

AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF
AYAHUASCA:
Healing Paradigms, Science and Spirituality.
(Identifying Neo-Enchantment)

by

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Statement of Authorship

This thesis is my own work containing, to the best of my knowledge and belief, no material published or written by another person except as referred to in the text.

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ABSTRACT

Ayahuasca* is a psychoactive brew that has origins in the indigenous traditions of the Amazon regions of South America. It is known as a healing medicine that is deeply embedded in shamanic practices and spiritual beliefs. In the last few decades the use of Ayahuasca has developed outside of the Amazon and has since become a transnational phenomenon, crossing boundaries between Western and non-Western healing contexts. This increasing popularity has attracted a multidisciplinary array of research interests, of which anthropology has significantly contributed. It has become evident for those engaged in Ayahuasca research that Western epistemology is limited by its longstanding constraints of objectivism, rationalism and scientific materialism. In this thesis, I provide an analysis of Ayahuasca to outline the spiritual centrality of its use and appropriation, especially in context of healing beliefs and practices. I apply the concept of neo-enchantment to outline how the globalization of Ayahuasca challenges the hegemony of rationalism and secularism in industrialized society. This is achieved through reference to recent Ayahuasca research and analysis that seek to overcome limitations of Western epistemology, through dialectically synthesizing scientific and indigenous paradigms of healing and knowledge. While focused on Ayahuasca research, the outcomes of this thesis relates to broader issues in the social sciences and beyond, and raises some important questions for future research.

*Due to its ubiquitous use, Ayahuasca (phonetic: *Aya-wás-kha*) will not be italicized herein.

INTRODUCTION

Ayahuasca is a psychoactive plant brew that has been used for healing and divination throughout the Amazon regions of South America. Ayahuasca shamanism has long been of interest for anthropologists seeking ethnographic insight into the rituals and beliefs of those once considered 'primitive people'. Since the 1980s, however, such representations of 'Otherness' have been remonstrated within anthropology, as the 'science of the exotic' (Clifford & Marcus eds. 1986, p. 23) has given way to new ethnographic research methods. Ayahuasca is now being conceptualized through a new gaze; a multidisciplinary field of research seeking to understand it as both a legitimate healing paradigm and a complex social phenomenon.

This thesis will elucidate how Ayahuasca healing is a complex system that challenges the theoretical and methodological limitations of what I broadly refer to as 'Western epistemology'. Applying this term, I am more specifically focusing on rationalism, scientific materialism and objectivism as hegemonic suppositions in the West used to determine truth. I will show how Ayahuasca research is offering new insights and understandings of human consciousness, cross-cultural healing and spirituality in the contemporary world. Ayahuasca is gaining global interest for its healing potentiality and pharmacological benefits, yet research shows that biomedical perspectives are limited in conceptualizing its efficacy through scientific empiricism.

Anthropologists are well positioned to challenge Western epistemological constraints still present and problematic in the social sciences. Geertz (1984, p. 275) proposed that when 'old triumphs become complacencies, one-time breakthroughs transformed to roadblocks, anthropology has played, in our day,

a vanguard role' in moving away from such limitations. For example, classical social theorists such as Weber observed a unilinear process occurring in the West; from the sacred to the secular, famously described as the 'disenchantment of the world'. Theorized as a grand process of rationalization, disenchantment became a point of critique for postmodernists seeking to challenge Western metanarratives. Re-enchantment became a useful concept for critiquing Euro-American assumptions and the universalism of grand theory. Re-enchantment offered an alternative to rationalization; a return to the sacred, to a less secular world. The concepts of disenchantment and re-enchantment are useful, as they have been of significant focus in the social sciences for understanding processes of modernity. Equally important perhaps, they reveal much about the developments of related scholarly knowledge. However, from an anthropological perspective and particular to the aim of this thesis, re-enchantment is a problematic concept. If postmodernism is a counter-reaction to modernity (Rabinow 1986, p. 248), as re-enchantment is to disenchantment, then it does beg the question of whether the world is, or ever has been disenchanted (Sherry 2009, p. 377)? It would therefore be fitting to proceed with a new perspective, that despite the domination of rationalism in the West, enchantment has never departed.

I apply Harrison's (2006) concept of 'neo-enchantment' as a motif in my analysis of Ayahuasca. Harrison (2006, p. 10) suggests that science and mysticism can be better understood dialectically, a proposition I follow through the science/spirituality separation of Ayahuasca research.

To elucidate neo-enchantment, Harrison (2006, p. 8) states:

Rather than a story in which the sacred and/or irrational disappears or goes into hiding and then comes back (*reenchantment*), it would be more appropriate to tell a story in which the sacred and/or irrational undergoes a change in state or kind, in order to adapt to current conditions—a new enchantment, re-tooled for the needs of the day.

I expand upon this definition to entertain whether Ayahuasca healing is a legitimate field for identifying neo-enchantment. To consider this proposition, I formulate two objectives. Firstly, I explicate Ayahuasca as a socio-cultural phenomenon and outline how it is challenging rationalism and secularism, as it becomes globally appropriated as a spiritual healing paradigm. Secondly, I analyze movements in contemporary scholarship that are addressing limitations of scientific materialism. My analysis is predominantly focused on Ayahuasca research, but the implications relate to wider discussions of Western epistemology, spirituality and healing. This thesis will address global shifts in Ayahuasca healing practices and correlate them with contemporary scholarly research, which I suggest fit within the paradigm of neo-enchantment.

Ayahuasca has moved beyond the jungle, in the globalized world it is now offering insights into human consciousness and spiritual healing that are of significant interest for academics, researchers and laypeople alike. The globalization of Ayahuasca is a palpable sign that individuals are seeking healing that contrasts the rationalism and materialism of Western society (Fotiou 2010, p. 132). Research on Ayahuasca and other psychoactive medicines suggest that the 'fundamental mystical experience induced by these

compounds transcends the materialistic ego-bound consciousness of contemporary Euro-American culture' (Grob et al. 1996, p. 316). Data consistently reveals the 'explicit ritual context' (Tupper 2009b, p. 271) of Ayahuasca healing, yet this is often ignored in biomedical research. Kuhn (1970, p. 24) notes that 'no part of the aim of normal science is to call forth new sorts of phenomenon; indeed those that will not fit the box are often not seen at all'. Ayahuasca is a field of research that raises many issues regarding the limitations of 'normal science' for explaining its efficacy within a materialist context. What is required, however, is to develop an epistemological framework to seek what lies outside of the 'box'. The data presented here is part of a multidisciplinary effort to further understand the socio-cultural implications of Ayahuasca's global resurgence and explicate how discursive concepts of body, mind and spirit are applied in conceptualizing its healing potentialities. This approach requires a reconsideration and reconfiguration of Western scientific research. I consider that Ayahuasca evidence supports shifts in healing and research practices that align with the paradigm of neo-enchantment.

