for healing or forms of spiritual defense. For example, the *pucunucho* or *rotoco* plants, both of the

Capsicum genus, provide *icaros* capable of stunning enemies in struggles for the health of a patient (Luna and Amaringo 1999:112).

Central to this specialization in the use of particular plants among *vegetalistas* is the notion that these shamans develop personal relationships with the plants of which they intend to make use. Beyer suggests that many mestizo shamans of this region learn of healing plants “not from human teachers, but in dialogue with the plant itself” (2009:346). This concept is extremely common in the ethnographies of *vegetalismo*—as Luna notes of four different shamans with whom he worked, all “insist that the spirits of the plants taught them what they know,” stating that for some shamans, they never had a human as a teacher at all (Luna 1984b:142). Though it would be ill-advised to presume that teacher-to-student transmission of power and knowledge is not in fact very common in this region,² nevertheless there is the sense in which the power of a shaman, and his or her capacity to heal, is related to the number and depth of relationships that he or she has with plants and plant spirits. To learn from a plant or its spirit is to learn from the “mother” of the plant (Luna 1984b:139). The “mother” of a plant is a term often used in *vegetalismo* to refer not only to the spirit of an individual plant, but the spirit of the plant „family” more broadly. Many plants are likely to have mothers, though perhaps especially “important food plants like manioc, large trees like the *Iupuna* (*Ceiba pentandra*), psychotropic plants, and plants used in the preparation of important medicines and poison for hunting and fishing” (Luna and Amaringo 1999:54). If many plants, not only those with psychoactive properties, are thought to have mothers or spirits, then the question becomes which plants actually teach, and what makes them

² See the previous chapters on the exchange of ritual knowledge, and the following chapter on the transmission of songs, spirit darts, and phlegm.

potentially distinct from other plants and plant spirits. Luna, in his work with a number of *vegetalistas*, suggests five distinct features common to, if not necessarily definitive of, „teacher plants“:

(1) produce hallucinations if taken alone; (2) modify in some way the effects of the *ayahuasca* beverage; (3) produce dizziness; (4) possess strong emetic and/or cathartic properties; (5) bring on specially vivid dreams. Quite often a plant has all these characteristics, or some of them. [Luna 1984b:140]

Though there is some disagreement among practitioners as to whether or not a plant must be psychoactive to be a teacher, the question of whether and how a plant might teach should not eclipse the related notion that each plant, whether it teaches on its own or not, may well have a mother or spirit. This spirit can, through the mediation of other teacher plants, instruct the shaman in its use, and make available a potential relationship between human and plant. As don Emilio, one of the shamans with whom Luna worked, states, “all plants, even the smallest, have their „mother“”, and don Celso affirms that the “mother of the plant is its existence, its life” (Luna 1984b:140).

Rao among the Shipibo-Conibo

Similar in some ways to *ambi* in Runa healing systems is the *rao* of the Shipibo-Conibo, a term that covers a wide range of potential uses. Though what „medicine“ may mean varies from context to context, *rao* among the Shipibo-Conibo can indicate plants that, including medicines, may be venoms, fish poisons, plants to attract animals for hunting, plants for seduction, plants to protect from the spirits, and hallucinogenic or psychoactive plants (Tournon 2002:394). Some of these properties, of course, are more easily „verifiable“ in a techno-scientific sense than others. As Tournon notes, it is easier to determine the antibacterial properties of a plant than those properties associated with the psychoactive, and often thereby spiritual, effects of a plant (2002:403). Many plants,

both psychoactive and otherwise, find their way into ayahuasca brews, used by shamans known as *onanya* (*unaya*) and *meraya* (*muraya*) (Tournon 2002:396; Arévalo 1986:151). In ways resonant with both the Runa and mestizo shamans of the region, many plants in the ecological space which the Shipibo-Conibo occupy are considered to have spirits, or „mothers“, which in the Pano dialect of this group is known as *ivo* (Cárdenas Timoteo 1989:130). This *ivo* is “a mixture of spirit protector of the plant and of an entity with its own existence, but very linked to the plant” (Cárdenas Timoteo 1989:130, my translation). Many plants have an *ivo*, not only psychoactive plants. However, psychoactive plants have a “special *ivo*”, which Shipibo-Conibo plant specialists “denominate as *plantas maestros*”, or master/„teacher“ plants (Cárdenas Timoteo 1989:130, my translation).

The *lupuna* tree in the ethnography of the Shipibo-Conibo is particularly central. The *Ceiba pentandra*³ is known as the “*rey de los palos*” (Cárdenas Timoteo 1989:131), making the *lupuna* the „king of the trees“, but particularly king of the extremely tall, straight trees that stand out so strikingly in the Amazon rainforest. Roe suggests, even, that for the Shipibo with whom he worked, it is possible to consider the *lupuna* tree as a “World Tree”, a “central pillar holding up multiple worlds of the Shipibo cosmos” (1982:118). Be that as it may, the tree is regularly considered to be dangerous, and the spirit of the tree often appears to a shaman drinking ayahuasca as “an evil wizard smoking an enormous pipe” (Roe 1982:118). It is “probably the last tree the Shipibo are still reluctant to fell for timber companies, for spiritual reasons” (Luna and Amaringo

³ According to Cárdenas Timoteo the *lupuna* tree is the *Ceiba pentandra* as cited above, though Karsten et al. (1964:82) state that the *lupuna* tree is the *Trichilia tocachiana*. Some familiarity with the literature suggests to me that the *Ceiba* designation is the genus more commonly referred to as *lupuna*.

1999:54). However it appears in visions, the sap is understood to be the source of power, and very dangerous. According to Karsten et al., the sap is “said to be very poisonous”, the source from which “sorcerers obtain the mysterious bewitching matter, *virote*, which they use when they want to harm their enemies” (1964:82). Still, while the *lupuna* may be the most widely noted powerful tree, Gebhart-Sayer suggests that shamans call on many spirit helpers, particularly of the trees, when beginning a treatment (1986:203). Arévalo, in a discussion of plants used by Shipibo shamans, notes some thirty or better plants, many of which are trees (1986:151). As Roe states, one of the “particularities of Shipibo mythology is its emphasis on the tree spirits, which control a wide range of specified plants” (1982:119).

Tobacco

Indigenous peoples of the Americas were cultivating and making use of tobacco thousands of years before the arrival of Europeans (Karsten et al. 1964:91-92), though it immediately proved to be a practice deemed particularly noteworthy by Columbus and his crew (Fairholt 1968:13). According to Wilbert, the cultivation of *Nicotiana* species, especially the parent species of the two primary cultigens *rustica* and *tabacum*, reach “back to the beginnings of lowland South American agriculture some eight thousand years ago” (Wilbert 1987:xvii). This means that the domestication of these plants may well antedate even the domestication of food crops within this region. While bearing in mind the agency of the plant in terms of co-evolutionary processes, the wide dispersal of tobacco throughout the Americas was due in large part to human agency, being brought from South America onto the northern continent some 2,000 years ago (von Gernet 1995:68). In noting that the nicotine content of the cultivated species of tobacco is significantly greater than wild species, Wilbert states that there is

a basic difference in South American *Nicotiana* geography between the natural distribution of wild species and their cultural insignificance, on the one hand, and the man-effected distribution of cultivated species and their immense cultural relevance, on the other. [Wilbert 1987:4]

Interestingly, tobacco species have been found as widely dispersed as Australia, demonstrably existing prior to European contact on that continent as well, though these Australian species claim a genetic history that still finds home in South America. The precise means by which these species of tobacco reached Australia is unknown, but while contentious, the claim has been made that there was some traffic between South America and Australia (Goodman 1993:3). Regardless, the extensive production of tobacco today makes it the “most widely grown non-food crop”, despite its relatively small land use in terms of cultivated area (Goodman 1993:7). Dating from pre-Columbian history in the Americas, the dispersal of *N. rustica* “rivalled even maize”, which suggests, given its wide range of habitable climates and ecological niches, that it “represents the older of the two principal tobacco cultigens” (Wilbert 1987:6). However, *N. tabacum* has become, today, the more widely cultivated of the two, being the preferred commercial variety (Goodman 1993:3).

Tobacco in the Americas

As noted by Schultes and Raffauf, there are “few plants more important in South American shamanism, whether as medicines or in mythology, than tobacco”, where ritual specialists blow smoke “over a sick patient, especially on the area theoretically affected” (1992:87). Tobacco smoke is seen as materialized spirit, not simply a sign but rather a *manifestation* of ritually powerful breath (von Gernet 1995:69; Beyer 2009:107; Goodman 1993:28; Wilbert 1987:186). According to historian Goodman who similarly draws on the work of Schultes, “the New World has as many as 130 separate plants

that could be classified as hallucinogenic” (1993:20), which makes the “pride of place” (Karsten et al. 1964:91) that tobacco holds in the shamanic traditions of the Americas all the more noteworthy. Though an extraordinary range of psychoactive plants are found and made use of in the Americas, as Goodman suggests, “when one looks more carefully at what plants shamans actually used”, one discovers that the “one plant used more than any other was tobacco” (1993:24). Given the violent nature of *Brugmansia* and *Datura* hallucinations, despite the similar range of dispersal for these plants throughout many parts of the Americas, Goodman suggests that tobacco found such a ubiquitous place in the ritual systems of indigenous peoples because “its effects were largely predictable, relatively short-lived and not life-threatening (as *datura* could be) and thus had a vast functional repertoire” (1993:24). This “largely predictable” psychoactive effect makes it possible for tobacco, then, to act as a remarkable point of contact between humans and spirits. Gifts of tobacco, left in ritually important places of the landscape, or smoke offered directly to the spirits, bind humans and other-than-humans together in mutually dependent relationships (Goodman 1993:25-26).

Goodman notes that beyond its immediately psychoactive effects on the ritual specialist, tobacco can be understood as the food of the spirits, a notion familiar to many shamanic and ritual traditions of the Americas (1993:27). Indeed, as Wilbert notes, hunger for food is “characteristic of man and hunger for tobacco” is characteristic of spirits (1987:173), such that to be “mindful of the Supernaturals meant offering them tobacco” (1987:182). Tobacco, in shamanic traditions of the Americas, has no equal in its breadth of dissemination and its wide range of ritual uses. It is that plant which establishes and maintains relationships between humans and the spirits more consistently and

effectively than any other plant. Communication between the human and spirit worlds, and the place of this communication “in healing, in divination or in offering,” suggests just how “critical to the Amerindian concept of the relationship between the individual and the spiritual world” tobacco historically was, and in many cases, still is within the living ritual traditions of many indigenous groups in the Americas, both North and South (Goodman 1993:32). Tobacco was so central, in fact, that even those groups who “practiced no form of agriculture nevertheless cultivated some tobacco” (Goodman 1993:33), marking it as a particularly noteworthy example of the social intersection between humans and plants in ways beyond the simple facts of daily sustenance.

Tobacco and Shamanism in South America

Though many aspects of tobacco use in shamanic and ritual systems of indigenous groups throughout the Americas have certain commonalities, here I focus on the shamanic uses of tobacco of indigenous and mestizo groups in South America. Wilbert suggests that in “traditional South American societies” tobacco has played a “culture-building role” (1987:xvii), which is to say that its use permeates both daily and ritual life. This is evidenced by the widespread use of tobacco recreationally as well as ritually, though the men and women who make use of tobacco recreationally tend to consume “on a more moderate scale” than the shaman (Wilbert 1987:xvi-xvii). Shamanic consumption of tobacco is of such a dramatic degree as to potentially lead to hallucinations, opening “pathways to the other world” (Wilbert 1987:xvi-xvii). Wilbert notes that observers unfamiliar with the nicotine concentration of the tobacco used by South American shamans “underestimate the potency of tobacco taken by Indians in ritual context” (1987:17), as these concentrations have been measured in excess of 18 percent (1987:142). Wilbert lists over a dozen potential reasons for the consumption of

tobacco in South American indigenous cultures, ranging from social purposes to fertility to what he describes as “spiritual purposes” (1987:19). There is a broad range of potential modes of consumption, though as Wilbert suggests, drinking tobacco juice and smoking dried tobacco are overwhelmingly the most common forms of ingestion (1987:64, 139). Drinking tobacco juice can be an effective mode of nicotine delivery, and as Wilbert notes it is common for novices to be “quasi force-fed” particularly large amounts of tobacco juice during shamanic initiations (1987:139). However, it is the lungs, as von Gernet points out, that provide nicotine “extremely rapid access to the bloodstream”, and that it is the “blowing and sucking of smoke” that are perceived “to be shamanic metaphors for the transfer of spiritual power” (1995:69). The blowing of tobacco smoke by ritual specialists “prophylactically and therapeutically into the face and over the entire body” is a widespread phenomenon in South American shamanism (Wilbert 1987:143). Tobacco smoke is often understood to be “the visible and magically endowed breath of the shaman” (Wilbert 1987:143), and “makes the life-giving breath of the shaman visible to the sufferer” (Wilbert 1987:186). Wilbert suggests this provides “tangible evidence of the healing power” of the shaman to the patient (1987:186).

Of the Napo Runa, Uzendoski suggests that tobacco plays the role of „opening up” the body of a patient (2012:28). During a healing *ayahuasca* ceremony, the tobacco effects a process called *paskarina* in Ecuadorian lowland Kichwa, which, in this context, is „to open up” the body of the patient to receive healing from the power of the rainforest itself (Uzendoski 2012:28). Among the Runa, bodies are not just opened, but cleansed by tobacco smoke as well (Whitten 1976:158). This cleansing is not just done for human bodies, but all surfaces of objects in the ritual space, to remove “supai substance”, or a

kind of spirit-stuff, that might prove harmful (Whitten 1976:153, 155). The breath is powerful, and not only in healing rituals. According to Whitten, all adult men of the Runa are understood to “have the power to blow away rain clouds, especially if they use tobacco smoke” (1976:44). The Ecuadorian indigenous groups known as the Yumbo, Quijo, Canelos-Quichua, and Zaparo all now find themselves broadly within the politico-ethnic identity of „Runa“.⁴ Wilbert notes that these groups each make use of tobacco juice, and states of the Zaparo in particular that young men “are slowly introduced” to the drinking of tobacco juice, “until they overcome the nausea that accompanies” the drinking of this juice, and thereby “demonstrate that they are mature men” (Wilbert 1987:37). Such drinking and acclimation is a necessary process in that this practice goes hand in hand with the development of shamanic power, especially when combined with drinking *ayahuasca* and *huanto* (*Brugmansia* sp.) (Wilbert 1987:37).

Among the Shipibo-Conibo, shamans make use of tobacco for many similar reasons as other indigenous and mestizo shamans already described: to cleanse plant medicines, to blow over the bodies of patients, and to cause evil spirits to flee (Cárdenas Timoteo 1989:272). However, while *mapacho* cigarettes are very common among mestizo shamans and some Runa specialists, many Shipibo-Conibo ritual practitioners make use of pipes for their smoking of tobacco, pipes called *shinitapon* (Cárdenas Timoteo 1989:272; Karsten et al. 1964:204; Arévalo 1986:154; Wilbert 1987:100). Karsten et al. likewise describe a small pot designed for drinking tobacco juice, often used in conjunction with the pipe, called a *roncon* (1964:204). Arévalo, himself an accomplished Shipibo shaman, suggests that after drinking the *ayahuasca*

⁴ Though I hasten to add that this does not suggest the absence of a specific ethnic identity as well.

beverage, the shaman takes a pipe which has been “previously prepared with magic melodies, and blows [*sopla*] over the head of the initiate with the smoke of tobacco”, an action which the shaman continues to do “with each one of those who ingested *ayahuasca*” (1986:154, my translation). This blowing of smoke, according to Gebhart-Sayer, among Shipibo-Conibo practitioners, is meant to “trace a path in the air leading the [spirit] helpers toward the patient” (1986:212, my translation). While pipes are certainly used in ritual contexts, the Shipibo-Conibo likewise make use of cigars, which can be up to “twenty-five centimeters long” according to Wilbert (1987:99), though the smoking of these may be as much for recreational as ritual purposes (1987:100). Like Runa tobacco smokers, the Shipibo-Conibo also blow smoke to drive away approaching storm clouds. This cultural phenomenon, as Wilbert notes, is widespread throughout South America and the Caribbean (1987:199).