This thesis will provide a descriptive analysis of Ayahuasca use and appropriation, along with a research analysis of theoretical and methodological approaches. I also discuss how the study of Ayahuasca relates to broader themes within the social sciences. This thesis is presented in three sections, each containing individual chapters. Section I is aimed at providing insight into the use and appropriation of Ayahuasca, from traditional to contemporary practices. Section II focuses on the multidisciplinary research of Ayahuasca, to outline how scholars are identifying and overcoming limitations of scientific materialism. Section III discusses the findings of Ayahuasca research within a broader discussion of knowledge, truth and future research practices.

In section I, the first chapter will provide a descriptive analysis of Ayahuasca, historicizing its use as a cross-cultural healing paradigm. I begin by exploring Amazonian *Vegetalismo* practices of Ayahuasca shamanism. This discussion will outline the etiological, pharmacological and ritual/spiritual context of its tradition-based use. The contemporary use of Ayahuasca as a sacrament will also be discussed by analyzing the Christian syncretic churches of *Santo Daime*, *Uniao do Vegetal* (UDV) & *Barquinha*. As we shall see, this religious use of Ayahuasca that began in Brazil in the 20th century is now globally active.

Chapter two will identify Ayahuasca as a contemporary phenomenon undergoing complex changes in the face of modernity. I will discuss the implications of its globalization through cultural appropriation and the development of 'drug tourism'. Researchers have observed some of the ethical issues of Ayahuasca's appropriation relating to the nexus of power and knowledge, inequality and global capitalism. Whilst raising concerns about the dangers of Ayahuasca misuse, data also suggests that the motivations of individuals seeking the 'Ayahuasca experience' are in response to a lack of spiritual healing in Western society. Despite the dominance of rationalism, contemporary appropriations of Ayahuasca healing are increasing globally.

In section II, I discuss developments in scholarly research that align with the concept of neo-enchantment. Chapter three addresses themes of Ayahuasca healing that relate to anthropology. Animism is a starting point; a world-view central to tradition-based Ayahuasca healing, and a concept within anthropology long used for defining the ethnographic 'Other'. Moving beyond Tylorian definitions of animism, theoretical perspectives are now being reshaped to fit the contemporary world. A new animism has developed, one

that has moved away from objective description, towards a 'relational epistemology' and ontological understanding.

In chapter four I explore the phenomenology of Ayahuasca through an analysis of experientialism in the healing processes. In the West, subjective context has received little attention and individual experience has largely been denounced, in favor of the objective authority of science. My discussion draws upon Shanon's (2010) 'structural typology' of the Ayahuasca experience. Shanon takes a radical position that rejects 'biological reductionism' and instead places emphasis on the experiential aspects of psychological phenomenon. I also include Echenhofer's (2012) phenomenological research that develops a 'pragmatist approach' in bringing together multidisciplinary Ayahuasca research. I outline his integrative practice, which aims at mediating between the psychological and spiritual dimensions of healing. This chapter provides examples of how Ayahuasca researchers are challenging the *status quo*, developing new theories and methodologies that extend beyond the limits of scientific materialism.

In chapter five, I analyze research that is dialectically engaged between Western and non-Western epistemological paradigms of healing. I demonstrate several ways that scientific, religious and tradition-based practices are being interrelated to further understand the various techniques of Ayahuasca use in a contemporary context. New healing methods are synthesizing Western and non-Western knowledge and practices, such as the *Takiwasi* Centre, treating drug addiction using Ayahuasca shamanism and psychological therapy. I analyze several clinical studies of Ayahuasca, which aim to determine efficacy, safety and ritual/spiritual context of the healing process. The final section of the chapter is an overview of Narby's (1998)

anthropological hypothesis, which interrelates scientific and indigenous knowledge. This research brings together Ayahuasca, indigenous cosmology and molecular biology to overcome the hegemonic limitations of Western epistemology. Narby's hypothesis represents a *modus operandi* for neo-enchantment, by synthesizing science/spirituality, traditional/modern, self and other to understand the origins of knowledge and the potentiality of human consciousness and ecological interconnectivity in new ways.

Section III, chapter six is a discussion of knowledge and truth. Here I outline some final considerations of Ayahuasca and recapitulate some key concepts as they relate to wider issues in the social sciences. I outline the Eurocentric formation of knowledge to be hegemonic and thus, inadequate for contemporary understandings of body, mind and spirit. Ayahuasca is a locus for moving beyond the 'epistemological bedrock' of scientific objectivism and I discuss the role it potentiates in the face of current global concerns. To move beyond the conventional parameters of research I discuss *Extraordinary Anthropology* (Goulet & Miller eds. 2006) as an adaptive strategy, engaged in overcoming anomalous or 'ecstatic' dimensions of fieldwork. I consider this to fit within the broader concept of a neo-enchantment, both applicable to epistemological discussions and future Ayahuasca research.

SECTION I – DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF AYAHUASCA

1. AYAHUASCA: HEALING PARADIGMS

1.1. Ayahuasca: 'Vine of the Soul'

Ayahuasca is often referred to as a tea or a brew that has been widely used throughout the Amazon regions of South America. Historically, Indian and *mestizo* shamans of Colombia, Peru, Ecuador and Brazil have used Ayahuasca for healing and divination (Metzner 2006, p. 1) in ceremonial or ritual settings. It has been reported that more than seventy-two ethnic groups across the Amazon, belonging to twenty different linguistic families, use various preparations of Ayahuasca (Luna 1986, p. 57). The beverage is known by several different names such as *Caapi*, *Yagé* or *Hoasca*, but it is most commonly known in contemporary literature as Ayahuasca. The etymology of Ayahuasca derives from the indigenous *Quechuan* language and translates to 'vine of the soul' (McKenna 2004, p. 112) or sometimes 'vine of the dead' (Beyer 2010, p. 208).

Ayahuasca is a plant mixture that defies simple classification due to the wide variety of scientific research, attitudes and intentions towards its use (Metzner 2006, p. 2). Pioneering ethnobotanist Richard Evans Schultes (Evans Schultes & Raffaut 2004, p. 22) describes Ayahuasca as a 'sacred hallucinogenic plant' that 'truly enters into every aspect of living' (Evans Schultes cited in Luna 2011, p. 4). Although it is often categorized as a psychedelic or hallucinogen, the word 'entheogen' is a more appropriate term for describing the spiritual context of Ayahuasca. Ruck et al. (1979, p. 146) first proposed entheogen to describe 'mind-altering drugs' used in shamanic and ecstatic states of

possession. *Entheos*; the Greek root word meaning 'god within' and *gen*; 'becoming', refer to entheogenic plants or substances that produce visions and are used in ritual practices (1979, p. 146). Categorizing Ayahuasca as an entheogen aligns scientific terminology with the indigenous cosmologies of the Amazon. It is an important premise from which to proceed, as the spiritual and mystical parameters of its use will be shown to be central regarding its healing potentialities.

Ayahuasca is boiled from various plant mixtures that produce an alternate state of consciousness (ASC) for both healers and patients, which is an essential aspect of the healing process. The vine itself, or liana, is called *Banisteriopsis caapi* (B.caapi) and is made with a variety of plant mixtures estimated to range between fifty-five to one hundred and twenty variations (Beyer 2010, p. 207). From a pharmacological perspective the plant mixture is a compelling concoction, as the right combination is crucial for producing the necessary psychoactive effects.

The most commonly know addition to the B. caapi brew is the *chacrana* leaf or *psychotria viridis* (Tupper 2009b, p. 269), containing the active ingredient *N, N-dimethyltryptamine* (DMT), which facilitates the entheogenic effects. Interestingly, DMT is not usually active when orally ingested. A *monoamine oxidase-A* (MAO-A) enzyme found in the stomach, oxidizes DMT molecules and renders its psychoactive properties inactive (Cavnar 2011, p. 11). It is only by preparing the B. caapi vine with the *chacrana* leaf that the psychoactive effects can be achieved. The alkaloids in the B. caapi vine contain an MAO-A inhibitor (MAOI) that enables the DMT of the *chacrana* leaf to become orally active (McKenna 2004, p. 112). It is through this chemical interaction that the basis for the entheogenic effects of an ASC is achieved. Pharmacological

research provides scientific insight into the Ayahuasca brewing techniques of indigenous Amazonian traditions. Beyond its ethno-pharmacological properties, however, the dimensions of Ayahuasca healing require further analysis to determine its spiritual significance.

Much of the research on Ayahuasca comes from the natural and social sciences. Problematic to these investigations has been the extraordinary experiential aspects of the healing process. Understanding the ritual contexts or neurophysiological effects alone, does not account for a great deal of its effects on individuals (Shanon 2010, p. 31). To assess its traditional shamanic use throughout the Amazonian rainforests, Dobkin de Rios & Rumrill (2008, pp. 23-24) reveal its use for the following:

To obtain divine guidance and to communicate with gods and the spirit world; to achieve trance states; to train prospective shamans; to induce dreams so as to see the future; to cure illness through psychic or physical means; to prevent the malice of others from harming members of the community; to use visions to prescribe remedies for illness; to identify an evildoer or agent responsible for illness.

Ayahuasca is commonly referred to as a 'plant teacher' in the Amazon. By accessing an ASC, shamans can gain knowledge from other realms to determine cause and effect for healing patients (Tupper 2009b, p. 272) and combating sorcery (Beyer 2010, p. 122). The mystical aspects of the Ayahuasca experience are a key factor for attracting Westerners to seek its use. As a healing paradigm, Ayahuasca is an alternative to biomedicine, as it encompasses the 'spiritual dimensions of healing, along with the physical' (Fotiou 2012, p. 8). The recognition of this is being given credence due to its

emerging efficacy and global popularity.

As will be shown, these practices are being increasingly sought out transnationally. The dissemination of Ayahuasca healing into global consciousness offers a counter narrative to the dominance of rationalism and secularization in the West. I suggest this cultural phenomenon represents a neo-enchantment; a new integration of the sacred into industrialized society. As part of this descriptive analysis, however, it is worth taking a closer look at the shamanic use of Ayahuasca in the upper Amazon, to further understand the paradigm of tradition-based healing.

1.2. *Vegetalismo & la Dieta*

Vegetalismo is a tradition-based practice of Ayahuasca shamanism within the *mestizo* and indigenous cultures of the Amazon (Horner 2012, p. 7). Research tends to focus on *mestizo* populations, however, distinguishing between indigenous and *mestizo* reveals a complex history of identity. Being *mestizo* means of mixed blood, however, the boundaries of identity in the Amazon often reveal certain ambiguities, being hybridized and acculturated (Beyer 2010, p. 294). Central to the *mestizo* and indigenous use of Ayahuasca, is the belief that there is an 'underlying spiritual aspect to everything that exists' (Luna 2011, p. 8). *Mestizo* and indigenous Ayahuasca practitioners are commonly known as *Vegetalistas* in the upper Amazon. These healers claim that their knowledge, power and healing skills come from 'plant teachers', that is, the spirits of the plants (Luna & Amaringo 1999, p. 12). Shamans from the *Vegetalismo* tradition that work specifically with Ayahuasca are known as *Ayahuasqueros*.

Initiatory training and ongoing spiritual development requires *Ayahuasqueros* to adhere to rules and dietary restrictions at certain times. Known as *la dieta* (the diet), shamans and patients follow abstinences from foods such as salts, sugars and fats, and often remain in isolation for long periods, so as to best learn from the plants (Horner 2012, p. 8). The diet is of the utmost importance in the shamanic initiations of *Vegetalistas*, as one's level of qualification, or depth of knowledge, is usually expressed by the duration and quantity of diets completed (Luna 1984, p. 126). It is considered extremely unwise and potentially dangerous to break the diet. Sexual activity is also prohibited, as it is claimed that the spirit of Ayahuasca can be jealous, and breaking the diet may leave one unprotected and vulnerable to malevolent spirits (Andritsky 1989, p. 79). Fotiou (2012, p. 14) notes that healers and patients can be punished by the spirits for not adhering to dietary rules, with informants reporting symptoms such as skin rashes after breaking their diet. Luna's (1986, p. 68) informant Don Emilio, a powerful *Vegetalista*, claims that some plant teachers are so strong and dangerous that if dietary restrictions are broken, they have even been known to kill. The rules of *la dieta* exemplify the importance of understanding indigenous knowledge when considering its potential use outside of Amazonian contexts. This will be explored in further detail in section II, which will show how shamanic knowledge can be interrelated with scientific research for safe and effective contemporary healing. Next I discuss the use of music in *Vegetalismo* ceremonies that is considered an essential practice for efficacy.