In the shamanic healing ceremonies throughout much of Amazonia, the blowing of smoke goes hand in hand with the sucking of pathogenic objects. To understand tobacco smoke in the mestizo shamanism near and around Iquitos, it is necessary to understand the way in which phlegm, smoke, and spirit darts are mutually implicative. Smoking tobacco and drinking *ayahuasca* causes magical phlegm, also known as *yachay* or *mariri*, to grow and develop (Beyer 2009:82). Magical phlegm, among indigenous and mestizo groups of the Peruvian and Ecuadorian lowlands, is understood to hold spirit darts, those power objects that are both the medium, and necessary for the cure, of sorcerous attack. Dobkin de Rios suggests that the healer may “blow *mapacho* smoke over the body of a sick person”, and upon finding a painful spot, will proceed to suck the area, “often bringing forth a spine or thistle which those present believe was

magically introduced by an enemy or evil spirit” (1972:72). Beyer, in describing a mestizo shamanic healing session, notes that a shaman “blows tobacco smoke on the place, rubs it to loosen the affliction from the flesh in which it is embedded” (2009:22), a loosening which reminds of the Runa notion of „opening up” the body. The phlegm, as it is grown and maintained, is where the shaman stores the spirit darts that are his or her weapons and tools. The darts are „alive” and act as his or her spirit helpers in healing ceremonies, but are also those same darts with which the shaman may cast harm at enemies. The darts live in the phlegm, and feed off of tobacco smoke and juice and, to an extent, ayahuasca. Beyer elaborates on this, suggesting that throughout the Upper Amazon “shamanic power is conceptualized as a physical substance – often a sticky saliva- or phlegm-like substance – that is stored within the shaman’s body, usually in the chest or stomach”, suggesting that it may even permeate the shaman’s flesh (2009:81). Not only does tobacco grow the shaman’s power as phlegm and simultaneously feed the spirits, but it is understood to be “the essential protector” (Beyer 2009:123), and in many ways that plant which builds and maintains relationships between the shaman and the spirits. Luna, citing don Emilio with whom he worked and studied *vegetalismo* states that “**Sin el Tabaco no se puede usar ningun vegetal** (without tobacco no other plant can be used)” (1986:159). This is mirrored by doña María with whom Beyer worked, when she indicates that, given the pronounced place of power that the breath has in mestizo shamanism, “Without mapacho, there is no soplando”, which is to say that without tobacco, there would be no powerful breath (Beyer 2009:181). Beyer suggests of tobacco that it “invites and feeds the spirits”, that it “purifies and protects the body”, and “nurtures the magical phlegm”, and that “infusions of tobacco bring contact

with the spirits” (Beyer 2009:267), all of which paints a picture of tobacco as the most central plant in mestizo shamanism, and of shamanism in this region more broadly. Tobacco establishes and maintains relationships between humans and the spirit world, opening spaces and making possible exchange between persons of these worlds.

Datura

Datura thrusts one into a world radically different than the waking, daily one of human life. *Datura* is potentially deadly, dangerously toxic and requiring specific knowledge of the plant to determine proper dosage, as this can vary depending on which parts of the plant are made use of, what it will be mixed with, how long it is left to soak or extract into water, and many other factors. The genus *Datura* is found in large part throughout Mexico, Central America, and the southwest of the United States, while the biologically distinct but very similar – both morphologically and chemically – genus *Brugmansia* is found throughout South America (Schultes et al. 2001:41). Both *Datura* and *Brugmansia* species contain tropane alkaloids like “scopolamine, hyoscamine, atropine” as well as other secondary alkaloids, though scopolamine, “responsible for the hallucinogenic effects, is always found in the largest quantity” (Schultes et al. 2001:141). As Schultes et al. note, the behavior of the *Brugmansia* species, and its dissemination, indicate “long association with man” (2001:140), where after “centuries of manipulation by man as a cultigen, it has undergone numerous atrophied forms which are highly esteemed” (Schultes and Raffauf 1992:48). Indeed, the *Brugmansia* species in particular is thought to potentially be comprised entirely of “cultigens unknown in the wild” (Schultes et al. 2001:37). Considering the history of cultivation and the close association of the plant with human activity, it is worth noting that the plant is used sparingly as often as not, for as Schultes and Raffauf note of Harner’s work with Shuar

shamans, “the strength of the plant is such that its repeated use is believed to lead to insanity” (1992:56). Goodman, echoing the sentiments of Reichel-Dolmatoff and Wilbert as noted previously, suggests that many indigenous peoples of Latin America who make use of this plant are well aware of its toxicity, and are specialists in manipulating particular desired effects from the plant-human interaction (1993:21). As he notes, where the power of its effects are deemed ritually necessary, it is made use of, but where “less violent experiences” are deemed sufficient, indigenous specialists make use of “less powerful hallucinogens” (Goodman 1993:21). It is my contention that *Brugmansia* species in this region are made use of particularly for the acquisition of power and knowledge that require the transport of a shaman or seeker wholly into another world of experience. Unlike tobacco, which may ritually open spaces between worlds and facilitate the establishment and maintenance of relationships between human and other-than-human beings, *Datura* effects a kind of transportation *into* other worlds. This transportation, per the regularly reported phenomenological effects, does not leave the shaman or seeker sensate to the waking, daily world of human life for the time of the experience. As such, the plant does not facilitate translation between human and other-than-human worlds in the same way that ayahuasca can be said to do. Rather, these plant species make possible a kind of „quest“ after power and knowledge one that entails the very real risk of dying, by remaining „on the other side“.

Wanduj

Among the Runa, particularly of the Napo, Puyo, and Pastaza regions, *Brugmansia suaveolens* is known as *wanduj* (Whitten 2008:3), and is directly bound up with the experience of travelling in *unai*, or the „world before“ of mythic time-space (Whitten 2005). Traveling in this world is necessary to meet Amasanga, the

quintessential “Sacha Runa” or forest person, who controls the realm of the forest, and the weather which is understood to arise from it, and “upon which the fecundity of the land depends” (Whitten 2008:3). As the spirit master of “our forest” and “our game”,⁵ Amasanga “oversees visionary experiences of lone, questing Runa on Datura-induced journeys, when he is known as *Wanduj supai*” (Whitten 2008:46). It is the questing nature of the Runa use of *wanduj* that is most central to understanding it in terms of „mediation“. For the Runa, *wanduj* and the spirit person of Amasanga facilitate these journeys into other worlds where power and knowledge are sought. This use is notable because, as Whitten suggests, though many indigenous groups throughout South America make use of ayahuasca, the use of Datura is far more common to Andean, Mesoamerican, and North American indigenous groups, than it is to Amazonian peoples (2008:68). Though both mestizo shamans of Iquitos and Shipibo-Conibo shamans of the Ucayali River do make use of *toé* or *Brugmansia* spp., it does not have the same degree of cultural elaboration to be found among the Runa, and it is far more often used in conjunction with ayahuasca, than it is taken alone.

Despite the cultural complex surrounding the use of *wanduj* among the Runa, the reasons people choose to make use of the plant tend to be highly individual, and the infusion tends to be drunk while alone (Whitten 2008:72). “If”, as Whitten states, “a second person is present, companionship is precautionary: there is no guiding helper who is of this world” (2008:72). Intercessors and guides in the world revealed by *wanduj* are *supai* beings, the chief of whom Whitten describes as “like a great tree, but... human, a person” (2008:86). The trip into these other worlds is one in which the seeker

⁵ In contradistinction to Jurijuri, who is a transformation of Amasanga, but of other people, and unknown places in the forest.

is transported to a realm no longer “controlled by a powerful shaman human, but rather one controlled directly by the forest master” (2008:82). Such a journey, while potentially making power and knowledge available to the seeker, is not without risks. The spirits themselves warn the storyteller with whom Whitten worked, stating that “You are a strong man, but no one has the power to live in the *unai* where you are now”, and that should he remain in the „before world“ of mythic time, in the human world he would die (2008:87). However, should the seeker emerge from the world of *unai*, the human world and the relationships that constitute it tend to become quite radically rearranged. As Whitten suggests, after taking Datura the person emerging from this other world may now ““know” that someone he thought was his trading partner and true kin is, in this newly found reality, an enemy who seeks to harm him” (2005). The knowledge that one gains from the journey into the Datura world is profound enough to reshape the understandings and social relationships that orient life. This is, in a sense, because Datura, unlike ayahuasca or tobacco, is thought to “collapse space and time” such that the seeker becomes aware of “*all* the spirits” (Whitten 1976:153). Where ayahuasca facilitates the knowledge of particular spirits and the building of specific relationships to spirits both in and beyond the realm of *wanduj*, Datura brings knowledge of everything, all at once (Whitten 1976:153; see also Whitten 2005). For with *wanduj*, the seeker becomes “*of* the *huanduj supai*, he is one of them” as they wind about legs and body, fluttering and flickering as they “accompany him on his journey” (Whitten 1976:100). The seeker ceases to participate in the human world during the duration of the experience, and as such his or her perspective may shift radically from daily awareness.

Toé

Cosmological elaboration of *Brugmansia* species is sparser among the mestizo shamans of Iquitos and the Shipibo-Conibo of the Ucayali. While these groups most certainly make use of *toé*, it does not have the same degree of cultural import as ayahuasca or tobacco. It is on occasion used on its own as a „teacher“, but it is far more common for it to be added, in some small measure, to the ayahuasca brew as an admixture, to modify the effects of the beverage (Luna 1984a:130). Indeed, Luna notes that often no more than two leaves of the plant are added – don Emilio, one of Luna’s collaborators, “considers this plant a very strong one” (1984a:130). Tournon states that the Shipibo consider *toé* to be a plant by which ritual specialists acquire strength and power (2002:393). Karsten et al. echo this, indicating that among many Shipibo groups, the plant “is used only by wizards who wish to put themselves into an ecstatic state for certain purposes”, but not for regular intercession with the spirits in terms of healing rituals and the like (1964:205). Interestingly, both Luna of mestizo healers and Cárdenas Timoteo of Shipibo-Conibo shamans suggest that *toé* is regularly used to divine for otherwise unavailable information – either the cause of some sorcery with a *virote* dart (Luna 1984a:130), or to locate a lost or stolen object, and to identify the culpable party (Cárdenas Timoteo 1989:76). These are not uncommon activities for shamans in this region,⁶ making it difficult to determine if these uses of *Datura* are specific to the psychoactive in a cultural sense, or belong rather to shamanic activity in the region more generally. Of other reports of *Datura* use among the mestizo shamans of Iquitos and the Shipibo-Conibo shamans of the Ucayali River, it can be difficult to

⁶ Cf. Highpine (2012:10-11) for ayahuasca being used in similar divinatory ways

disentangle its uses from those of ayahuasca rituals. It tends to be made use of in these contexts, very often in order to add *fuera* to the brew, though whether this added force modifies the actual practices and beliefs of the ayahuasca rituals for these groups is more difficult to ascertain. Regardless, there is the broad sense that *toé* is powerful, though its visions are “dark and frightening”, such that surviving it “demands great courage” (Beyer 2009:272). Where ayahuasca presents plants and spirits as potential allies, among mestizo and Shipibo-Conibo shamans, the *Datura* spirits are routinely terrifying, and its power stems as much from what it requires of the seeker as from what it gives in return (Beyer 2009:272).

Ayahuasca

Of all the striking visions and otherworldly experiences that are credited to the ayahuasca brew, one of the most remarkable aspects of the altered states it produces is the clarity, the lucidity, that those who ingest it are said to retain. Beyer notes that ayahuasca does not, of its own accord, negatively “affect lucidity or clarity of thought”, suggesting that during an ayahuasca experience there “is no sense of being narcotized, no decrease in alertness, no inability to process linearly” (2009:232). Schultes and Raffauf make much the same point, noting that one of the “unique characteristics of caapi intoxication is its lack of interference with muscular coordination”, and that, even with a wide variety of other plant admixtures modifying the chemistry of the brew, “the lack of interference with muscular activity is striking” (Schultes and Raffauf 1992:82). This potential for maintaining lucidity, a sense of presence, clarity of thought, and bodily control is dramatically different than the states experienced in *Datura* intoxication. As described above, those who ingest *Datura* lose all sense of the waking, human world. With ayahuasca, the human world is still readily available to the ritual practitioner even

during visions of the spirits, interactions with plant and animal „mothers“, and experiences of a wide variety of places and beings. I suggest that it is precisely this capacity to have a „foot in both worlds“ that makes ayahuasca the plant most suited to the healing focus of the ayahuasca shamanic complex, and simultaneously that plant which most remarkably resonates with the historical role of „mediation“ that these cultural groups, and the cosmological-historical role of mediation that shamans in particular, both have played and in many ways continue to play in this region.

According to Tournon, the first identifiable reference to the ayahuasca brew in historical literature was by Veigl, who noted that it was a vine growing even into the tallest trees, of which indigenous groups tended to make a bitter preparation from the juice (2002:51). Other authors suggest Villavicencio as the first to have recorded the vine and brew, in his 1858 volume on the geography of Ecuador (Mazzatenta 2003:243; Reichel-Dolmatoff 1975:30). Certainly Villavicencio was the first European to record personal experience with the brew, noting features that would go on to prove very common in the literature on ayahuasca subsequently: voyages through the air, picturesque landscapes, magnificent cities with “lofty towers” and “beautiful parks”, shot through with experiences of aggressive “beasts of prey” (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1975:30). Whatever the first reports, it was not until Spruce’s extraordinary botanical work in South America that the *Banisteriopsis caapi* vine was botanically identified as being part of the Malpighiaceae family, where he encountered it among the Tukano living along the Vaupes River (Mazzatenta 2003:243). Though Spruce published his work on this vine in 1874, the paper remained somewhat obscure for a time, leading to a period of confusion about the vine and its chemistry (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1975:28). In 1923 Fisher-

Cardenas performed the work to determine the chemical composition of the vine, isolating what he dubbed „telepathine“ due to the alleged telepathic powers that brews of the vine granted (Mazzatenta 2003:243). This chemical was later discovered to be harmine, which had previously been isolated from *Peganum harmala*, or Syrian rue.

The vine did not find its way to the wider Euro-American imaginary until the publishing of Ginsberg and Burroughs“ *The Yage Letters* in 1963. Even with this and the subsequent work done by Dobkin de Rios (1972) and Luna (1986), compared to other psychoactive plants and substances part of popular discourse during these years, ayahuasca remained relatively unknown (Beyer 2012c:2). In fact, as Beyer suggests, “it is probably fair to say that the popular interest in ayahuasca that began in the mid-1990s... was driven in large part by Amaringo“s extraordinary paintings” (2012c:2). This is in reference to the volume *Ayahuasca Visions*, which consists of many dozens of paintings done by the *ayahuasquero* Pablo Amaringo. Amaringo worked in conjunction with Luis Luna to produce the volume, where Luna acted as the anthropological interpreter who explained, provided details, and transcribed Pablo“s own understandings of the unique artistic material. This volume opened the way to an extraordinary degree of popularization of the vine brew in the Euro-American imaginary, including, as Beyer notes, the influx of “foreigners seeking out ayahuasqueros in the Amazon” (2012c:2). Though much of this popularized rhetoric often focuses on ayahuasca as a medicine, as a plant that heals,⁷ it is worth bearing in mind, as Beyer notes, that ayahuasca provides information – it “tells you how”, it aids in diagnosis and understanding, but it does not heal directly (2012c:3).

⁷ Cf. the forums, newsletters, and experience listings on sites such as erowid.org, forums.ayahuasca.com, and ayahuasca.tribe.net, or „retreat“ sites like bluemorphotours.com

A myth of the Desana recorded by Reichel-Dolmatoff states that “mankind needed a means of communication; it was for that reason that the Sun Father was searching for Yaje” (Calavia Saéz 2011:134). Calavia Saéz suggests that this Desana myth demonstrates a broader point: the ayahuasca user “is not thrown into another world. He is distant enough to get into contact with other spirits, yet without abandoning communication with his fellow humans” (Calavia Saéz 2011:134-135). And it is communication, perhaps most clearly, which stands out as that feature of ayahuasca use in this region. Of those cultural features related to ayahuasca use, “Chants, designs, and myths transcend ethnic and linguistic limits”, as trade of ritual knowledge and power move between and among different ethnic groups, both indigenous and mestizo (Calavia Saéz 2011:140). Indeed, Calavia Saéz suggests that it may be possible to understand the communication between ethnic or cultural worlds and the communication between human and other-than-human worlds that ayahuasca facilitates as possible because ayahuasca manifests in these situations and contexts as a kind of “*alloscope*”, or an “instrument capable of producing understandable images of the other – be the other cosmological or sociologic” (2011:141). It is this facilitation of communication between worlds that makes ayahuasca so striking in historical and ritual terms. The ritual complex that has evolved around its use “is not a repeated tradition with accessory variations from one people to the other” (Calavia Saéz 2011:143), so much as it is a shared, open, and dynamic complex of practices and beliefs in continuous dialogue with one another, across both ethnic and geographic boundaries.

The Vine of the Soul

The word „ayahuasca“ is itself a Quechua word – the language spoken by the Runa – from *aya*, soul, and *huasca*, vine. It is a contention of Highpine’s that I find most

intriguing in understanding ayahuasca use among the Runa, perhaps especially the Napo Runa with whom she has worked most extensively. She states, “one of Ayahuasca’s vital roles is teaching humans about *other* plants”, arguing that it is specifically ayahuasca’s role to translate and mediate “between the human world and the plant world” (2012:11). Within the region outlined for this investigation, many plants, psychoactive and otherwise, are thought to teach, but ayahuasca is relatively unique in that it teaches *of* other plants (2012:11). According to much ethnography in the region of both Runa ritual specialists and the *vegetalistas* of Iquitos, ayahuasca is credited with the discovery of plant medicines for the significant majority of illnesses (2012:19). Though ayahuasca is not thought to heal directly, the communication with the world of plant spirits enables shamans to discover remedies and forge alliances with spirits in order to combat illness.

In the Napo Runa world of ayahuasca, “spirit allies are mainly plants” (Highpine 2012:11). This resonates with Swanson’s assertion of Runa thinking, that ayahuasca “allows human beings to communicate with plants”, and that this idea depends on the cultural understanding that “the plants and animals were once human” (N.d.a:1). To the Runa way of thinking, perhaps especially of the Napo Runa with whom both Swanson and Highpine work, plants ceased to be human at the beginning of „this world“. During this transformation “from humans into other species”, the “curtains of privacy encoding their languages” were raised, so that humans and these other species could no longer understand one another without aid (Swanson N.d.a:1). According to Swanson, for Runa ritual specialists, “ayahuasca visions raise this curtain that veiled communication between species”, and open

the person's ears so that they can hear the communication from the vast personal world hidden behind the other plant and animal species as well as behind the rivers and mountains. [N.d.a:1]

Indeed, Whitten notes of the openings and gaps between the worlds, that both dreams and ayahuasca visions make it possible to glimpse “a reality lying between the other world of the spirits and the world of people” (2008:12). He suggests that while both worlds exist, the planes upon which they exist do not always, or perhaps even regularly, intersect (Whitten 2008:12). However, during ayahuasca visions and in dreams, sometimes “these planes come together in strange but interpretable ways” (Whitten 2008:12). Thus, while *yachaj*'s drink the ayahuasca brew “to alter consciousness so that they can communicate with the *supai* (spirit) world” (Swanson 2009:41), this world is, and must remain, hidden, set apart from the waking world of human daily life, as this is “necessary to make the world habitable” (Swanson N.d.a:3). This is so because should the veil between worlds become wholly permeable or rent apart, the „human-ness“ of all species would collapse into a single plane, “causing biodiversity to collapse into a single human form” where we would “destroy each other competing for the same resources and the world would end” (Swanson N.d.a:3). Ayahuasca does not overcome a barrier between worlds that serves no purpose but restraining humans and other-than-human beings from one another, but rather mediates a vital frontier of difference at work to defend from a kind of destructive intimacy.

The ayahuasca vine, and the brew made from it, is able to mediate these barriers because it shares a soul in kind with both humans and plants. As Whitten notes, the vine “provides special linkages between humans and spirits through their mutual souls” (1976:40). Interestingly, according to Whitten, the place of prominence given to *Datura* among certain Runa groups suggests that ayahuasca is, itself, a “spirit of the huanduj”,

capable of providing “the necessary linkage to spirits which have acquired human souls” (1976:153). Though ayahuasca is, in this case, understood as one of the *Datura* spirits, it has the unique capacity to allow for mediation between the ritual participant and other plant spirits, and finally even spirits beyond the *Datura* realm more broadly (1976:153). Even the souls of the deceased, according to Kohn, can be seen with ayahuasca (1992:42), and insofar as *aya* can also be translated accurately as “dead”, the vine and its brew can be just as fully understood as the „vine of the dead“ as „vine of the soul“.

Ayahuasca in *Vegetalismo*

According to Gow, who was himself following Taussig (1987), it is possible to consider „ayahuasca shamanism“ in this region as a form of “historical sorcery”, or that “which allows a return to the beginning of history” in order to effect healing and ritual transformation (1994:104). He suggests that ayahuasca shamanism is so “particularly associated with mestizos” because „mestizo“ is only the ethnic category, however problematic this category proves to be in practice, that can “effect such a return to the beginning, for they are the only category of people in Amazonian imagery whose origin lies in history” (Gow 1994:104). It is, for Gow, precisely the position of mestizos as situated between the white and indigenous cultural worlds, “living between the cities and the forest”, that allows this socio-economic and ethnic designation of people to “become the masters of the paths between” the poles of white and indigenous, city and forest (1994:104). Whether this analysis is wholly accurate, the point is one worth highlighting – the socio-historical situation of mestizos, and even their geographical-cultural context as *riberños*, positions this group of people to be mediators between cultural worlds. Insofar as the ritual use of ayahuasca is inextricably bound up with a similar kind of

mediation between worlds, ayahuasca shamanism has a distinct resonance with this social, historical, and geographic situation.

It is among the mestizo shamans of Iquitos that a significant shift in the use of ayahuasca occurs, from the perspective of who is included in drinking the brew. For both the Runa and Shipibo-Conibo, adults attending a healing ceremony are often permitted to drink ayahuasca, but it is significantly more common for the shaman alone to drink ayahuasca as part of the ritual process in determining the healing action to be taken.⁸ Though the shaman most certainly continues to drink ayahuasca in mestizo rituals, “present-day Mestizo healing with the vine has undergone some major transformations” (Dobkin de Rios 1972:47), in that it has become common for whole groups of people, even those who do not know one another, to gather and drink ayahuasca in this context (Dobkin de Rios 1972:68). The role of purging in mestizo uses of the vine is also distinct from Runa ritual use. According to Highpine, among the Napo Runa purging is “far from automatic” (2012:27) when drinking ayahuasca. She suggests that while this form of ritual practice can be cleansing – as Beyer notes, in both a physical and spiritual sense (2009:209) – purging as part of the intended ritual experience in mestizo shamanism seems to be distinct from Napo Runa uses of the brew. Whatever the origin of the practice, today ayahuasca is commonly referred to in mestizo shamanic practice as “la purga”, where the saying goes “*La purga misma te enseña*”, or “the purgative itself teaches you” (Luna 1984b:140). Indeed, even the term “*mareación*”, used to refer to the altered state of consciousness brought about by ayahuasca ingestion, derives from “the verb *marearse*, to feel sick, dizzy, nauseous,

⁸ Cf. Highpine (2012:26-27) for this among the Napo Runa, and Cárdenas Timoteo (1989:200) for this among the Shipibo-Conibo

drunk, seasick” (Beyer 2009:209). Remarkably, it is with positive connotation that one can be said to be “buen mareado after drinking ayahuasca”, as the effects take a stronger or more intense hold on one’s consciousness (Beyer 2009:209). Though shamans and habitual drinkers of ayahuasca do ultimately develop tolerance to the emetic effects, many of the admixture plants and chemicals – perhaps especially including the DMT of the *Psychotria viridis* or *chacrana* bush – do not seem to be subject to the same tolerance over time (Beyer 2009:209-212).

If, as Dobkin de Rios notes, ayahuasca is rarely considered “by itself as a curative agent” (1972:134), then it remains to be seen just where ayahuasca factors in to the process of diagnosis and healing. Ayahuasca’s role tends to be “strongly diagnostic and revelatory” in this sense, and healing itself tends to be located in “special diets, rituals, orations, particular spells, and counter magic” (Dobkin de Rios 1972:134). These diets often include medicinal herbs and plants, and rituals often involve the sucking of pathogenic objects from the body. The vine “gives the healer entry into the culturally important area of disease causality” (Dobkin de Rios 1972:129), which finds expression in a number of ways. Briefly, to follow Luna’s outline of diagnosis of illness for mestizo shamans, 1) it is necessary to determine if the illness is of natural or „magical“ origin; 2) should the origin be unnatural, then the motive of the party who cast sorcery must be discovered; 3) the motives for sending sorcery tend to be located at the interstices of familial, financial, and emotional conflicts; 4) ayahuasca can be used to consult spirit doctors to determine what action should be taken; and 5) finally, if the illness has been caused by a *virote* or spirit-dart, ayahuasca may be used for autoscopy, or looking into the body of the patient, to see what would otherwise remain

invisible (Luna 1986:122). To learn to use ayahuasca in these ways, Luna suggests, is different than simply drinking the brew to cure oneself, or to see visions. It is a serious matter to apply oneself to learning medicine from the brew (1984a:127). The effort to learn medicine, of ayahuasca as well as other *doctores*, is a long and committed process, depending both on the will of the healer and the relationship he or she is capable of building with the plant – for “the plant can „reject“ a person” just as much as it can “choose” one (Luna 1984a:127).

The *Nishi Oni* of the Shipibo-Conibo

Ayahuasca, medicine, enrapture me fully! Help me by opening your beautiful world to me! ... Reveal to me completely your medicine worlds. I shall heal the sick bodies.... [from a Shipibo-Conibo ayahuasca healing song, recorded in Schultes et al. 2001:126]

In an account of Shipibo healing practices recorded by Grandidier, a young Frenchman writing in 1861, there is, strikingly, no mention whatsoever of ayahuasca. The rite is described as one in which songs are sung to plants, animals, and birds to cure the patient; „strange“ symbols or signs are drawn over the patient’s face by the healer; and plants or powders are applied to the body, or places on the body are sucked to bring relief (Tournon 2002:80). Though many of the features of this kind of shamanic healing remain in practice today, it is worth noting that no mention of ayahuasca occurs, nor any other psychoactive plant for that matter. This is not to say the report is wholly accurate, or that mention was not simply elided in this particular report, but if it is accurate, then it begins to chart a timeline that has other points worth noting. Karsten et al., in 1964, state explicitly that though ayahuasca is “known to the Shipibo”, it plays not nearly so important a role for the Ucayali tribes as it does for the Shuar of the region (1964:204). This same sentiment is echoed in 1982 by Roe, who suggests that this was

still, as of his fieldwork, in many ways the case. The Shipibo knew of and did make use of ayahuasca, but that it had a lower cultural prominence than it did for other nearby indigenous groups (Roe 1982:123). Indeed, even among many contemporary Shipibo-Conibo, there are those individuals who “do not agree with the „ayahuasca-shaman“ identity concept that has been collectively imposed on them” (Brabec de Mori 2011:44). This history is noteworthy, in particular, because Shipibo-Conibo shamans have become, both in the Euro-American imaginary and in much mestizo discourse, virtually synonymous with ayahuasca, noted for having a reputation as the most powerful *ayahuasqueros* (Fotiou 2010:29). If, as has been demonstrated in the previous chapter, the spread of ayahuasca shamanism up the Ucayali River from the mestizo shamans of Iquitos has, historically, been the source of the integration of ayahuasca into the shamanic traditions of the Shipibo-Conibo, then it is important to bear this in mind when considering the discourse surrounding its use in the ethnography. Though ayahuasca has come to be an extremely widely noted aspect of Shipibo-Conibo culture, this may in many ways prove to be a relatively recent and strategic adaptation. While no less authentic as a cultural expression, ayahuasca use among the Shipibo-Conibo may have a much more recent history than is often assumed.

What, then, of the “medicine worlds” invoked in the song above? According to Cárdenas Timoteo, it is principally “*Nishi Oni*”, or ayahuasca, that allows shamans to “enter the world of the supernatural” (1989:192, my translation). The effort to heal is said to entail entry into the spirit world, in order to speak with the spirits of the *palos*—those tall imposing trees of cultural significance to the Shipibo-Conibo—in order to discover the origin of illness or suffering for a patient (Cárdenas Timoteo 1989:199).

This is because ayahuasca among the Shipibo-Conibo, as among the mestizo shamans of Iquitos, is not considered a „medicine“ as such. The plants, the trees, and the spirits effect healing, not the ayahuasca itself, despite its central role as a mediator between the shaman and these other-than-human beings (Cárdenas Timoteo 1989:199-200). It is the unique phenomenology of ayahuasca, however, that allows it to play such a role. Both Cárdenas Timoteo (1989:202) and Roe (1982:124) note of their work with the Shipibo-Conibo that the remarkable lucidity that shamans evidence in their experiences with ayahuasca makes it possible for them to be in contact with both the spirit world and the human world of the patient simultaneously. Without a presence in both worlds simultaneously the shaman would not be able to make use of ayahuasca as part of a process of ritual healing. If the shaman is unable to enter the spirit world, no spirits can be contacted for aid, but should the shaman eclipse his human connection entirely and slip too far into the world of the spirits, the power of these beings cannot be brought to bear on the patient.

According to Gebhart-Sayer, this mediation between worlds on the part of the shaman is a question of manipulating “luminous designs”, which are in a sense the „domestication“ of the swarm of chaotic information that one sees in ayahuasca visions (1986:190). This process of domestication is a matter of “transforming this [information] into diverse aesthetic notions: geometric patterns, melodies/rhythms and fragrances which play a key psychological and spiritual role” on both an individual and social level for the patient (Gebhart-Sayer 1986:190, my translation). Over time the shamans not only learn to see these designs, but can become familiar with visionary „books“ of these designs in ritual space, where healing song-designs are potentially available in the rapid

flux of information experienced during the ayahuasca ritual (Gebhart-Sayer 1986:196). Though not an ethnographic example which can lead to identical analysis, the closely related Pano-speaking Cashinahua of Peru make use of *kene* designs in ayahuasca healing. Their use of designs presents a comparison specifically worth drawing by way of opening onto a notion of designs as a point of mediation between worlds. These *kene* patterns can be both painted onto objects and people, or woven into cloth, and represent, as Lagrou states, the “core metaphor for how identity is made out of alterity” (2009:200). It is not the *kene* themselves, however, that are the alterity being incorporated. The designs are not the „other“, but rather lead to it. This is because *kene* are considered the „language of yuxin“, or the language of spirits (Lagrou 2009:194), and, thereby, “being of the language of the yuxibu... function as paths leading to their owners” (Lagrou 2009:198). This is to say that *kene* designs do not merely suggest, point to, or remind of the yuxibu spirits, but rather they make possible the transformations of perception and cognition necessary to engage with these others (Lagrou 2009:198). While these designs among the Shipibo-Conibo do not fit neatly into an identical ethnographic mold for interpretation, the recognition that the aesthetic component of the ayahuasca experience and its expression through song, weaving, pottery, and the like is an important one, especially as it implies an integration of shamanic mediation with other worlds into daily lives and material culture.

Arévalo notes of Shipibo shamans that they “enter into a marvelous world”, a world whose doors have been opened by ayahuasca (1986:156, my translation). Apprentices make trips to learn of “other cosmic places, subaquatic and subterranean”, often during a period of training and dieting which can last six months or more (Arévalo

1986:157, my translation). Facilitated by ayahuasca, Shipibo-Conibo shamans “have direct contact with the villages of the spirits in the upper world and the world below” (Illius 1994:186, my translation). This is because, through frequent use of ayahuasca, shamans possess “a detailed knowledge of the cosmos”, which has given them the opportunity to “visit the mythical yoshinbo beings”, a relationship which allows them to cure infirmities (Illius 1994:190, my translation). This set of relationships, as Illius notes, “is fundamental to the medicine” practiced by this group (Illius 1994:190, my translation). I suggest this is because it is the engagement with multiple worlds made possible by ayahuasca – worlds which can be interacted with simultaneously – that makes ayahuasca particularly suited to its applications in healing for the cultural groups in this region. The psychoactive brew made from the vine and a number of admixture plants is not understood to be effective for healing illnesses on its own. While certain „purges” may prove psycho-spiritually and even somatically effective for some kinds of release or relief, as Beyer (2012a) notes, purging is ubiquitous in this part of the Amazon, and ayahuasca is by no means the sole plant made use of to this end. The effects of ayahuasca may teach a shaman of other plants, other remedies, other cures, or may make available direct visionary evidence of illnesses such as sorcery, spirit-dart, or – in the case of the Shipibo-Conibo – marred or damaged designs in a person’s body. But all of these are predicated on the notion that ayahuasca allows the ritual specialist to move between worlds, or at least to act on both at once, without abandoning presence in either.