1.3. *Icaros* & Whistling

To facilitate healing on a patient, a shaman will often sing sacred songs called *icaros*. It is known that shamans are taught *icaros* by plant teachers during their Ayahuasca visions, and return from an ASC having perfectly memorized the songs (Luna 1986, p. 101). How many *icaros* a shaman knows can be an indicator of their power as a healer, but the true power comes from the spirits (Razam cited in Horner p. 39). A shaman may use an *icaros* for many purposes, such as healing and protection, and they are highly important in an Ayahuasca ceremony. Their use is extensive and entwined into the whole paradigm of *Vegetalismo* healing. The main functions of an *icaros* are; 'to call spirits, to cure objects and endow them with magical power, and to modulate the visions induced by Ayahuasca' (Beyer 2010, p. 66). Music acts as a conduit between the spirit world, the shaman and the patient, and is necessary for successful healing.

Whistling is also used at certain junctures throughout the Ayahuasca ceremony and has a sacred function for connecting shamans with the spirit world. More specifically, whistling is an incantation, and a 'way in which the spiritual forces of nature and the guardian spirit of the vine, itself, can be evoked by the healer' (Katz & Dobkin de Rios 1971, p. 324). The power of the *icaros* & whistling outlines the importance of the relationship between the shaman and the spirits in the healing ceremony. The shaman's chanting also navigates the participant's journey in the ASC, as the spirits act to guide, protect and cure (Demange 2002, p. 55). Music has a central function in nearly all appropriations of Ayahuasca use, yet in Amazonian practices, shamanism and music are so closely connected that they can be considered one and the same activity (Rouget cited in Shannon 2010, p. 310). The role of music is

integral to Ayahuasca healing, often resulting in physical and psychological manifestations during a ceremony. Shamanic music is an example of the indigenous epistemological traditions that connect humans with the non-material world of spirits. As more Westerners are engaging with this experiential healing, it presents significant problems for materialist science solely focused on biological perspectives. This will be discussed at length in section II, for now, further descriptions of *Vegetalismo* are required to provide deeper insight into tradition-based use.

1.4. *La Purga*

An important characteristic of the Ayahuasca experience is the cleansing process known as *la purga* (the purge). Although the success of the Ayahuasca ceremony is partly measured by whether or not the brew produces visions, the session is also considered successful if vomiting and diarrhea occurs. *La purga* is an important aspect of the ceremony and relates to following *la dieta*, as the plants work to cleanse the person (Luna 1986, pp. 149-150). The emetic effects of Ayahuasca are considered to be a manifestation of the need for both spiritual and physical cleansing (Tupper 2008, p. 298). Although vomiting and diarrhea are prominent, purging may occur in several ways. Some *Ayahuasqueros* suggest that yawning, crying, sweating and fever are powerful ways to purge, as they can be the best ways to cleanse emotionally (Fotiou 2012, p. 15). Three processual stages of the purge can be identified. The first is the bodily stage, usually vomiting; the second is psychological, dealing with personal issues; and the third is spiritual (Shanon 2010, p. 307). In some experiences patients observe strong visions and purging simultaneously. One of Fotiou's (2012, p. 15) informants stated

that 'she saw spirits that were encouraging her and sometimes seemed to be waiting to collect what she vomited'. *La purga* is a physical, psychological and spiritual emetic feature of Ayahuasca healing that contrasts the materialist paradigm of Western biomedicine. Rather than ignoring the shamanic context of Ayahuasca use, it will be shown how these indigenous traditions are being interrelated in contemporary method and practice, which outlines the dialectic of neo-enchantment in Ayahuasca research. *Vegetalismo* etiology will be discussed in detail below to outline the cultural implications of spiritual illness in the Amazon.

1.5. Etiology & *Vegetalismo* Cosmology

Due to the growing popularity of Ayahuasca, shamanic traditions such as *Vegetalismo* are receiving increasing attention. Anthropology has a significant role in understanding how indigenous and *mestizo* shamans conceptualize illness and heal patients using Ayahuasca. Contrasting the etiological framework of Western biomedicine, most illness in the upper Amazon is believed to originate from a spiritual rather than biological source (Tupper 2009b, p. 276). Ayahuasca efficacy is not characterized by its pharmacological constituents alone, its curative benefits are attributed to 'supernatural forces mediated by the plant spirits' (Tupper 2009b, p. 273). In turn, illness causation is believed to come from maleficent forces that are socially manifest in the upper Amazon.

The most common cause of illness is known as *envidia* (envy), which relates to how and why people may cause harm to one another (Luna 1986, p. 123). *Envidia* fits into the medical anthropological category of a 'culture-bound

syndrome'. This refers to 'culturally specific systems' of causation that differ from the biological etiologies of Western medicine (Winkelman 2009, p. 230). It is a world-view that considers almost all misfortune, sickness and suffering to stem from human sorcery, due to failed social relationships. The implications of these social failures result in the manifestation of ill will and the motivation to inflict harm (Beyer 2010, p. 134). Categories of natural illness such as a pathogenic infection are recognized in the Amazon, yet magical causation is attributed to malevolent spirits or evil people (Luna 1986, p. 120). It may be the case that people seek out the services of a sorcerer to enact revenge on an individual they believe may have done them wrong in some social capacity. There are shamans in the Amazon known as *Brujo's* or *Bruja's* (sorcerers) that engage with malevolent spiritual forces with the intention of causing harm (Fotiou 2010, p. 195). *Envidia* and resentment are interrelated terms that are culturally implicit to a remarkable constancy in the Amazon, and they usually occur through closer associations, rather than by strangers (Beyer 2010, p. 137). Through his research in the Putumayo region of the Colombian Amazon, Taussig (1987) suggests that the ubiquity of *envidia* is concomitant with the political economy of social life. The author elucidates the social presence of *envidia* (Taussig 1987, p. 394):

As the organizing principle for delineating misfortune, as the sociopsychological theory of the evil inevitably flowing from (perceived) inequality, and as the dominant signifier of perturbation in the social bond.

Political economy may have a deterministic influence in facilitating the social conditions for *envidia*, however, causation is not ultimately attributed to cultural or social factors. It may be that such conditions are the incitement for sorcery

or the motivating force for provocation, but they are not considered the power source of the misfortune. Luna (1986, p. 73) points out that for *mestizo* and indigenous populations of the Peruvian Amazon, the belief in spiritual beings who live in the jungle, water and air that interfere with humans is still firmly established. Therefore, in *Vegetalismo* healing, spiritual illness requires spiritual healing. In an Ayahuasca ceremony this is often acted out through the shaman's practice of 'sucking out illness' or by blowing the sacred *mapacho* 'tobacco smoke over affected parts of the body' (Andritsky 1989, p. 81) to cleanse, protect and heal the patient. Such practices are tied to indigenous knowledge systems, which are starkly oppositional to the Western objectivist epistemologies of modernity (Viveiros de Castro cited in Horner 2012, p. 18). The tradition-based paradigm of *Vegetalismo* healing challenges the premise of materialist science approach to illness and raises questions regarding Ayahuasca's potential use in Western contexts. To further explore this theme it is worth analyzing the appropriation of Ayahuasca into the religious practices of various syncretic churches.