To Be between Worlds

Ayahuasca shamans of this region share in an open and dynamic complex of practices and beliefs, one that does not have clear boundaries or wholly essential

elements, but nevertheless shares significant resonances between practitioners from distinct cultural groups. Movement between worlds is a feature of this complex more broadly – not just between spirit and human worlds, but in a process of constantly engaging with, translating, borrowing, utilizing, and re-interpreting features of other cultures and other ways of knowing. Beyer notes that mestizo shamans make use of inspirational material from sources as varied as “the indigenous shamanism of the Upper Amazon, folk Catholicism, popular plant lore, traditional Hispanic medical theories and diagnoses” and even, interestingly, the “images and symbols of European biomedicine”, without any sense of internal incoherence (2009:281). Arévalo has been quoted as saying that “right now in the Amazon, we can’t say there’s any pure tradition. It’s mixed. Even the indigenous are fusing together different cultural beliefs” (Beyer 2009:281). If the mestizo is a cultural category that mediates between the poles of white and indigenous, and the *riberaño* one which mediates between the forest and the city (Beyer 2009:307), then it is perfectly sensible for the shaman to be “a node in this interethnic network of social relations. Shamans seek to gain power from a variety of sources, including other ethnic groups” (Beyer 2009:283). Just as ayahuasca shamanism has transformed and transmuted folk Catholicism to its own ends, it is doing much the same with New Age terms and concepts as they find their way into the rainforest with ayahuasca tourists (Beyer 2009:341). In a tradition that makes ready use of spiritual radios and extraterrestrial doctors, this should not seem implausible or inconsistent (Beyer 2009:339), and should strike a careful observer as a practice that bears no small trace of active political-historical agency. To take „alien“ discourses of techno-science and neoliberal extractivist economics – and the attendant colonialist

imaginaries that come with these – and transform them into sources of healing and power is a profoundly political act. If, as Luna suggests, the shaman is one who “transcends the boundaries of society and goes outside, where there is power” (1986:35), then as these boundaries become ever more uncertain and prone to both collapse and extraordinary elaboration under pressures of globalization and its simultaneous exploitations/exclusions of indigenous peoples, it must be expected that the transcending of these boundaries and movements between worlds will reach to ever newer and unexpected horizons.

CHAPTER 5 OF BODIES AND HEALING

Song and Smoke

The ceremony begins with whistling, soft if unexpected, a breathy sound that reminds as much of the tobacco smoke it carries along, as it does of song. It is a low sound, penetrating only because of the stillness of the space, a *silbando* that whispers a memory with each note of the breath behind it, and the tiny, almost absent echo from the cup, filled as it is with the brown brew of the *Banisteriopsis caapi* vine. The echo carries a half-haunting sound in the dark, a dark now broken by the red glow of a *mapacho* cigarette, just as subtly as the whistle breaks the silence.

Where to Begin

What I want to do in this chapter is ask the perhaps obvious question: what do shamans who work within this particular ayahuasca ritual complex *do*. By this I not only mean to ask questions of particular ritual practices, but also who comes to these shamans, and for what reasons. While certainly most if not all shamanic systems in Amazonia involve healing practices, many also involve other ritual elements related to warfare, hunting, local politics, quasi-priestly activities associated with periodic ritual activities, and other both „religious“ and „practical“ engagements with both human and other-than-human worlds (Highpine 2012:27-28, Brabec de Mori 2011:28, and Calavia Saéz 2011:132, 136). The complex of beliefs and practices described as „ayahuasca shamanism“ is distinct from these, in that it is almost entirely oriented toward healing.¹ That is not to suggest that ayahuasca, in all indigenous cultural groups and in all places in Amazonia, is used in ways similar to the complex outlined here. Rather, in the region

¹ Though to be clear, healing in this context is distinctly bound up with sorcery, envy, and reprisal.

outlined for this investigation, and given the historical conditions that have been part of the spread of this ritual complex throughout this region, ayahuasca shamanism oriented toward the ends of ritual *healing* to the virtual exclusion of other elements. This orientation toward healing draws the relationship to the body in ayahuasca shamanism into a more immediate focus. I would like to suggest that people, regardless of cultural context, look for the help of a healing specialist – whether biomedical, psychological, spiritual, etc. – to find ways of coping with the vulnerabilities of suffering. What must be recognized, in this region of Amazonia as elsewhere, is that the *sources* of suffering are multiple, and any particular event of suffering may well be overdetermined by a constellation of these forces. However, the *site* of suffering, where it is experienced, and where it is susceptible to amelioration, is the body.

I propose, following Beyer (2009:44), that the sucking and vomiting of pathogenic darts; the blowing and fumigation of smoke; the massaging and palpating of the abdomen, throat, legs, arms, chests, and bodies of patients; the auditory pulse of a leaf rattle and the swish and crack of it on heads and shoulders; the scents of powerful perfumes; and the bitter tastes of herbal brews – not to mention the biochemical and spiritual actions of the plants – all act as modes of healing the *body itself*. An ayahuasca shaman may not be able to rewrite the whole history of colonization and political-economic exploitation which act as the particular frameworks in the production of many indigenous and mestizo subjectivities of this region. What they are able to do, however, is work on the body – as the site of articulation with these historical, political, and economic pressures – in such a way as to rearrange the lived effects of these to provide for the alleviation, by degree if never in full, of suffering.

In undertaking an analysis of the ayahuasca ritual complex in terms of shamanic action in this region of the Amazon, I suggest that while important, it is easy for the psycho-spiritual experience of the shaman to overwhelm an analysis of ritual healing, especially as this experience intersects with trance states and the ingestion of psychoactive materials, to the exclusion of an analysis of the body of the patient. These altered states and their impact on the body of the ritual practitioner are certainly important and will be engaged with in this chapter, but what is no less important, and often overlooked, is the suffering body of the patient him- or herself, its constitution or production, and its somatic-historical agency. In the significant majority of cases, especially within a more indigenous context, the patient does not drink ayahuasca. In the more usual case, the patient does not experience or undergo an alteration of consciousness, so regularly discussed in terms of shamanism. It is here that I depart from Winkelman's "neural ecology" (2000) orientation, insofar as that work tends to discuss alterations of shamanic consciousness in terms of how these alterations can have biophysical effects. For this chapter, I am less concerned with whether or how shamanic consciousness alters the biophysical or neurochemical reality of the shaman, than I am with how this produces healing for the suffering body of the patient.

Of Suffering and Healing

There are two bodies that I wish to take into account when looking at shamanic healing in terms of the ayahuasca shamanism in this region: the body of the shaman and the body of the patient. I propose, following Kleinman, Das, and Lock (1997), among others, the idea of the patient as a „suffering body“ – a body whose event of suffering has been potentially overdetermined by a constellation of spiritual, physical, historical, economic, and both micro- and macro-political forces. The suffering body, in

its modes of experiencing illness, in its moments of manifesting suffering, has specific historical and political import, that can be understood in particular ethnomedical – or cultural in the broadest sense – terms. Framing the patient as a body that suffers in the context of a healing ritual can potentially imply rhetoric prone to the same critiques that one might level against the agency-denying frames of victimhood.² It is not my intention to deny human agency either historically or affectively within the space of the experience of suffering. Rather, I would suggest instead that suffering is, in effect, virtually a given of human experience. While all cultural elaboration of suffering both in discourse and bodies is variable both geographically and temporally, the *fact* of suffering as an acknowledgement that things are not as they ought to be, or as we would hope for them to be, is tantamount to a “universal” human reality (Kleinman et al. 1992:1). To this end, then, the fact and experience of suffering does not degrade the notion of agency, nor does it situate the sufferer as impotent – the healer, as will be explored further on, suffers too, and in many ways can only effect healing to the degree that suffering *is* a common experience between them. Within Taussig's notions of healing and colonial history (1980; 1987) there is extensive elaboration of this idea that suffering is produced not simply by somatic pathologies but by the very character of systemic and structural racism, oppression, exploitation, and violence. I contend that much of his insight into the nature of what he describes as „folk healing“ in Colombia among indigenous people of Putumayo has marked resonance for the ayahuasca complex of the region under discussion here. Taussig elaborates the idea that the power associated with shamans is in many ways a reflection of the process of colonial

² Cf. Good (2008:10)

„othering“ reflected back on itself and out into the wider imaginary (1980; 1987). Coupled with this is the notion that many of the illnesses as they are lived and experienced in the lives of the rural poor are in fact ironic reflections of these same power dynamics in a socio-cultural sense. This is a powerful insight and critique, though I follow Kleinman (1992:189-190)³ in pointing out that as much as biomedical rationalizations of illness can strip suffering of its densely human experience, so too can descriptions of structural or systemically unjust power dynamics playing themselves out in human lives lead to a sense in which the corporeal and lived phenomena of suffering are abstracted away from the site of individual bodies. It is crucial that the necessary historical contextualization and political critique bound up with suffering does not, in the gravitational pull of its own analytical weight, strip from the human body the experience and expression of suffering.

The suffering body is constituted by the same forces that produce the event of suffering. The body, as such, is disciplined, constituted, oriented, composed, produced, and molded by forces – physical, economic, micro- and macro-political, historical, ecological, spiritual, etc. – that ultimately also produce suffering. The body is constituted by, and finds its modes of action within, these forces and their arrangement. Thus, beyond some critical tipping point – the point at which quotidian suffering becomes illness, pathology, soul loss, etc. – it is not possible for the body to free itself from that suffering through ordinary means. The forces it would use to do so are the same ones producing the suffering. To my mind, shamans cannot stop these forces, either – they cannot will them away. The ayahuasca shaman may not have some absolute power

³ Cf. Beyer (2009:150) for a related analysis.

over an exploitative economic system, a racist socio-political system, or a colonial history of oppression and exclusion. But, I argue, what an ayahuasca shaman may have the capacity to do is to transform the orientation of particular productive patterns, disciplining forces, in a way that does not just resituate the suffering body in relationship to these forces, but resituates the forces of production *of that body*. This opens up the agency of the somatic and historical body to be able to *play* once again – in both the sense of „give“ or „space“ between objects, but also in a potentially ludic sense⁴ – with these forces, in such a way that they no longer produce, for that body, the same degree or type of suffering. Both the body's orientation to these productive forces and the body's agency in terms of ordering these forces is re-arranged and re-oriented to alleviate suffering.

The Transformational Body

Of the oral literature of the Shipibo-Conibo, Cárdenas Timoteo suggests that “everything transforms, nothing remains static: plants transform into men, men into spirits, spirits into plants, animals, or gods.... The variety of persons and the constant transformation of these, marks the internal dynamics” both of these stories, and their elaboration in daily life (1989:113, my translation). This same sense of transformation can be found in Runa thinking of the *kallari timpu*, or the world-before, which is in many ways still ongoing and present, albeit „outside“ of linear time. Beings there are both the plant-or-animal-persons as they were before ceasing to be human, but also already bear traits of the plants or animals that they would, in the present world, become.⁵

⁴ Cf. Taussig (1987:444, 461) on laughter, mockery, and play in ritual space

⁵ Cf. Swanson for the transformation of plant-persons and the relationships of seduction/attraction between these and contemporary Napo Runa persons, specifically for plants as „ex-persons“ (2009:63).

Through plant psychoactives like ayahuasca and *Datura* these worlds – spirit worlds, „before worlds“ and the like – are able to be accessed, and the other-than-human persons who reside there may be contacted, engaged with, and brought into social relationships. As Whitten suggests of the Runa *yachaj*, this contacting of other-than-human worlds, and the mediation between worlds of all kinds, is the position of the shaman in many cultures throughout this region, and beyond through much of Amazonia more broadly (2008:61). What becomes apparent through readings of comparative ethnographic material of this region is that mediation between worlds implies, necessarily, the transformation of the mediator in a process of becoming-toward both poles of the mediation. In Reichel-Dolmatoff's analysis of the shaman-jaguar complex found in much of South American shamanism (1975), the shaman becomes-toward the jaguar and the jaguar-people as a multiplicity, in order to be able to take on this transformational power. But at the same moment the shaman must maintain a becoming-toward the human, working to never abandon the humanity that links him or her to the social world of his human kin. The ability to transform into a jaguar implies, reciprocally, the necessity of transforming once again into a human.

A Note on Theory

I take as my theoretical orientation toward bodies or „embodiment“ work by Csordas (1988), Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987), Strathern (1996), and Vásquez (2011) among others. I am interested in beginning from an immediate and experiential phenomenology of healing practices of the shamanisms of this region, to understand the body as the “existential ground of culture” (Csordas 1988:5). However, setting this theoretical orientation as a goal, I must admit an inevitable failure, at least of a sort. The ethnographic material here is comparative, and does not consist of a detailed analysis

of a particular ceremony or particular bodies, such that this text refers, in a sense, only to other texts. The contradiction of a textual comparative approach that works toward an engagement with embodiment must be at least acknowledged, and though I have spent time in ritual spaces very similar to those described here, I have not done so within the confines of an IRB-approved research program. As such my personal experience can act only as a guide to my thinking, a shaping of the embodied experiences that I have myself witnessed or undergone, as they seem to resonate with the comparative material here. However, I do believe that an orientation toward embodiment can prove key, despite the drawbacks of this particular implementation, as it allows space for insisting on what Csordas describes as “an *indeterminate* objective reality” (1988:38). I highlight the body as both transformational and suffering, attempting to recognize the way in which both bodies and their suffering are produced by the self-same forces, and to suggest that agency in healing may be restored through radical processes of montage and bricolage via the transformational powers of the shamanic healing ritual. This orientation situates my arguments well within a field that would fare poorly, should it be enclosed by a framework insisting on any one, univocal perspective, be that perspective religious, anthropological, historical, political-economic, discursive, or biomedical. In order to open the practices and discourses that are at play within a ritual healing space to multiple perspectives, I follow Scheper-Hughes and Lock’s notions of the „mindful body“, especially as they note that:

It is sometimes during the experience of sickness, as in moments of deep trance or sexual transport, that mind and body, self and other become one. Analyses of these events offer a key to understanding the mindful body, as well as the self, social body, and body politic. [Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987:29]

It is the sense in which the body is mindful, is social, and is political, all at once, that most informs my orientation to the body in this chapter. The „all at once“ of the body is affirmed again by Strathern who, following Csordas, notes “the body itself has to be a unitary concept, not opposed to a principle of mind” (1996:178).

It is implausible to discuss transformational bodies in the anthropology of South American shamanic traditions without invoking „Amerindian Perspectivism“ to some degree. My interest in this chapter is not to give an overview of this theoretical model – there are many other better sources for this, not the least of which would be Viveiros de Castro’s own work (2002, 2004a, 2004b). Nor is it my intention to level a critique of the theory – this has, too, been done effectively by both Ramos (2012) and Turner (2009). Rather, I am interested in two aspects in particular of this theory, for the sake of comparing where it opens up a more robust understanding of the ethnographic material under discussion, and for where it fails to cleanly intersect with the same. The ethnographic material for the Runa shamans near and around the Napo River, for the mestizo shamans near and around Iquitos, and for the Shipibo-Conibo shamans of the Ucayali River suggests that, when speaking of other-than-human persons, plant-spirits feature just as prominently as animal-spirits. It is my suggestion that the emphasis on „predation“ in Amerindian Perspectivism⁶ does not always neatly intersect with shamanic understandings of other-than-human worlds in this region, though this does not suggest that it finds no purchase whatsoever. That is not, in and of itself, too damning a critique, as it is relatively simple to find ethnographic details that are unsuited to any more generalized theory. Here, however, I follow Wright (2009) by noting that if, for these

⁶ Cf. Viveiros de Castro (2002:309)

groups, the programmatic statement of Amerindian perspectivism is that “the animal is the extra-human prototype of the Other” (Viveiros de Castro 2002:310) in terms of contemplating and contextualizing alterity, then this does not extend clearly to all of the plant-human relationships commonly found in the ethnography. It may be that the „late structuralist“ binary of predator-prey to be found in Amerindian perspectivism would benefit from re-consideration in terms of other non-human relationships for this region. If the predatory perspectives of different species are those that arrange the boundaries of alterity, then plant-human relationships that are not bound up with predation complexes do not present a particularly clean „fit“ with the theory. It is less that predation, as „incorporation of the other“, does not have some resonance in an analysis of human-plant relationships of this region, than it is that the „other“ as a category is of uncertain applicability in all cases.⁷

It is not my intention here to present an alternative model for understanding alterity in the cultural region of this thesis, but rather to ask whether or not alterity is the most suitable concept for understanding all human and other-than-human relationships. For many Napo Runa ritual specialists, relationships with plants rely on a fundamental and *shared* humanity, a humanity that exists, if perhaps hidden or latent, as a residue of the „world before“ still present in the plants (Swanson N.d.e; Swanson 2009:63). This „shared“ or common personhood suggests that, in these relationships, there was never an „other“ to incorporate, but rather a temporal or spiritual rift to overcome. This does, in a sense, agree with the Amerindian perspectivist notion that the “original condition of

⁷ It is important to note however that certain plants and trees in the emic discourse of each of these groups can be „violent“ toward humans through sorcery and illness. Whether these can be understood as „predatory“ relationships is not always certain.

both humans and animals is not animality but rather humanity” (Viveiros de Castro 2002:309), but such a statement must be extended beyond animals to plants, rivers, mountains, and the like in turn.