1.6. *Santo Daime*, UDV & *Barquinha*

Across the globe Ayahuasca has taken on a contemporary syncretic context. Originating in Brazil, the main religions to incorporate Ayahuasca as a sacrament have been *Barquinha*, *Santo Daime* and *Uniao do Vegetal* (UDV). These churches have emerged out of the mixed race populations of the Amazon and Northeastern Brazil between the 1920s and the 1960s (Langdon & de Rose 2012, p. 43). As cross-cultural religious groups, they were formed out of Christianity, Indigenous Amazonian traditions and Afro-Brazilian practices (Shanon 2002, p. 4). Ritual consumption of Ayahuasca in the

syncretic churches differs significantly from tradition-based shamanic use, and should be mentioned for comparative insight.

The ceremonial use of Ayahuasca within these sects is strictly structured on traditional religious practices. Ayahuasca use is incorporated into the organizational functions of the churches, with limited memberships, leaders, acolytes and prescribed times for sacramental consumption (McKenna 2004, p. 113). In the *Santo Daime* church structure is hierarchical and paternalistic. During ceremonies men and women are separated in concentric circles, whilst singing is proscribed through a confluence of hymns (Beyer 2010, p. 290). The spiritist practices of the UDV is also highly structured and members are organized by 'degrees' in their spiritual development, as well as by their level of servitude to the organization (Dobkin de Rios & Rumrill 2008, p. 115). Ceremonies serve to provide members with a sense of belonging within their community, providing social cohesion through participation (Metzner 2006, p. 31). Ayahuasca is integrated into congregations as a sacred beverage for improving social and individual outcomes. Dobkin de Rios & Rumrill (1999) conducted multi-sited fieldwork at UDV churches in Brazil, and found that participants often shared similar experiences and beneficial outcomes. After ceremonies, there tended to be general feelings of euphoria; a common perception of transcendental reality and connectedness achieved through the common cause of their church (Dobkin de Rios & Rumrill 2008, p. 115). In addition to the ritualistic aspects of the ceremony, such as singing and preaching, Ayahuasca is viewed as a 'divine gift' or 'tool' that opens peoples receptivity to the spirit world and facilitates their spiritual evolution (Barbosa et al. 2009, p. 206). The appropriation of Ayahuasca into global religious contexts, counters the individualism and secularism predominant in industrial societies. Furthermore, as a socio-cultural phenomenon, it is an expanding

religious organization, connecting people through community and spiritual self-development. These congregations bring together religious and shamanic traditions into the contemporary world, contrasting with materialist society. Rather than a return to the sacred, these are practices suited for the contemporary era and as such are a form of neo-enchantment. As church membership has increased globally, however, complex issues have arisen regarding the legal and policy status of Ayahuasca.

The global expansion of Ayahuasca use within the syncretic churches has been of significant interest and controversy in recent years. Moving out of Brazil, congregations are being formed in countries such as Australia, Japan, Spain and the USA (Tupper 2008, p. 299). One of the most significant aspects of the appropriation of Ayahuasca outside of the Amazon has been the legal implications and policy issues that have arisen. Churches are engaged in legal disputes with the State in countries where Ayahuasca, or more specifically its active ingredient DMT is an illegal psychoactive substance. When Brazil approved the UDV's use of Ayahuasca for ceremonial use in 1987, it marked the 'first time in over 1600 years that a government has granted permission to its nonindigenous citizens to use a psychedelic substance in the context of religious practices' (McKenna 2004, p. 114). The situation globally is currently of great interest, as litigations are underway in many countries including the USA and Europe (Shanon 2010, p. 28). Policy issues are part of an ongoing discourse that Tupper (2011, p. 131) describes as 'ideological underpinnings of international regimes of prohibition', also known as the 'drug war paradigm'. The religious and spiritual contexts of Ayahuasca use have become an effective basis for legitimation and control (Dobkin de Rios 2009, p. 159) that some critics observe to reflect the neo-colonial hegemony and Eurocentrism of drug controls transnationally (Tupper 2009a, pp. 122-123). As Ayahuasca

spreads out of the Amazon, it is confronted with the rationalistic hegemony of the State. Current legal battles, however, continue to challenge Western law that classifies it as an illegal drug. The power dimensions that restrict the use of Ayahuasca demonstrate the many obstacles it faces, as it finds its place in Western consciousness. It also becomes vulnerable to the exploitative forces of global politics, economy and consumer culture.

2. THE GLOBALIZATION OF AYAHUASCA

2.1. 'Drug Tourism'

Ayahuasca's rapid globalization has raised concerns regarding the dangers of its potential misuse. The imperative for anthropologists lies in understanding the motivations and interactions of both healers and those seeking the Ayahuasca experience. Dobkin de Rios (Dobkin de Rios & Rumrill 2009, p. 167) first posited a 'dark side of globalization' by observing Ayahuasca 'drug tourism' in the Peruvian city of Iquitos. For Westerners travelling to the Amazon seeking Ayahuasca, the health risks can be significant when encountering ill-qualified practitioners purporting to be shamans. It can be an ambiguous task for outsiders seeking Ayahuasca, as 'many of the so-called native healers are common drug dealers, dressed for deception' (Dobkin de Rios & Rumrill 2008, p. 71). In conceptualizing the Western tourist, Dobkin de Rios (Dobkin de Rios & Rumrill 2008, p. 70) suggests that motivations of 'emptiness', 'low self-esteem' and confusion about values, are what compel these individuals to seek out an Ayahuasca 'trip'. It is also claimed that Westerners are inevitably 'purchasing mysticism' in the Amazon, in turn being exploited by charlatans (Dobkin de Rios & Rumrill 2009, p. 166). This aspect is of concern and deserves continued attention for understanding the impacts of Ayahuasca globalization. It is also important to outline here that the motivations of Westerners heading to the Amazon, and the ensuing cultural implications, are multifarious, and not all negative.