With this in mind it is possible to highlight that aspect of Amerindian perspectivism that I believe bears most readily on a discussion of bodies in the shamanic systems of this region of Amazonia – transformational bodies, and bodies as clothing. Viveiros de Castro notes that:

This notion of „clothing” is one of the privileged expressions of metamorphosis – spirits, the dead and shamans who assume animal form, beasts that turn into other beasts, humans that are inadvertently turned into animals – an omnipresent process in the „highly transformational world”... proposed by Amazonian ontologies. [Viveiros de Castro 2002:308]

Here, again, it is because of that which is *shared* between humans, animals, and spirits that these can transform one into the other, moving between bodies, taking them on or putting them off as if they were clothes. If there is, as Viveiros de Castro suggests, “no „spiritual” change which is not a bodily transformation” (2002:318), then the transformational body of the shaman must be understood not as simply metaphoric, but corporeal. There is of course the contention raised that bodies are not “material organisms”, but rather “bundles of affect and sites of perspective” (Viveiros de Castro 2002:318), though as T. Turner’s critique suggests (2009), I am not wholly convinced that these are not simply alternative perspectives on the same thing. Viveiros de Castro himself in fact presents something similar, when he notes that “bodies „are” souls, just, incidentally, as souls and spirits „are” bodies” (2002:318) – I find this statement compelling, though I would be interested in considering it without the quotation marks. To take seriously the transformations implied by much of the ethnography of the region engaged with in this investigation, I propose that it may be less important to try to

determine if a body is a “material organism” or if it is a “spirit”, than it is to consider that spirit-persons may simply present *different* bodies in different worlds, including the world of „mythic” time. In this way, the body-clothes that the shaman may put on or take off in ritual spaces implies transformation by way of moving between worlds more than it calls into question the corporeality of any given body.

The Body-as-Swarm

It is, in a sense, possible to conceive of shamans within this cultural region as „collective” beings, persons not simply human, nor fully spirit, but in some ways *composed* of spirits. Notable in this case is not that personhood is constructed out of artifacts as described by many authors in Santos-Granero’s *The Occult Life of Things* (2009),⁸ but rather that the multiplicity of selves and perceptual orientations or subjectivities that a shaman may lay claim to ultimately *inhabit* him or her.⁹ As Beyer suggests, many people in this region of the Amazon “consider the darts and other pathogenic objects in a shaman’s phlegm to be autonomous, alive, spirits, sometimes with their own needs and desires, including a desire to kill” (2009:98). Harner, in his work with the Shuar, has noted that shamans are known to ingest magical darts, or *tsentsak*, which are said to be spirit helpers of the shaman, used to both cure illness as well as to cause it (1990:16). As he reports, “Different types of *tsentsak* cause, and are used to cure, different kinds of degrees of illness. The greater variety of these power objects that a shaman has in his body, the greater his ability as a doctor” (Harner 1990:17). What is notable in this interaction between a shaman and his or her darts,

⁸ Though this is a fascinating work.

⁹ Cf. Fausto (2008), Viveiros de Castro (2004a).

however, is that these darts have both ordinary and non-ordinary aspects, and that these darts are simultaneously objects and spirits, and possessed of their own perspectives, intentions, and inclinations (Harner 1990:17). In fact, the process of mastering the pull of these darts as they, outside of the intentions of the shaman, desire to cause harm, is one of the major projects of becoming a shaman among the Shuar. In this case, these spirits are simultaneously beings or persons with whom the shaman must maintain relationship, but also part of the shaman's self, embedded in his or her body. The shaman in this sense is a multiple being, possessed both *of* and *by* the alternate perspectives and intentionalities contained within him or her.

While Whitten likewise states that these projectiles are housed in the *shungu* ("heart-throat-stomach area") for Runa shamans (2008:60), he also notes the phenomenon of the *bancu* (*banco*) among the Puyo Runa (2008:71), though this title and its associated beliefs are ubiquitous throughout the entire region. In effect, according to Whitten, it is possible for a human shaman to become, in a sense, possessed by the spirits, and even spirit-shamans (2008:71). *Banco*, meaning „bench“, can be understood as a „seat of the spirits“, making the shaman extremely powerful, and very dangerous (Whitten 2008:71). The songs, chants, and actions become those of the spirits, and the shamans from the spirit world. The human shaman becomes a conduit for them, as “he himself knows that the chants are coming from the spirit, and he is now the spirit's vessel and vehicle into the waking world of humans” (Whitten 2008:78). This „possession“ by a spirit introduces yet another intentionality into the body of the shaman, such that the spirit-darts as helpers with their own wills, the shaman him or herself, and the possessing spirit all come together at the same „site“ of ritual power. This „site“ of the

body is highlighted by its posture, in that sitting is a ritually important act for the Runa. As per Whitten's analysis of sitting/being standing/appearing among the Runa (2008:77-79), the *banco* is, as the seat of the spirits, *present* in a powerful way – unmoveable, firm, grounded, certain – but also present, in the sense of „being“ as opposed to simply „appearing“ in more than one world, simultaneously. The seated *banco* in an ayahuasca ceremony can be contrasted to the roaming madness that overtakes one with *Datura* use, in order to highlight the manner in which the immediate *presence* of the *banco* states, physically, in a culturally resonant idiom for Runa observers, the multiple-body of this ritual specialist in more than one world. The person of the shaman becomes a kind of multiplicity, more an aggregation of spirits, persons, wills, intentions, and forces than a single unitary consciousness. I suggest that it is just this „swarm“¹⁰ that has a kind of resonance with the ways in which the patient him or herself is composed of forces in kind – economic, historical, political, biophysical, and spiritual – all of which exert distinct and often contradictory pressures on the body of the patient.¹¹ This suggests that it is through montage or bricolage that healing might be effected, as the swarm of the shaman intersects with the multiple-body of the patient.

Corporeality – Smoke and Breath

Where, then, does the transformational body of the shaman make contact with the suffering body of the patient? Through what practices is this transformational capacity brought to bear on corporeal reality in ritual space? Though there are a significant number of ritual healing practices, both common for many forms of

¹⁰ Cf. Wright (2009:136) for a mythic relationship between „swarms“ of bees and the acquisition of *pariká*, the ritual snuff of shamans among the Baniwa.

¹¹ See the previous chapter for an elaboration on how Runa bodies are formed through continuous integration of and interaction with plants, stones, and the earth of the local ecology.

Amazonian healing shamanism and those particular to the ayahuasca shamanism of this region, here I am interested in focusing on one in particular: the use of tobacco smoke as a form of powerful breath. According to Beyer, who in turn was referring to work by Métraux, “it is the tobacco smoke that *materializes* breath” (2009:107). I take this to be particularly important, because it is here that the transformational and „spiritual“ power of the shaman becomes something physical, materially visible, while retaining an ephemeral and quasi-phantalasmal nature. Of *samai*, or powerful breath, Whitten notes that for Runa ritual specialists one’s “*samai* carries with it something of the force of one’s will, *shungu*, and something of the invisible (to humans when awake) yet tangible proof of inner strength” (2008:60). Breath, alone, is considered to be powerful, a carrier of *shungu*, where the phlegm resides, but when materialized and made visible through tobacco smoke, it becomes something more powerful still. Beyer relates both *icaros* and phlegm to the breath, suggesting that these both “converge in the act of *blowing*, which can both cure and kill; and unite in the magical mouth of the shaman, which contains the power and wisdom of the plant spirits” (2009:82). Where darts from the phlegm are blown at enemies, so too is tobacco smoke blown over a patient – the intent, while different for each ritual practice, nevertheless draws from the common ground of breath as a potent ritual substance. The phlegm that is the source of this power is, according to Taussig, a “materialization of yage-derived wisdom. It is matter, knowledge, and power, all in one. It represents the materialization of wisdom-in-action” (1980:240). And if the phlegm holds power, it is more than just a kind of reservoir. The phlegm, as the physical substance of shamanic power (Beyer 2009:81), has a history of its own. Novices acquire their power from older shamans, who transmit

this phlegm from their mouths into the mouths and chests of the initiate (Taussig 1980:239-240; Arévalo 1986:158; Cárdenas Timoteo 1989:208), which suggests that this power has a kind of lineage, a history of the transfer of power from one shaman to another. This is, in fact, made explicit by Langdon (1981:106), who suggests that shamans of the Sibundoy Valley traveled to lowland Ecuador to receive just this *shungu* power of darts and phlegm from Canelos-Quichua shamans, just as did the Shuar shamans with whom Harner worked (1972:119-123). Gaining or increasing power for these groups is a matter of receiving phlegm from more powerful shamans, suggesting that this phlegm is not an a-historical spiritual essence, but rather a substance with a geographic and political history.

The Suffering Body

Bearing afflictions of the body, of the spirit, and of the social network and working through their distressing consequences are the shared existential lot of those whose life is lived at the edge of resistance in local worlds. To this dark side of experience we give the name *suffering*, with all its moral and somatic resonances. Suffering, then, is the result of processes of resistance (routinized or catastrophic) to the lived flow of experience. Suffering itself is both an existential universal of human conditions *and* a form of practical and, therefore, novel experience that undergoes great cultural elaboration in distinctive local worlds.... [Kleinman 1992:174]

Social Suffering¹²

All suffering is, in a sense, social or bound up with the social; and there is therefore suffering that is specifically experienced through, and produced by, social structures and forces. It is because of the social nature of suffering – its interconnection with all aspects of a person’s life – that it is available to be alleviated in ritual space. Purely private suffering, if it could be said to exist, would be unreachable from the

¹² I borrow the term from the volume by Kleinman, Das, and Lock (1997) of the same name.

outside, by specialist or otherwise. Suffering must be expressed, and thereby shared, to make it subject to any ritual act, shamanic, psychoanalytic, or biomedical. It is for this reason, I suggest, that a common refrain is found in the analyses of healing that takes place in many shamanic rituals – that, as Cárdenas Timoteo suggests of Shipibo-Conibo ritual healing, it is not “limited to the treatment and disappearance of symptoms and physical signs of suffering... but rather goes beyond, intending to determine the ultimate causes of the illness” (1989:265, my translation). These causes are often social, or even cosmopolitical, in nature (Cárdenas Timoteo 1989:266). Not only are the causes of suffering social, but so too are the acts taken to alleviate it. As Kohn notes of Runa ritual healing, they are never performed “without the presence, at least, of some members of the extended family” (1992:42, my translation). This suggests that insofar as the suffering of one family member affects all the rest, so too must healing effect some positive outcome in a bodily or individual sense, as well as for the family or community more generally. This is because the problems, the causes of suffering, that are in need of healing are, as Taussig states, in the eyes of the „patients“ themselves, “economic, political, and social, as well as those of bodily disease” (1980:219). Economic and political forces that cause suffering are never individual, but always experienced and expressed throughout a whole social field.

The problems of “inequality, envy, and fear of magical retaliation” that mark out the experiences of social suffering in this region, as Taussig suggests, no doubt “date from the remote past” (1980:257). However, more central to contemporary livelihoods is his attendant statement that there is “also no doubt that the capitalist economy both creates new forms and intensifies” the extant modes of social discord, suffering, and

illness (Taussig 1980:257). As Dobkin de Rios notes of Iquitos, and Belén in particular, the political-economic structures are systemically racist and classist, where, as she states, migrants from the forest into these urban areas are met with “an iron-like wall of hostility, as class lines crystallized around obvious markers of identification such as skin color” (1972:56-57). While forest and riverine indigenous and mestizo people face similar difficulties, the brutal effects of poverty and exclusion on people’s lives are extremely evident in urban areas like Iquitos. Regularly reported are “feelings of hopelessness, despair, and fatalism” (Dobkin de Rios 1972:57) which bring about “social disorganization, broken homes, abandoned children, and prostitution” among other forms of „social“ suffering (Dobkin de Rios 1972:62). In these spaces, what Kleinman describes as „local moral worlds“ (1992:172), desire becomes bound up with envy, which is itself virtually always implicated in sorcery. *Pusanga*, or „love magic“, here is the only kind of love that endures, according to Dobkin de Rios, creating a bond that cannot be thrown over amidst the vicissitudes of economic struggle or domestic strife (1972:62). In these poverty-bound worlds the presence or absence of a lover is as much or more a question of economic survival as it is romantic entanglement. Here it is important to understand desire, and the ritual acts that are driven from it, in a broader context throughout this region. Desire shapes interactions even between humans and non-humans (Swanson 2009), and seduction plays a pronounced role in the ideology of domination and manipulation. Indeed, Beyer suggests that seduction has a historical component, in that the process of colonization throughout parts of Amazonia make infrequent use of the rhetoric of „conquest“, describing the situation more as one of “mutual seduction” (2009:295). He states that the terms of seduction “are compelling –

on the one hand, manufactured goods; on the other, sexual magic” (Beyer 2009:295). Seduction and desire are bound up with manipulation, dominance, and sorcery in ways that imply that the attempt to constrain and modify the behavior of others through ritual means must be understood as part of the same envy and sorcery-as-social-circuitry complex (Taussig 1987:438) that has been so commonly described in the ethnographic literature. It is in these local moral worlds – in the multitude of daily and lived realities of economic need, sexual desire, and the ritual acts taken to engage with these – that the “cultural elaboration of pain” occurs with its diverse “categories, idioms, and modes of experience” (Kleinman et al. 1992:1).

Sorcery and Violence

As Dobkin de Rios notes of the mestizo communities in Iquitos with whom she worked, “„why me?“ and not „how?“ is the subject of inquiry into disease and all its ramifications”, stating that the concern “is to find out exactly why he, and not someone else, is afflicted by disease” (1972:78). The „how“ may be well understood in its material, micro-political, economic, or biomedical details, including by those suffering from the sorcerous act itself. The need, as with the collapse of the Azande granaries of Evans-Pritchard (1976:22), is to look to the complex web of relationships that situate and constitute people, in order to determine that which gives rise to the particular outcomes experienced by individuals, as these relationships act as conduits for the flows of envy, witchcraft, and sorcery. As Heckenberger states of Xinguano communities in Brazil, “Why one person gets sick and recovers while others die... is because they were targeted by some evil force, usually witchcraft” (2004b:188). Social notions of reciprocity and egalitarianism, and an understanding of events – perhaps especially unfortunate events – as the outcome of intentional acts taken by other persons, help to open out on

ways of understanding where and how sorcery „fits“ within the production of convivial life. However, as Taussig notes:

To assert, following Evans-Pritchard, that sorcery is invoked... to explain coincidence, is true. But what this illustration also brings out is how stupendously such a formulation flattens our understanding of what their lives are about and what their invocation of sorcery does to what their lives are about. The clarity of the formula is misleading, and powerfully misleading at that. [Taussig 1987:464]

It is not enough to simply understand sorcery and the suffering that it inflicts on particular lives in terms of „coincidence“, nor even as a system of „social checks and balances“ in the perpetual game of enforced egalitarianism, grounded in a sense of a world of „limited good“. ¹³ In order to understand where sorcery becomes a question of social suffering, it is necessary to look at violence.