The influx of Westerners has implications for local communities, and drug tourism has had some negative impacts on traditional healing practices. It has been noted, however, that the severity implied by Dobkin de Rios, may

perhaps be an oversimplification (Tupper 2011, p. 58). Ayahuasca tourism, like other tourism, also contributes to the struggling economies of Amazonian communities, and funds have helped protect some local ecologies and medicinal plants (Metzner 2006, p. 34). Questioning the concept of drug tourism, Winkelman (2005, p. 210) aims to understand the motivations of Westerners seeking 'traditional spiritual medicine' and examines whether what is going on is really a form of 'drug dilettantism'. Research was conducted at an Amazonian Ayahuasca retreat and reveals that primary motivations were related to spiritual development and personal experience (Winkelman 2005, p. 214), rather than reasons of inebriation or 'tripping'. The range of motivations varied for participants, from emotional healing, assistance with substance abuse, personal evolution and life direction (Winkelman 2005, p. 211). The benefits, motivations and dangers of Ayahuasca healing require continued attention, and I agree with Dobkin de Rios & Rumrill (2008, p. 77) that the anthropologist's responsibility is to pay attention to the various appropriations and potential misuses of Ayahuasca. What has become clear, is that Westerners are not only seeking Ayahuasca healing, but seeking to learn from the traditions of *Vegetalismo* and integrate them into more 'holistic' medical practices than are offered by biomedicine.

The practice of *Vegetalismo* has moved beyond the Amazon and into the global sphere. Westerners are now learning to become healers, neo-*Ayahuasqueros* or neo-shamans. The increasing dissemination of knowledge driven by the Internet has been integral in the globalization of Ayahuasca, providing new 'sociological conditions for ... [it] to enter the popular mindscape of Euroamerican culture in the way it has' (Tupper 2009a, p. 123). This increasing phenomenon of Westerners learning 'the medicine' has been defined as 'cross-cultural *Vegetalismo*', which is based on tradition, but carried

out for and by non-Amazonians (Tupper 2011, p. 13). Those seeking to become healers often undertake apprenticeships in *Vegetalismo*, whilst ceremonies and healing often take on a hybridized form in the non-Amazonian settings (Tupper 2011, p. 15). Such contemporary rituals incorporate several traditions in addition to the primary use of Ayahuasca. As well as being trained in the use of entheogens, many practitioners and indeed participants, are experienced in other psychospiritual practices such as shamanic drum journeying, Buddhist *Vipassana* meditation and yoga (Metzner 2006, p. 36). These practices are becoming widely known in the West, for people seeking a spiritual context to healing.

Cross-cultural *Vegetalismo* is a ritualistic appropriation of Amazonian traditions. It offers a re-connection to spiritual healing practices and appears to be emerging into Western consciousness with burgeoning nascency. It reveals a counter-culture movement among Westerners seeking alternative paradigms of healing to biomedicine. As deviation from materialist conceptualizations of health, cross-cultural *Vegetalismo* fits within the parameters of neo-enchantment, as new approaches to healing suited for the contemporary world. It is clear, however, that it is a complex field, and the implications deserve further attention that I will outline below.

The Ayahuasca paradigm is now part of a cultural flow of people and practices transnationally. The emergence of this intercultural exchange, however, has become the focus of significant criticism (Fotiou 2010, p. 135). The 'psychonaut', as describes by Ott (1994), is a voyager using entheogenic drugs as a vehicle for exploring consciousness. The psychonaut characterizes the non-ritual use of psychoactive plants, which in some cases can be purchased over the counter or online for home-brewing consumption (Tupper

2011, p. 13). Such use of Ayahuasca by Westerners, and others, who lack the necessary knowledge and support, is concerning considering the high risk of psychological and spiritual damage when used incorrectly. It is worth noting, however, that Ayahuasca consumption does not lend itself easily to non-ritual use. Common effects such as *la purga*, or the psychological distress that may be experienced whilst in an ASC, do tend to discourage casual experimentation (Tupper 2008, p. 299). In fact, there is no evidence in the literature that Ayahuasca can be used for purposes of inebriation outside of its healing context.

The non-ritual exploration of Ayahuasca characterized by the psychonaut, reflects the limitations imposed upon consciousness exploration and spiritual healing in Western culture. Many participants who seek out Ayahuasca feel that 'Western culture, in addition to discouraging people from discovering themselves, is lacking in utilizing ritual in any constructive way' (Fotiou 2010, p. 240). Furthermore, it is the transformative potential and reported benefits of Ayahuasca ceremonies that have caused it to receive so much interest in the global sphere. Despite the cross-cultural variations in world-views of participants, those coming from Western conditioning find Ayahuasca's transformative potential as being antithetical to the rationalism and materialism dominant in their society (Fotiou's 2010, p. 132). For people who's epistemological framework has been developed out of a dominant rationality and materialism, Ayahuasca offers an alternative healing paradigm. Luna (2011, p. 19) posits that:

We are now in a phase beyond Ayahuasca tourism ... now-a-days [people] do it with the intention of finding guidance from within, for personal growth, or in search of spiritual experience.

As a part of this descriptive analysis, however, it is pertinent to recognize the social implications for indigenous and *mestizo* communities regarding the commodification of Ayahuasca into the global sphere.

2.2. Cultural Appropriation & New Age

For those seeking to counter the secularization of modern society, Ayahuasca healing may offer a contemporary alternative, part of a neo-enchantment in the West. However, the appropriation of indigenous knowledge and spiritual wisdom is a concern for anthropologists considering the power dimensions of globalization. 'New Age' movements that appropriate and hybridize indigenous practices have been criticized as being products of liberal Western capitalism. Borne out of the counterculture of the 1960s, New Age is an eclectic response to technocratic society, aiming for personal growth and self-transformation (Fotiou 2010, pp. 94-95). Yet, some critiques of contemporary global movements and spiritual groups, aim to point out the consumerist culture inherent in Western spiritual appropriations of traditional indigenous practices. Aldred (2000, p. 239) claims an irony in the 'consumer culture' that Westerners seek to escape, as 'New Agers' pursue 'spiritual meaning and cultural identification through acts of purchase'. Critics have identified some practitioners who commodify spirituality and orientate themselves within a modern continuation of Calvinistic principles (York 2001, p. 367). The results being, the 'theft' of intellectual property and pharmacopoeia by Westerners whom are 'pushing aside indigenous or *mestizo* healers to take over their rituals ... referred to as *biopiracy*' (Dobkin de Rios 2009, p. 137). Given such circumstances, there is a lack of power and choice for indigenous groups to control what happens to their medicines such as Ayahuasca, as they become

popularized and appropriated into Western culture.

Whilst outlining some of the exploitative potentialities of appropriation, it is also important to recognize the complexity of cultural exchange. Tupper (2009a, pp. 125-127) notes that whilst appropriation of indigenous culture can undermine the integrity of a community, it would be remiss to characterize 'all instances of ostensibly asymmetric cross-cultural transfer of spiritual or esoteric knowledge as necessarily problematic or reprehensible'. Either way, the implications are significant for local Amazonian populations, which reveal potential imperialistic inequalities (Holman 2011, p. 106). Also, in response to the political economy of Ayahuasca, local practitioners are adapting to a new economic market, driven by Westerners seeking to consume the 'sacred drink'. Some *Ayahuasqueros* and *Vegetalistas* are now incorporating Western stratagems into their business practices. Shamans have now 'adopted the rationalizing devices of modernity, primarily those of collective organization and professionalism' (Beyer 2010, p. 337). It is clear that continued research is required to determine not only what is given in the processes of cultural exchange, but what is taken away (York 2001, p. 363). Due to increasing global interest in Ayahuasca, the ensuing implications for indigenous people require further attention in addressing the power dimensions of Ayahuasca's use and appropriation.