Looking closely at violence – and taking seriously the idea that it has specific, culturally sanctioned, meanings – is an anthropological task that must be balanced by both the need to engage with even extreme cultural difference, and the need to avoid representing particular cultural practices in ways which will have negative political or economic effects on the lives of real people. The effort to sidestep addressing violence and its multiple meanings can be bound up with colonialist attitudes to cultural difference, as an attempt to deny or efface what does not offer itself readily for analysis (Whitehead and Wright 2004:1). However, given long histories of dehumanizing portrayals of indigenous Latin Americans, there is also always a pressing need to turn a critical eye to any representations that tend toward sensationalism. Witchcraft and sorcery as forms of violence are authentic and legitimate parts of cosmological, social, and political realities. Though many modes of sorcery do disrupt and even actively work

¹³ Cf. Beyer (2009:137)

against conviviality and sociality, sorcery cannot be reduced to being in all cases the performance of socially destructive acts. Violence, in some ways, marks “the limit of the cultural order” (Whitehead 2004:9), and thereby plays as much of a role in making sociability possible as acts of conviviality.

As Stewart and Strathern warn, it is necessary not to underplay the centrality of the ways in which „talk“, in the forms of rumor and gossip, “themselves may act as a kind of witchcraft” (2004:29). The social and economic effects of rumor and gossip can be just as devastating as physically damaging assault, at least over the long term. Certainly, according to Stewart and Strathern, “words may produce real disasters” (2004:29), for beyond economic, social, and political violence that words may quite readily bring about, the violence of sorcery tends to move along paths already opened by gossip and rumor. The socially vulnerable, who are generally marginalized through this kind of talk, often prove to be the target of sorcery accusations (Santos-Granero 2004:275). This suggests that the mechanisms of sorcery are often arranged around existing political articulations of social life, working outward from the sorcerer to politically vulnerable targets, but also through accusation back inward from the social unit toward particular individuals. However, as Whitehead suggests, what makes sorcery in these cases most troubling is that it is not “just talk” (2002:16), or actions that can be explained simply as a social mode of constraining behavior. The difficulty is that people “actually die in ways consistent” (Whitehead 2002:16) with these modes of assault sorcery. This is reminiscent of the same problem to which Lévi-Strauss sought an answer in his analysis of sorcery’s efficacy in terms of social death (1967).

Sorcery is linked to the dynamics of social suffering where they intersect in violence. Violence as an entry point into cultural analysis resonates throughout much of Whitehead's work. This work is concerned with what he describes as a "poetics of violence" (2002:65), that which is less about "the formal properties of signs, symbols, and rituals – semiotics – but how those signs are performatively used through time – poetics" (Whitehead 2002:2). His purpose in this is how to understand violent acts "as a form of cultural performance" (Whitehead 2004:58), what he describes as "a cultural expression of the most fundamental and complex kind" (Whitehead 2004:68). The reasoning behind such a series of investigations ranges from an absence produced by a common anthropological aversion to such topics (Whitehead 2004:6), to the light it can shine on the production of violence in state societies (Whitehead and Wright 2004:16). The project can be understood as validated on its own terms, however, by attempting to place within culture what is often seen as outside of, or an irruption into, the social. In an interesting harmonic with work on conviviality in indigenous Amazonia (Overing and Passes 2002), the centrality of affect has a marked place in the study of violence. Overing and Passes describe "antisocial affective states (e.g. anger, jealousy, „fierceness“, loneliness)" (2002:xiv). These are resonant with what Whitehead describes as the intensity of "vehemence", which he suggests "may be a widely valid means of interpreting violence" (Whitehead 2004:62). Whitehead invokes Riches' triangle of "victim-perpetrator-observer" (2004:62) as the social-space that ultimately defines and situates the intra-cultural definitions of violence, noting that not all violence is necessarily beholden to the particular emotional state of vehemence. The pertinence of affect to the understanding and interpretation of violence, however, is that it "allows us

to do justice to the gradation in violent acts” (Whitehead 2004:61), which is a necessary link in understanding violence in terms of its broader implications for suffering in an extended social network.

Living well together is not something simply given by particular modes of social organization – it is the outcome of effort, struggle, and the active performance of sociable behavior. It is a task that readily calls to mind the image of Sisyphus, conviviality as an unceasing struggle toward harmony, one that can never be wholly achieved, but cannot be abandoned (Santos-Granero 2002:284). For many indigenous and mestizo cultural groups throughout Amazonia, this is a process that must be carefully monitored, where success is measured “according to its degree of intimacy and informality, and to the extent to which conviviality has been attained” (Overing and Passes 2002:xi-xii). The paradox of the struggle toward this kind of intimate and informal conviviality is that the fecundity of social life is often predicated on the hostile, chaotic, and violent “exterior domains beyond the social” (Overing and Passes 2002:6). Violence, including occult violence, has in some cases a productive capacity toward the generation and maintenance of society, and this productive or at least boundary-making capacity of violence “frequently reveals the nature of violence at work in state societies” (Whitehead and Wright 2004:16). Indeed, Taussig suggests the “magic of production and the production of magic are inseparable” (2010[1980]:21), generating ruptures where the conflict between the use-value and exchange-value of production, in Marxist terms, insinuates itself into social life. These ruptures, coming full circle, make the constant struggle to live well together ever more problematic, more prone to discord, breaking along socio-cultural lines in terms of sorcery and sorcery accusation.

Historical Sorcery

Though an appeal to a lapse in reciprocity is too general to explain sorcery in particular situations, it does provide a background against which to understand specific social actions. Envy, however, has more depth to it than this. Buchillet suggests that among the Desana, both envy and illness are “considered to be the heritage left by the mythical ancestors” which continue to “constitute an ever-present threat” (2004:120). While such a notion can be described in cosmological terms, it is, at the same time, a statement of historical experience. Taussig suggests an image of sorcery as an “*evil wind*”, wherein the “*history of the conquest itself acquires the role of the sorcerer*” (1987:373). In this conception, the historical space of colonial violence itself becomes a “temporal hell located in a fermenting, rotting, organic underground of time” (1987:372), generating of its own accord a permeating miasma of sorcerous malevolence. Envy and sorcery must be understood as more deeply distributed into the ground of social life, providing the „outside“ of violence that gives space to the norms of sociability (Heckenberger 2004b:179-180).

Among American Indian psychologists, the concepts of “„historical“ or multigenerational trauma, and „historical unresolved grief“ have begun to be investigated as a means to understand the ways in which history may manifest in individual lives as suffering (Good et al. 2008:5). I suggest that historical grief may be another lens by which to understand this same concept of historical sorcery. In both systems, regardless of the particular nomenclatures, it is a colonial history of exploitation, exclusion, and oppression that acts on the lives of contemporary bodies to cause suffering. History is productive of subjectivities in that history is always a question of power, at micro and macro scales. This is to say that the “history of conquest” or a

“multigenerational trauma” simultaneously play a role in the production of the subjectivities of contemporary indigenous human beings while generating, in the same moment, suffering. As Das et al. suggest:

As stories are layered upon other stories, the categories of history and myth collapse into each other. Thus spaces become imbued with these mythic qualities, narrations not only representing violence but also reproducing it. [Das et al. 2001:7]

These stories provide the opportunity for violence of one era to be “grafted onto memories of another” (Das et al. 2001:7), such that the suffering experienced by a given body may be a lived echo, present and shocking, of historical trauma. In order to understand historical trauma in Runa terms, however, it is necessary to consider the way in which history is understood and experienced by Runa people.

According to Kohn, for many contemporary Runa living in Ecuador, history “is visible everywhere in the landscape”, though as he cautions “the forest does not provide some objective mirror of political economic circumstances” (2007:125). Indeed, Uzendoski suggests likewise of Ecuadorian Runa, particularly of the Napo River, that both time and space are bound up with cycles of growth, death, and rebirth, and that *allpa*, or the earth itself, is that which “defines temporal and spatial deixis” (Uzendoski et al. 2012:14). The past is something that, like plant growth, blossoms into the present, which in the passage of time becomes again the ground of the future, which finally is the same *allpa* as the past (Uzendoski et al. 2012:15). The present continuously arises from and descends back into the earth, the space of both the past and the future as temporal horizons oriented not to a linear sense of chronological permanence, but rather to a sense of organic growth bound up with the lives of plants and the ecological system that situates Runa lives in a sense of place. Uzendoski states that for Napo Runa persons,

“there is no reality that is not part of place”, such that the landscape is the literal ground of one’s “historical and future relatedness” (2012:15). Bodies, then, are born of, live on and with, and return to this same earth in continuous cycles. History is not other than the earth, which is the same „body“ of Runa persons. Indeed, of the landscape and history, Uzendoski states that:

the body... is a complex web of spiritual and social relations that extends through the community of people, through history, through individual lives, into the myriad forms and beings of the landscape and the ancestors
[Uzendoski 2005:201]

This identification of the body, history, and landscape draws more sharply into focus, then, when contemporary resistance to economic policies takes place.

During 2001 a series of indigenous uprisings occurred in Ecuador, situated around the broad resistance to the dollarization of the Ecuadorian economy. The figure of Jumandy, an ancestral hero who led an indigenous assault on the Spanish in 1578 (Uzendoski 2005:147), was invoked as a symbol of indigenous identity and historical agency during the „levantamiento“ of 2001 as part of a peaceful resistance in and around the small city of Tena. The citizens of the city who participated in the peaceful resistance, the overwhelming majority of whom were Runa, were attacked by government forces. As Uzendoski notes, the “intense events were something of a collective trauma” (2005:147) for the Runa resistance activists, who recognized that money with white men on it was not money for them. They stated that dollars simply spent too quickly, and that they did not provide sound economic material upon which people could build lives (Uzendoski 2005:147-148). The echo of the historical trauma of which Jumandy’s resistance reminds during the sixteenth century found ample, if no less terrible, resonance in the violence of 2001. It is only in context with the

understanding of history as literally within and of the earth, the living place itself, and of Runa bodies and subjectivities as formed from this same earth, that the figure of Jumandy can be understood as an ancestor who was and still is present. The resistance he represents does not just have a metaphoric and historic parallel to more recent events, but is in some ways bound up in the same earth, with the same bodies, who have grown, lived, died, and been reborn from the same *allpa*.

Historical trauma is expressed and experienced in the body – a body that shares an identity with the *allpa* from which it is sustained, with the earth that is the past-and-future temporal horizon of the body's own subjectivity. But this is not the only reading of historical sorcery, or at least one that is potentially incomplete. The performance of healing in colonial and neocolonial spaces of exclusion and marginalization must also be integrated into the account. In what Taussig describes as a “surprising irony of history”, the ritual specialists of this region are “called upon to reelaborate the culture of the colonizer by the colonizers themselves” (1980:221), in healing ceremonies that are performed for the benefit of both white and urban mestizos who seek out indigenous healers. The irony, as Taussig describes it, is that this capacity to heal, this “magical power”, is attributed to indigenous healers by way of the colonizer's projection onto them of “tamed savagery” (1987:441). The source of this „magic“ is a quasi-psychoanalytic „transference“ in the discourse of suffering. According to Taussig:

the power of the ritual itself then proceeds to do its work and play through splintering and decompressing structures and cracking open meanings. In the most crucial sense, savagery has not been tamed – and therein lies the magic of colonial healing through the figure of the „Indian“. [Taussig 1987:441]

By representing a counter pole of „irrationality“ and „wildness“ as the „Indian“ to that of the „reason“ and „civilization“ of the colonizer – features so “essential to colonial

hegemony” (Taussig 1980:251) – the figure of the „Indian” healer, by way of this transgressive status, “becomes the means by which the colonizer seeks release from the civilization which assails him” (Taussig 1980:251). Indeed, according to Taussig’s analysis, for all the ethnocentric and racist ideologies that the patient-colonizer may bring to bear, it is not the patient who doubts the reality of the magical world and its powers described by the „Indian” healer. Instead, it is “the Indians who are called upon to provide magical power to blunt the evils of inequality in the rest of society” who have the most substantial uncertainty about the reality of these powers, of the „magic” they wield (1987:446). Here there is a second troubling reading of historical sorcery – not just the malevolence left by the history of colonial exploitation and violence, but also the „occult” power, the „magic” of healing sought out and even forced upon the „Indian”. This power can be understood as brought about and manifested by way of continuing political-economic inequalities and injustices, a healing magic that, while perhaps often effective, rises ephemeral, like mist, as much from racism and exclusion as it does from indigenous tradition. Brabec de Mori notes that many Shipibo-Conibo people resist the contemporary imagery of „ayahuasca shaman” that drapes them in *kene* design-covered *cushmas* to facilitate the mystic vision of ancient healing (2011:44). Such resistance is not unique to the Shipibo-Conibo, as Taussig suggests that Putumayo shamans likewise shake off the “heroic mold” into which they are pressed (1987:444). Indeed, he states instead that “their place is to bide time and exude bawdy vitality and good sharp sense by striking out in a chaotic zigzag fashion between laughter and death” where they, time and again in ritual healing, construct and break down “a dramatic space layered between these two poles” (Taussig 1987:444).

The Space of Encounter in Ritual Healing

The hum, or whistle, of the two tones is the sound analog of swinging from side to side; each brings the Runa world and mythic time-space into the same cosmic dimension with known history and the spirit domains. With ancient and contemporary now one, and with a unity of history and 'now,' don Rodrigo has taken the steps necessary to establish a force field around himself and his Amazonian water turtle seat of power; he again begins to sing. [Whitten 2008:78]

Song and the Suffering of the Shaman

Ritual begins with song and smoke – both manifestations of powerful breath, a materialization of power moving across the boundaries of one world and into another. As Whitten notes, for the *bancu*, though all in attendance see the physical form of the human shaman still singing, both the shaman and the attendees know that “the chants are coming from the spirit, and he is now the spirit’s vessel and vehicle into the waking world of humans”, as song becomes both the means of, and the gateway to, the performance of spiritual power (2008:78-79). But this capacity for identification with the spirits does not come easily. Songs are not granted without the suffering of sincerity made manifest through actions of the ritual specialist over long months and years to acquire particular relationships with plants, trees, stones, animals, rivers, and landscapes. Isolation, fasting, the performance of *dietas*, extreme forms of initiation, and other such trials are common throughout much of Amazonia, and this region as well, to build relationships with other-than-human persons, whether the spirits of plants or geographies. Degrees of power, or depths of relationship, are obtained by more or less radical procedures. Among the Shipibo-Conibo, those practitioners working to become *unaya*, a form of healing shaman who makes use of plants and some limited number of spirit helpers, must only avoid certain forms of communal labor or festival. His or her social duties in these are not forgiven, however, and the cost in social capital is not

necessarily small (Cárdenas Timoteo 1989:184). More drastically though, to become a *mueraya* – similar to the Runa *bancu*, a seat of the spirits and one through whom the spirits may act more or less directly on the world – one must remain isolated for months at a time, often more than a few times over the period of years, solitary in the deep forest, alone and without contact, all the time ingesting vast quantities of psychoactive materials (Cárdenas Timoteo 1989:184).

These isolations are not limited to human contact, but also isolation from normal patterns even of sustenance – along with periods of isolation of whatever degree, go periods of fasting, eating very little, and dieting. Dieting in this region is a concept distinct from its connotations in other traditions – it does not imply simply eating less, but abandoning entire types of culturally meaningful foods (peppers, salt, *chicha* or manioc beer, most meats but a few small fish). The body of the dieter begins to transform during isolation, becoming thinner, less substantive in a corporeal sense.¹⁴ Tobacco water and ayahuasca are often drunk in large doses, but along with these more powerful plant teachers, individual plants with whom a shaman would make contact or build relationship are often „dietet“. Bits of the plant are ingested, drunk as cold extracts, and the plant is meditated on for days or weeks on end, to come to know it and its spirit more fully. This process can be returned to throughout the shaman’s life and practice, to deepen one’s insight or to build new relationships. As Cárdenas Timoteo suggests, these activities work as “preparation of the body and of the mind, in order to establish communication with supernatural forces, especially with the *ivo* of the plants and trees” (1989:188, my translation). The Piro reside upriver from the Alto

¹⁴ Cf. Cárdenas Timoteo (1989:184-188), Beyer (2009:56, 94), Luna (1984b:145) for more thorough treatments of *dietas* in the shamanic traditions of this region.