Section I has provided an analysis of Ayahuasca healing paradigms and the recent developments of its use and appropriation from the Amazon and beyond. This section has contextualized neo-enchantment with the socio-cultural phenomenon of Ayahuasca healing. With this understanding, it is now time to deepen the analysis and explicate the neo-enchantment of Ayahuasca. Section II will provide insight into research theory and methodology aimed at

overcoming the materialist split between Western and non-Western epistemologies.

SECTION II – RESEARCH ANALYSIS: THEORY & METHODOLOGY

3. ANTHROPOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

3.1. Animism & the New Animism

Early ethnologists and anthropologists tended towards ethnocentrism, by denigrating indigenous beliefs into a primitive category, antithetical to modern civilization. The dominant perceptions that developed out of the Enlightenment perpetuated views of separation, not only between mind and body, but also between human and non-human categories. This ‘Cartesian self-deception’ (Harvey 2006, p. 10) has continued to promulgate a spiritual/materialist dichotomy in formulating truth (Bird-David 1999, p. 68) that can be identified in the anthropological development of animism. Moving beyond its original definition, animism has re-emerged as a renewed methodology for overcoming the hegemony of scientific materialism that emanated out of the ‘constellations of political power specific to European history’ (Stokke 2009, p. 3). Recent theories of animism are aimed at overcoming Cartesian limitations, by engaging with pluralistic epistemological and ontological perspectives. I suggest contemporary theories of animism fit the neo-enchantment approach as they are dialectically engaged between Western and non-Western epistemological frameworks, and are formulated with the intent to expand theories and methodologies suitable for understanding contemporary cross-cultural phenomenon such as Ayahuasca.

E.B Tylor first coined the term animism in *Primitive Culture* (1871) to describe ‘the belief in spiritual beings’, which he asserted were non-empirical entities (Harvey 2006, p. 11). As a social evolutionist he argued that such beliefs were

false and absurd, belonging to primitive people at lesser-evolved stages of religion than Europeans (Horner 2012, p. 14). The Tylorian use of animism was aimed at delineating differences between 'modern' and 'traditional' societies. Animism was the childlike world-view of primitives, and in the evolutionary spectrum, animism and science were viewed as antithetical (Bird-David 1999, p. 69). Tylor's descriptive framework of animism is fraught with Eurocentric assumptions, now well acknowledged by anthropologists. Recent contemporary scholarship is engaging with a new animism, focusing on the 'porous boundaries between human and more-than-human worlds' (Barrett 2011, p. 124). The intent is to explicate the concept of 'relationality' that goes beyond the reductionist view of materialist science. The new animism aligns with the reconfiguring parameters of neo-enchantment, as a new research tool for anthropologists overcoming human centered world-views.

Animism has undergone a theoretical shift that has moved away from concepts of belief, to refocus on epistemology and ontology. Contrasting Cartesian dualism, contemporary views of animism aim to understand how humans are not separate from the world in which they live (Beyer 2010, p. 112). Theoretical developments have shifted away from determining whether something is animate or inanimate, to instead focus on how we should relate (Harvey 2010, p. 19). In contrast to a Humanist perspective or modernist epistemology founded on separation, animistic knowledge is 'understanding relatedness from a related point of view within the shifting horizons of the related viewer' (Bird-David 1999, p. 77). Animism is, therefore, ontologically engaged and aimed at comparative ethnological distinctions of being in the world (Beyer 2010, p. 112). The relationality of the new animism contrasts *a priori* assumptions that conceptualize boundaries between categories of organisms. Instead 'it is rather a trail along which life is lived ... not of interconnected

points but of interwoven lines' (Ingold 2006, p. 13). For anthropologists, animism can be useful as discursive field for respectfully understanding world-views explicitly in regards to indigenous people (Harvey 2006, p. 11). This means proceeding with an open mindedness, to rearticulate contemporary world-views with a more heterogeneous approach to understanding the world through a plurality of epistemologies. Ingold (2006, p. 19) suggests that 'knowing must be reconnected with being, epistemology with ontology, thought with life ... [leading] us to propose the re-animation of our own, so-called 'western' tradition of thought'. Animism is purposive in that it seeks to move beyond the world of Western rationalism by engaging with alternative world-views through a wider conceptualization of relationality.

Contemporary animism specifically addresses holistic world-views that prioritize a symbiotic relationship between human and non-human life. One of the key contributors to this field has been Hallowell (1960), whose research with the *Ojibwa* of North America has been of importance in freeing animism from modernist concepts of personhood (Bird-David 1999, p. 71). Hallowell considers 'ethno-metaphysics' to be a cultural realm for exploring personhood beyond a Western perspective. Studying *Ojibwa* ontology, Hallowell points out that that the indigenous concept of personhood is antithetical to the categorical abstractions of Western thought. In other words, the concept of 'person' is not synonymous with 'human being' (Hallowell 1960, p. 21). Relations between human and non-human persons have a social significance for the *Ojibwa*, and values are given to the entire range of social interaction. More specifically, these are moral values, which are viewed as standards of mutual obligations, not only between human beings, but between other than human persons (Hallowell 1960, p. 45). Whilst acknowledging the spiritual dimensions of

Ojibwa cosmology and social life, the overarching principle is that of relationality; also a common precept in the Amazon regions of South America.

Reichel-Dolmatoff's research on the *Tukano* of the Northwest Colombian Amazon, outlines the sophistication of Indian knowledge as an integrated world-view of philosophy, cosmology and ecology. Reichel-Dolmatoff (1997, p. 8) notes the ingenious adaptive strategies of *Tukano* Indians for coping with ecological and climatic conditions, whilst maintaining strong social, ecological and moral systems of belief and practice. The animistic world-view of *Tukano* Indians, form a synthesis and unifying conceptualization of social and spiritual life, as the author clarifies:

This cosmological model of a system which constantly requires rebalancing in the form of inputs of energy retrieved by individual effort, constitutes a religious proposition which is intimately connected with the social and economic organization of the group (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1997, p. 11).