Ucayali, in the Bajo Urubamba region and share a number of cultural features with the Shipibo-Conibo. Piro shamans are drawn to their occupation due to compassion: either the death of a child, or the fear of the death of a child, emotionally plagues the shaman such that the he or she, through a transformation of his or her own sense of sorrow, chooses to work to prevent others from experiencing the same emotional state. As Gow suggests, “shamans cure because they „compassionate” their patients” (2002:58). It is the suffering of the shaman and the compassion this evokes – his or her desire to transform that suffering – that makes intercession between the patient and other worlds possible at all, acting as a shared ground between bodies. But it is not just between worlds that the shaman moves – it is on the “razor”s edge between life and death” that the healer must continuously walk. The act of healing is never done only for the benefit of the patient: “in healing others, he is also healing himself” (Taussig 1980:255). Taussig suggests that to become a healer in this region of Amazonia is not just to take on an altruistic social role, but produces a need felt in the body – of shamans, he states “they need to heal in the same way as other people need to eat” (1980:255).

In long isolations, the weeks or months of *dieta* to know a plant, to build a relationship with its spirit, the song comes. “The icaro”, as Beyer states, “is given to the shaman by the spirits of the plants and animals”, for indeed, one “cannot enter the world of spirits while remaining silent” (2009:63). It is in the interpenetration of this music as it moves between ethereal spheres and irreverent laughter that the spirits are brought to the spaces of human bodies and woes. As Taussig notes of the yagé spirits singing through the shaman Santiago, “counterpoised to this „divine” speech of song in its eddies and whirlings is his gentle mockery, sexual innuendo, and degrading profanities”

(1987:461). For how else to bring the gods to earth but in song that whispers and dives with the movement of spirits in the room, riding on smoke and cracking with the *schacapa* rattle, then laughing at profanity and a coarse joke, shaking away the unexpected weight and density of visions and spirits clinging to the flesh, laughter coming like rainwater fresh to wash it away and bring back a life that is somewhere between terrified and grateful. It is here and like this that the spirits come through songs to work on the human body, a ritual space opened to sing powers out from the trees and plants and rivers and earth into the flesh and minds of suffering bodies, laughter making these forces so far from human suddenly familiar, the same, us, enough that they intersect, and in such an intersection, transform. “The shaman’s spirit pours forth in breath, and the song is his action on the world”, becoming in this the “medium for the transmission of a voice far greater than his own” (Taussig 1980:267). As Beyer notes, communication “between the shaman and the plants is two-way” (2009:63), the plant spirits communicating back in the song as the shaman sings to them, the same music in whistles and falsetto notes that descend in unexpected and haunting trails down the scale becoming more akin to a path between the shaman and the spirit than an action that either of them perform alone.¹⁵

If the song is a path, then the semiotics are also sounds in the air, the affective sense that shapes the whole range of sensory perception in an ayahuasca ceremony.¹⁶

¹⁵ See Lagrou (2009) on *kene* designs, and songs that are designs in kind, among the Cashinahua as paths to the spirits.

¹⁶ It is important to be clear here that the songs referenced in this section are *icaros*, or songs particularly related to ayahuasca shamanism and healing, and not other ritual songs made use of by many indigenous groups in the Amazon. Ritual songs throughout Amazonia are often densely meaningful and highly metaphoric, working on multiple levels at once, and should not be confused with the particular analysis of song and its relationship to meaning given here.

Indeed, as Beyer suggests, “abstraction from conceptual meaning is a key feature of mestizo shamanic music” often becoming refined into “*silbando*, breathy and almost inaudible whistles” (2009:74). Csordas notes of glossolalia among charismatic Catholics that it “ruptures the world of human meaning, like a wedge forcing an opening in discourse and creating the possibility of creative cultural change” (1988:24). Here in this space new worlds and new possibilities might emerge, unburdened by the heaviness of transporting univocal *meaning* as such across the boundary between realms of human and spirit. Indeed, many *icaros* are sung in languages not known to the patients, and often may be composed of sounds that are similar to indigenous languages of cultural groups external to that of the singing shaman, but are not, on analysis, fully composed words or sentences, but rather phonemes and the like that mimic these. These languages sung within the ritual space are spirit languages, populating a song with what, following Csordas, I would suggest is language, if not semiotically stable language, for the singer. As he notes:

we are not to treat glossolalia only as a gesture, for we must grant its phenomenological reality *as language* for its users. I would argue, with Merleau-Ponty, that *all language* has this gestural or existential meaning, and that glossolalia by its formal characteristic of eliminating the semantic level of linguistic structure highlights precisely the existential reality of intelligent bodies inhabiting a meaningful world. [Csordas 1988:25]

Icaros are not glossolalia, but the consistently reported feature of their sometimes quasi- or meta-linguistic character,¹⁷ not always being populated with words, though with utterances that are near to words, or that may be words unknown to many of the listeners, suggests that like glossolalia of charismatic Catholics, these songs may well

¹⁷ Cf. Brabec de Mori (2011:36) on the common use of Quechua and other languages among Yine *médicos*, but not the use of the mother tongue. See also Beyer (2009:74-76) on *icaros* and „strange languages“.

bypass the burdens of singular or univocal „meaning“, to register as manifestations of transformational power, vibrating in the air, hung thick with *mapacho* smoke. Because here, as with Benjamin’s notion of “true language” (1997:159, 165) or “pure speech” (1997:160) approached by the task of the translator, the power of the song goes beyond the intention of codifying a „message“ as such across the boundaries of spirit and human worlds. There is not one single, quantifiable meaning that would survive between worlds of radical disjunction such as these. Rather it is the possibility, as Benjamin suggests of all translation, to evoke an echo of the „original“ in the translation – or perhaps here, with an *icaro*, to cause something of the spirit world and its often radically distinct perspectives to ring harmonically in the body of the sufferer.

Ritual Acts and Acts of Healing

How does a shaman, with ragged gasps of breath coming between wracking sounds of vomit and gagging coughs, suck the historical trauma out of a patient’s chest? But perhaps more immediately, how did this become a *virote* dart in the first place? This raises a question of *shungu* and *virotas*.¹⁸ Why is the will, the heart-throat-chest of the shaman, this core of power/knowledge substance in the body, so intimately bound up with the same phlegm and spirit-darts as the ground of sorcery? The oft-cited „ambivalence“ of shamanism and shamanic power in indigenous Latin America may well hold broadly true, but so broadly that it answers little. I propose that it is because the recirculating *samai* – the “vital energy” and life-breath (Uzendoski 2005:33) of the mountains and rivers¹⁹ – in fact rises from an earth in which colonial history has been

¹⁸ Cf. Tournon (1991), Dobkin de Rios (1972:77-78), Beyer (2009:81-88), and Luna (1986:120) for extensive analyses and descriptions of sorcery, spirit darts and their place in the etiology of illness throughout this region.

¹⁹ Cf. Uzendoski (2012:33) for *samai* interconnectedness with the landscape.

buried. And this grave, like all graves, can become a womb, where something covered over and abandoned is reborn time and again as that same “evil wind” of historical sorcery. The burial site of colonial history is the same spatio-temporal future-past horizon of the *allpa* from which bodies emerge. Or in terms with which this chapter began, the same forces which produce the very subjectivities of indigenous and mestizo persons in this region are those that in combination exert inescapable pressures upon one another in an always overdetermined event of suffering. As Taussig notes:

No doubt inequality, envy, and fear of magical retaliation date from the remote past. But there is also no doubt that the capitalist economy both creates new forms and intensifies the socioeconomic conflicts among the peasantry. [Taussig 1980:257]

And if sorcery is born of the same ground where power and knowledge rise as the breath of the earth, then that breath will inevitably carry, in some form, the capacity for the projection of violence and suffering, there present just beside the “vital energy” of *samai*. A history of colonial violence, economic inequality, political exclusion, extractivist development, and the inevitable periodic failure in the struggle toward conviviality condenses into the thorn of a *chonta* palm. Such a dart is blown along the winds of powerful breath into the hearts, minds, bodies – corporeal, social, and politic²⁰ – of an enemy, or a friend momentarily on the wrong side of the “vehemence” of violent anger. But here I perhaps tread too closely to Kleinman’s warning of treating suffering in overly structural and systemic terms (1992:189-190), making an inevitability out of a contested experience of suffering and violence. This experience does not give itself over to such an analysis without again presenting as resistance the carnality of bodies and the intractable stubbornness of corporeal persons. The somatic-historical agencies of

²⁰ Cf. Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987:29)

bodies and persons, and the experience of suffering of which these are the site, cannot be reduced simply to a nexus of historical, economic, and political forces of subjectivity-production, nor can they escape constitution by the same.

Healing, then, must take place on and in the body, the materialized site of both the expression of structural forces and the simultaneous agentive resistance of, and play with, these. Songs and smoke and the shaking pulse of the leaf rattle – the *huairashina panga* (Oberem 1958:79), or wind-making leaf – each in their way open and purify both bodies and ritual space. As Whitten suggests, the shaman “drinks again” of ayahuasca, and “shakes his leaf bundle to create a spirit wind (*supai waira*), and „sees” snake tongues flickering from its lancet leaves”, drawing in with his whistling the spirits of the forest, the spirits of events and places (2008:70). The spirits aid the shaman, in his or her ayahuasca visions, to find the sources of illness, the „flechas” as spirit arrows and darts that lodge in bodies (Oberem 1958:78). And while it is the spirits and the ayahuasca which may allow the shaman to find these pathogenic objects, it is the body that heals the body – as Uzendoski notes of a Runa healer’s testimony, “the healer’s body does the work, and there is not any real effort involved. The healer intends to heal, so his *aycha*, or flesh, sends out power of its own accord” (Uzendoski 2012:28). The flesh heals the flesh, and where the dart is found, it can be sucked from the patient and taken into the shaman’s “own organism, in order to then go and deposit them below a tree in the forest” (Oberem 1958:79, my translation). Of course darts are not always deposited benignly in a stump or stone and returned to the earth. They may be taken into the body of the shaman as weaponry or defense, or perhaps – and more often – be blown back in retaliation to the source from which they came (Beyer 2009:86). For if

sorcery may rise like mist from a putrefying colonial history in the earth, its form as a violent object blown in darts and spirit arrows does not so easily return to become fecund decay, but is rather likely to circulate as disease and illness through networks of sociality that bind humans and other-than-humans together into relational arrangements that are prone to envy, gossip, and the giving and taking of offense.

There is a Kofan legend that depicts God vomiting, shitting, and crying out in terror, gripped in the throes of an ayahuasca ritual experience, the vine itself the unknown product of his own left hand (Taussig 1987:467). In reference to this Taussig suggests that the insights of ayahuasca ritual space do not pretend to a transcendental exaltation, but rather act as a “profane illumination” which does not bring man to God, but rather “brings the gods to earth”, such that these forces beyond the human – be they divine or political, spiritual or historical – are made subject as “fate to chance, and determinism to active human agency” (1987:467). Singing a design through ayahuasca visions by a Shipibo-Conibo shaman, a complex geometry that is as much sound and song as it is spirit, is blown and sealed with tobacco smoke, into the body of a person, becoming part of that person (Illius 1994:194). In kind with bringing the gods to earth, so too do the sung designs of the Shipibo-Conibo transform spiritual power to a human space of sound and smoke and breath, blown, with a *soplado* of tobacco smoke by the shaman over the head of a patient (Arévalo 1986:154), to permeate the body with spirit-song designs until they remain permanent (Gebhart-Sayer 1986:193). Indeed, it is a sense of synesthesia, as Beyer notes, that draws experience of the spirit world across senses, describing *icaros* in terms such as “„my painted song,” „my words with those designs,” or „my ringing pattern”” (2009:233). The designs become parts of the body, so

fully in fact that illness can be understood as a marring or fouling of a person's designs, and where kinds of suffering "are thought to be caused by harmful designs that the shaman must magically unravel and replace with orderly designs" (Beyer 2009:234). By making spirit corporeal through song and breath and design and smoke, not only does power move across the boundaries of worlds, but these same spiritual powers – and concomitant political-historical powers – are, as Taussig suggests, made subject to "chance" and "active human agency" (1987:467). The palpating of bodies, the massage and sucking and blowing of smoke, the sweeping and fanning with the leaf rattle (Tournon 1991) all work to heal the body, both as corporeal flesh, and as the social body and body politic with which it is inextricably bound up, or simply identical.

Of Montage and the Body

To know more about what is within, the shaman must increasingly know more about what is without. The shaman becomes a paradigm builder. He continuously reproduces cultural knowledge, continuously maintains the distance between our culture and other culture, and continuously transcends the boundaries that he enforces by traversing the distances he builds. [Whitten 2008:64]

It is this transcending of boundaries from which the shaman draws power necessary to reorient forces, to transform situations, to open up again the agency of the human body, to liberate the suffering body from a static and immobile place, to set it back in motion, to let it work its own generative capacities on the strategic reintegration of these productive forces. To my mind it is less that the power to heal derives wholly from the world of the spirits, than it is that the transformational potential made available to the shaman can be located in the act of crossing boundaries between worlds as such. To cross a boundary is to admit of a way of being that is, at least potentially, not structured by the same forces, not bound by the same absolutes, as any given world, at

a cosmological or „local moral“ scale. I would suggest that it is the very *possibility* of moving between worlds that makes available this transformational potential to refigure and reorient the forces that simultaneously produce bodies and suffering in kind. Healing does not take place by bringing together an ideal unification, an enraptured sense in which pain and uncertainty are opiated and finally answered. It is not to a perfect future, and thereby a renunciation of all that has brought about the event of suffering, that healing practice pretends. Rather, it is in the polyphonic and polysemic overdetermination of context, a recognition not of the negate-ability of suffering but more in its transformability by way of image, sound, song, and touch that together create a shifting and unanswerable sense of the holographic- or phantasmic-cum-flesh, where healing occurs between bodies, both of the shaman, the patient, and the humans or other-than-humans present in ritual space.

Montage (Taussig 1987:435) proves necessary as a mode of healing because of the overdetermined nature of suffering.²¹ It is necessary to utilize images, references, concepts, and sensations from the domains of different constitutive forces – political-economic, historical, socio-cultural, biophysical, ecological, cosmological, spiritual – in order to access the orientation of those forces in, on, or through the suffering body. The body is indexical for all of these other forces, as it establishes a referential position by or through which they are known and expressed. Because they have an impact on the body – because the body is affected by the arrangement and interplay of these forces – the body is inextricably *part* of the same. That is to say that the body is political, the

²¹ Though here bricolage (Lévi-Strauss 1966), paradigm manipulation (Whitten 2005), and world-making (Overing 1990) all suggest similar models for drawing diverse elements of multiple worlds together to, in particular moments and for specific ends, reorient perspectives and situations.

body is economic, the body is historical, the body is material, the body is spiritual, the body is ecological. These forces have no field that is not the body, nothing else upon which they could act. I am not reductively arguing that there is no *sui generis* of the mind, the social, the spiritual, what have you. I am rather arguing that the site of intersection, the site of contact in the most literal sense for each of these forces is the body itself – the body as flesh, in a raw sense of carnality. That is why it is the body that must be healed, why it is the body that is the site of suffering. All pain, including emotional pain, is felt in the body. Pain and suffering collapse the boundaries between internal and external states, between mind, body, or spirit, such that whatever utility might be found in recognizing aspects of these as poles of experience in particular cultural or historical contexts that are inextricably bound up with discourse, their fundamental and underlying connection, their sameness, is affirmed in the experience of suffering. This is why spirit darts are sucked out as vile bits of blood, puss, and thorn. This is why soul-loss causes the body to be heavy, lethargic, and dispirited. The site of the body does nothing to reductively suggest that soul-loss or spirit darts are only psycho-cultural somatic expressions and not potentially „spiritual“ phenomena at the same moment. What a recognition of the body as the site of suffering and contact between these other forces does is make intelligible why healing, in the shamanic sense, must cover so broad a range of complaint, and why there is such a „bound-ness“ between symptoms from seemingly different strata of experience. As Strathern notes, “whatever the context, however, one feature seems to reappear, and that is that healing involves a reframing of experience” (1996:171). Such a reframing makes use of images as well as signs, of sounds as well as meanings, of words that sometimes but not

always eclipse their semantic referents. It is what Beyer describes as a “synesthetic cacophony of perfumes, tobacco smoke, whispering, whistling, blowing, singing, sucking, gagging, the insistent shaking of shacapa leaves” (2009:22-23) where spirit-visions and the songs they give to the shaman – and are simultaneously transformed by – can rearrange the relationships of a person to an envious neighbor, or the relationships of a patient to history. If, as Taussig suggests, the problems that patients “bring to these rites are, in their own eyes, economic, political, and social, as well as those of bodily disease” (1980:219), then so too must the means of healing be able to act on these same forces.

Kleinman suggests that in order to deal with the “complex, collective *grounds* of chronic pain,” we approach understanding “not by insisting on a single „objective” interpretation, but by juxtaposing multiple, positioned, intersubjective perspectives” (1992:191). This approach has of it that necessary multiple nature of montage. Because if healing is a space of mediation, where a specialist operates between worlds, then the act of healing cannot strive after an illusory wholeness, but rather must seek, as of Benjamin’s assertion of translation, to fit together pieces of worlds “just as fragments of a vessel”, which “in order to be fitted together, must correspond to each other in the tiniest details but need not resemble each other” (1997:161). It is a space in which images and sounds and smells and physical contact can echo bits of worlds – from mythic time to political history, from social idioms of envy and poverty to eschatological *oraciones* whispered to Catholic saints – and become pieced together, making them all “recognizable as fragments of a vessel, as fragments of a greater language” (Benjamin 1997:161). It is in the interruptions, in the “illusory order, mocked order, colonial order in

the looking glass”, in the “alterations, cracks, displacements, and swerves” of song and laughter, of spirit power dazzling in curling wisps of smoke that healing breaks out, unexpected (Taussig 1987:441). Like the first soft whistle breaking the silence, the red glow of a cigarette the only light interrupting the dark, so too does healing, unexpected, break into the ritual space performed between transformational and suffering bodies.

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

Power drawn through the position of mediation between worlds, and the application of that power in healing, are the two most central features of ayahuasca shamanism in the geographic region bounded by the Napo River, the Ucayali River, and the city of Iquitos. Plants, in particular, play a profound role in this ritual complex, acting with ritual agency as mediators themselves, between persons of sometimes strikingly distinct worlds, both cultural and spiritual. The brew of the ayahuasca vine, particularly those brews making use of other plants as admixtures and additives, is unique in this region for its particular capacity to allow a ritual practitioner to maintain a presence in multiple worlds at the same time – an assertion that has both discursive and phenomenological ground in the experience of ritual specialists. Analyzing the position of the ayahuasca brew in conjunction with the related ritual uses of tobacco and *Datura* for the Runa, the Shipibo-Conibo, and the mestizo shamans of this region, suggests a range of mediation based on a degree of contact, translation, and transportation across the boundaries of different worlds. The predecessors – and the current peoples themselves – of the Runa, the Shipibo-Conibo, and the mestizo groups of this region have acted as, and continue to act as, brokers and mediators between European and indigenous worlds, between the highlands and the lowlands, and between urban and forest spaces. This mediatory role in historical and geographic terms has distinct resonance with the „foot-in-both-worlds“ capacity so often noted of ayahuasca experiences, especially of ritual specialists who are highly knowledgeable of the brew. It is not incidental that the rivers – those spaces of movement, mediation, translation, transport, and contact *par excellence* – have such geographic, historic, and ritual

significance in this region. The world of the water is a place of access to power and knowledge, but always with the ambivalent sense in which these are never wholly benign, and may well bring un-looked-for and unwanted effects. This is true as much of the songs of the *yacuruna* as it is of the trade goods of the missionaries.

Within this region and throughout much of Amazonia more broadly there is a long and remarkable history of indigenous exchange, moving inter-regionally across great distances along the rivers, and intra-regionally between geographically near groups. Though these networks were inarguably subject to collapse after roughly 1550 on through the beginnings of the rubber economy in the 1880s, new routes and connections were regularly re-established, as indigenous groups continually adapted and re-constituted communication and exchange. Indeed, it may well be that exchange, and specialization in the production of particular goods, may have played as distinct a role in shaping collective identities in pre-contact Amazonia as kinship, language, and even ritual systems. These ongoing processes of exchange were not limited to material products, but carried ritual and religious beliefs and practices up and down the rivers, and into the forest, such that ritual innovations and sources of power were able to reach remote areas prior to, and during, later periods entailing the destructive effects of European contact, missionization, and rubber slavery. This is not to argue that novel developments and adaptations to ritual practice were not provoked by these more devastating historical forces, but rather to suggest that apprentice shamans were very likely to have been traveling to remote distances to learn of techniques, plants, spirits, and songs prior to and despite European impacts. The scattering, mixing, and decimating of indigenous populations that occurred during missionization and the

violence of the rubber economy did lead to an increase in an exchange of ideas between peoples who would otherwise likely never have interacted. But these were not the only means by which ritual knowledge could or did spread throughout this region.

Indigenous exchange networks that existed at the time of European contact were able to, in some ways, absorb the new metal goods and other trade items made available through the missions. Though the demand for these items was significant, it was not out of keeping with a history of indigenous groups importing from other groups objects that they did not have access to the resources to fabricate, could not make as well, or simply could trade to acquire with less effort. Because the predecessors to the Runa and the Shipibo-Conibo had already been actively engaged in long-distance trading, especially acting as brokers between the Andean and Amazonian indigenous groups, at the time of European contact, these peoples became those who would, in kind, mediate between Europeans and more remote indigenous populations. This, of course, made them more vulnerable to the initial ravages of disease, slavery, and violence brought by the whites, but over the course of time, they also developed a greater knowledge of how the white world functioned, and how to interact with them. This knowledge would, during the rubber boom, ultimately save lives compared to less-contacted indigenous groups, though of course not leaving the Runa and Shipibo-Conibo exempted from that violence. For the Runa in particular, because of the cultural capital gained through this mediatory position between cultural worlds, other, smaller groups began – and continue – to acculturate to Quichua-speaker cultural patterns. This cultural capital also meant that Runa ritual specialists were, and likewise continue to be, looked to as powerful sources of knowledge, or *yachay*. The origin of the ritual complex

of ayahuasca shamanism, and the forms of ritual practice associated with it, began among the Napo Runa shamans, and was able to be disseminated so widely in part because of just this cultural capital developed through a geographic and historical position as brokers and mediators. It is, then, perhaps understandable that moving between worlds, and mediating between spirit-persons and humans, is a prominent feature of ayahuasca shamanism in this region.

By focusing on indigenous exchange networks and historic brokerage roles of indigenous groups in this region, it is my hope to supplement or broaden the insights first expounded by Gow on the origins of ayahuasca shamanism (1994). Gow, based on what he acknowledges is potentially tenuous evidence, suggests that ayahuasca shamanism is a historically recent phenomenon, developed out of the cultural mixing of the mission camps, and then spread during the rubber boom. His work is an attempt to re-contextualize within specific histories the development and dispersal of the ritual complex of ayahuasca shamanism, and is a very necessary corrective to often uncritical references to contemporary ritual practices as part of unbroken, ancient indigenous traditions. However, by situating the origin of this form of shamanism in the mission *reducciones* and suggesting that its dispersal was in large part due to the forced mobilization of the rubber economy, his argument does not take into account the history of the brew, its association with Quichua-speaking culture, and the alternative modes of distribution of this complex of beliefs and practices. In Gow's defense, much of the research that has come after his work to open up this more nuanced account was not available at the time, and the majority of it has been heavily informed by his work on the subject, the broad tenets of which are still quite applicable.

This research throws new light on the ways in which ayahuasca shamanism has incorporated novel elements as it moved and developed. In the Napo River region where the ritual complex began, there has been little-to-no incorporation of Catholic liturgical elements. The shamanic traditions that gave rise to the ritual complex, while dynamically adapting to local changes and considerations, have not routinely taken on the additional elements that have developed in and around Iquitos. Even the use of DMT-bearing *P. viridis* leaves has not become such a profound aspect of the use of the vine brew in the Napo region, despite the overwhelming centrality of these visions to much of the literature focused on the shamanisms of Iquitos. The *vegetalistas* of Iquitos have incorporated Catholic cosmological elements, the DMT-bearing admixture plants, European esoteric thought, „eastern“ religious ideas from Buddhism and Hinduism, and New Age concepts into their ritual beliefs and practices with the brew. This, too, makes sense – and here, Gow is quite correct – as the mestizo shamans of Iquitos are mediators now between urban-and-white spaces and forest-and-indigenous spaces in Peru. This mediation, still central to the ayahuasca shamanic complex wherever it is practiced, adapts dynamically to the geographic, historical, political, and discursive contexts within which it is located. It is not surprising then that these elements travel up the Ucayali River, toward the Shipibo-Conibo – and the Piro with whom Gow worked most directly – and find their way into the ritual practices of ayahuasca shamans working there. These practices adapt, as Shipibo-Conibo (and Cashinahua, and even Piro) notions of visual designs and patterns, often woven into clothing or painted on pottery, intersect with the ritual understandings of ayahuasca use, changing modes of discourse about the brew.

A multitude of plants are made use of, both ritually and medicinally, throughout this region by both indigenous and mestizo specialists. Three plants, however, stand out as the most central ritual plants in emic discourse: tobacco, ayahuasca, and Datura. Given the historical situation of the Runa, the Shipibo-Conibo, and the mestizo shamans of Iquitos as mediators and cultural brokers, „mediation“ proves to be a valuable lens through which to view these plants. Tobacco, throughout the Americas from North to South, plays a pronounced ritual role in establishing and maintaining contact and relationship with the spirit world. In this region, as in others, tobacco smoke is understood to be the very materialization of powerful breath, an ephemeral yet visible trace of ritual power and spiritual substance. Tobacco smoke makes relationship with spirit-persons possible, however more profoundly other plants may move one across or into other worlds. Datura, on the other hand, makes possible the movement into another world most radically and completely, setting one on a path to power or knowledge that requires the utmost effort and will. Faltering in that world means death in this one. Datura, perhaps most especially in Runa discourse, sends one wholly elsewhere, to meet with spirit-persons of great power and knowledge, but who are likewise very dangerous. Such quests are not undertaken lightly. And it is ayahuasca, then, that translates and facilitates interaction between worlds. Ritual practitioners note the pronounced lucidity of ayahuasca visions, the ability to engage fully with the spirit-world, while simultaneously remaining cognizant and capable in this one. This capacity to translate between the worlds, without necessarily losing sight or connection with either, makes ayahuasca particularly suited to healing practice. The power of the spirit-world, the power drawn from eclipsing boundaries in both directions, is made available in the

healing space of ritual to the body of the patient, through the mediation of the specialist. Ethnographic and phenomenological evidence from among the Runa, the Shipibo-Conibo, and the mestizo shamans in and around Iquitos – while containing any number of cultural variances and distinct understandings – all suggest that mediation, in terms of contact, transport, and translation, is a viable way to understand the ritual uses and effects of these plants.

Despite the often-contrived images in much popular literature, shamanism in Latin America – and worldwide – has never been uniquely oriented toward healing as such. Intercession with masters of animals for the release of game, with divine beings for „priestly“ or culturally sacred activities, with spirits both to bring rainfall and drive it away – all of these are aspects of different shamanisms. Divining the location of a lost object is not any less common, in many shamanic systems, than searching for a lost soul. This is to say nothing of sorcery and the causation of disease, misfortune, and the like, all of which are bound up with the same spiritual forces as shamanism. Not all, or even most, shamans are sorcerers, but misfortune and malevolence follow like the inescapable shadow beneath the footfalls of healing, well-being, and convivial livelihood, and work through the same spiritual powers as the rest. This is important to note because the ayahuasca shamanic ritual complex does, in effect, take healing as its particular orientation. Healing, in this sense, grapples directly with sorcery, though, and because many treatments of illness involve sending it back to its source, the circulating spiritual violence makes it difficult to find an ayahuasca shaman who is not also, in some sense, engaged in sorcery. Whatever the case, the orientation of ayahuasca shamanism to healing makes the body, in particular, relevant to the ritual practices and

beliefs of this complex. The sources of suffering are always multiple, and any event of suffering is likely to be overdetermined by pressures ranging from domestic to ecological, from spiritual to political. But it is the body that experiences suffering, and the body that can be healed – it is the site where these other forces intersect. The body is the nexus in and through which subjectivity-producing forces operate and, literally, manifest. It is for this reason that ayahuasca shamanic healing must transcend boundaries between worlds. It must be capable of drawing on imagery and discourse from political worlds, economic worlds, historical and even multi-generational memories, as well as spiritual and ecological worlds in order to work with these forces as they simultaneously produce and afflict the body. The multiplicity of a shaman – who is made of spirits, is a house of spirits, a „swarm“ of intentions and perspectives – intersects with the multiple-body of a patient in ritual space.

Somatic agency is historical agency. The body is that in which, and through which, history unfolds, is lived, understood, remembered, recognized, resisted, and (re)interpreted. The body is history manifest. Changing the course of history means, quite literally, changing the state, arrangement, control, and expression of bodies in particular times and places, both for and against the interests of those bodies themselves. And if the body is history, then health and illness speak as much of politics as they do of medicine. This study has been in large part occupied with historical, linguistic, and comparative ethnographic evidence in the phenomenon of ayahuasca shamanism. The thesis statement was argued and analyzed in terms of mediation and exchange, in order to contextualize ritual practice within its historical development. But what is central to the actual ritual performance of ayahuasca shamanism is healing. In

ritual healing space, the questions are not those of how such practices came to be, but rather what it is they can do, what suffering can they relieve. And if the body is history, and suffering arises from the same forces that produce or constitute bodies-and-subjectivities, then healing is politics, albeit at times cosmopolitics. If „historical sorcery“ is an apt metaphor for understanding colonialism and its impacts on indigenous lives, then we must ask, both of medicine and politics, how to work toward „historical healing“.

Crisis and prevention operate as two temporal horizons from which to approach healing. A crisis modality attempts to rectify problems that have already manifested as pathologies and acute distress. Preventative medicine attempts to establish a way of living, particular behaviors and practices, that prevent the body from reaching a pathological state in the first place. If the body is indexical to historic, economic, and political forces, then what does „health“ mean in context with this insight? Can we speak of health without speaking of politics, economics, history, culture, community, spirituality, and ecology? These are the things that the body is made from, shaped by, expressed through and in. So when we speak of healing and health, we must look to these fields of influence just as much as any investigation of infections and pathogens. And so the question becomes, who is vulnerable? This echoes the rhetoric of sorcery: why does ill befall one person and not another? Was it intentional? Who did this, why was it possible for it to happen here, but not there? To speak of health we must also ask these questions, but of repressive and exclusive political systems, exploitative and intrusive economic constructs, colonial histories and neocolonial prejudices, petroleum polluted rivers and rainforest homes sold out from under families. It is not enough to heal a body that has already manifested some illness or

distress, however necessary this might be. It is necessary to change the situations that bring about the disease in the first place, that give rise to suffering in structural and systemic ways – systems that in large measure determine who receives food, clothing, shelter, education, and a say in how their lives and well-beings are managed and traded on. Healing at the political and economic level cannot remain in a crisis modality, responding only at the outbreak of violence and outrage, but must rather embrace the foresight of finally changing the systems that give rise to these kind of dangerous and destructive social manifestations. If the ritual healing encounter teaches us anything, it is that while healing does manifest regularly in these spaces, in order to prevent the appearance of new disease and relapse to old, the imbalances and disharmonies of these other forces must be altered directly.

In the preceding pages I have attempted to paint a more complete view of indigenous historical agency in terms of the development and elaboration of the ayahuasca ritual complex. Given the outmoded – but still too-often repeated in popular discourse – narratives of indigenous groups as „people without history“, it is necessary to critically examine where, when, and how indigenous groups were actively engaged in creating their own histories, even amidst overwhelming and pernicious pressures. Not only are indigenous people currently active in shaping their own histories, but they always have been. I am not suggesting that this study reveals indigenous historical agency in ways that have not been demonstrated in other work, but rather that it has been my intention to put this agency in context with the ritual complex of ayahuasca shamanism in particular. Ayahuasca over the last two decades has found itself drawn into popular consciousness, from New Age spirituality to references made in

mainstream entertainment. This popularity has not, unfortunately, necessarily brought with it clarity or critical reflection in many cases, and while much good work is being done to rectify this, more needs to be done. It has been my intention in this study to bring a contextualized awareness to both political history and ritual practice, in order to highlight indigenous agency in the development and elaboration of this ritual complex.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

James C. Taylor was born in up-state New York in 1978, and graduated from Jacksonville University with degrees in both English and philosophy in 2000. His research is focused on the ritual use of plants in the Peruvian and Ecuadorian Amazon, especially as these relate to healing. He is currently an M.A. student with the Center for Latin American Studies at the University of Florida, and a research associate with the Working Group on Plants and Religion at the University of Florida.