The balance and relational quality of all life is given great consideration in *Tukano* society. Animistic beliefs and reverence for 'superior forces' indicate to the *Tukano* that it is necessary to respect all life, biotic and non-biotic, and to apply adaptive strategies to maintain balance, individual and collective survival (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1997, p. 11). Furthermore, the use of Ayahuasca, known as *Yagé* in Colombia, is central in affirming the *Tukano* world-view. The trance state or ASC is not only at the core of ritual practice and spiritual belief, but it is at the core of practical affairs of daily life (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1997, p. 244). Far from being non-rational or primitive, *Tukano* animism reveals an interconnected sophistication in maintaining a spiritual, social and ecological

balance of relationality, a significant point considering the lack of such equilibrium in the contemporary Western world.

Ethnographic research in the Amazon has provided a wealth of insight into divergent Amerindian ontologies. It is apparent in the literature that concepts of humanity are not restricted to human beings alone. Vilaça (2005, p. 448) points out that humanity also includes spirits and animals and is being continually re-defined through ethnographic insights. Western scholars have tended to downplay or ridicule the concept of 'other than human persons' (Barrett 2011, p. 126), yet recent perspectives of animism are bringing together ethnographic insights to elucidate world-views contra to the human-centered vision of modernity (Harvey 2006, p. 12). Ayahuasca, or more specifically the shamanic traditions of *Vegetalismo*, offer an alternative to the Humanist paradigm. Animism is a suitable theoretical framework, as it 'offers powerful counter-rhythms to the rampant physical materialism' (Horner 2012, p. 16) of Western science. Animism is being developed to reconfigure the epistemological lens, to challenge the human centered notions of personhood and our interrelationship with the 'natural' world. This theoretical framework aligns with the neo-enchantment paradigm, and can be further contextualized by its connection with Ayahuasca traditions.

3.2 Animism & Ayahuasca: 'Plant Teachers'

To further understand the animistic dimensions of Ayahuasca use, it is worth explicating the concept of 'plant teachers' as mentioned in chapter one. In the Amazonian traditions, Ayahuasca is constructed as much more than a drug, it is imbued with 'agency and a capacity to relay knowledge and information from

the realms beyond ordinary ken' (Luna cited in Tupper 2009b, p. 272). Indigenous cosmology, as noted with the *Tukano*, is relationally constructed and the balance of spiritual and communal life requires maintaining relations between human and other than human life. As a sacred plant, Ayahuasca is believed to facilitate individual and community life balance, through interactions and alliances with spiritual forces (Luna 2011, p. 8). The ASC that occurs after imbibing Ayahuasca is considered by shamans to produce visions that stem from important sources of knowledge (Trupp cited in Evans Schultes & Rauffaut 2004, p. 23). Learning from the plants is the primary source of power and knowledge for *Vegetalista* shamans of the Peruvian Amazon, if they adhere strictly to *la dieta*. Luna (1986, p. 63) points out that *Vegetalista's* seek to establish rapport with intelligent beings called 'doctores' (spirit doctors) who teach them about flora and fauna in the Amazon. This is a pertinent detail regarding the healing process of an Ayahuasca ceremony, as illness and treatment are determined by the shaman through their communications with the spirits of Ayahuasca (Tupper 2009b, p. 275). Animism theory offers a potential for developing Western research frameworks for understanding indigenous knowledge and practices. As Ayahuasca is becoming widely used beyond the indigenous and *mestizo* contexts of the Amazon, animism may potentiate a deeper understanding between Western and non-Western epistemologies.

Despite pointing out the implicit differences between Western and indigenous epistemologies, many scientists are seeking to move beyond a critique of modernist limitations or primitive naivety, to develop pluralistic and interrelated forms of knowledge suitable for contemporary understandings of body, mind and spirit. Griffith (cited in Stokke 2009, p. 11) calls for a 'paradigm of unity' between pre-modern and modern world-views, whereby 'ideas of modernity,

such as the human self, historical meaning and truth are corresponded with pre-modern notions of divine reality, cosmic meaning and enchanted nature'. Animism theory in anthropology is now developing beyond the descriptive Otherness of its early 'armchair' theory. Harvey (2006, p. 15) notes that by recognizing the limitations of the Cartesian separation, it may be possible to gain a 'relational and participatory perspective on the job of academia [that] may greatly enhance the effectiveness of our academic work'. As an anthropological approach, animism fits within the parameters of neo-enchantment. The new animism is a shift in theoretical and methodological approaches to scholarly work, developing ideological principles for overcoming scientific materialism and objectivist research that may have a significant influence in the study of Ayahuasca. The following chapter continues to analyze contemporary scholarly approaches to Ayahuasca research that fit within the neo-enchanted paradigm.

4. THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF AYAHUASCA

4.1 Structural Typology of Ayahuasca

Phenomenology is a nascent field contributing to the multidisciplinary study of Ayahuasca. More than merely an adjunct in the discourse, it seeks new insights into the experiential and subjective context of Ayahuasca use. It is through the phenomenological study of Ayahuasca that the paradigm of spiritual and supernatural forces central to Amazonian cosmology 'can be corroborated, if not validated' (Tupper 2008, p. 298). I intend to show how such studies align with neo-enchantment, as they challenge the *status quo* of cognitive research and potentiate new methodological and theoretical parameters for understanding Ayahuasca healing. As a cognitive study focused on human consciousness in a non-ordinary state or ASC the parameters for research raises some interesting phenomenological issues.

Cognitive psychologist Benny Shanon (2010) develops a structural typology of Ayahuasca to focus on experiential and phenomenological data. It is a comprehensive study that encompasses personal experience, interviews with participants and extensive data analysis of the literature (Shanon 2002, p. 6). Taking a 'radical approach', Shannon challenges the dominant view of 'representationalism' in cognitive psychology, which views the human mind as a kind of sophisticated computer (Shanon 2010, p. 32). Instead, the focus is on the experiential capacity of human cognition, that is, being and acting in the world (Shanon 2010, p. 33). Emphasizing a 'non-reductive' psychological outlook, Shanon rejects the 'biological reductionism' of neurophysiological explanation, and posits that such accounts fail to address the experiential 'meaning patterns' of cognition (Shanon 2010, p. 35). Following this, Shanon

develops a structural typology of the Ayahuasca experience, with a significant focus on visualization, non-visual, temporal, semantic and reflective themes.

Despite the significance of personal beliefs, cultural background and so forth, Ayahuasca is an experiential realm of non-ordinary reality that can transcend cultural determinants. Typological similarities are reportedly common in Ayahuasca visions despite one's social position or ethnic origins. Westerners with no prior knowledge of indigenous cosmology or Amazonian culture often report similar visions to that of Indians (Shanon 2010, p. 318). Some of the most commonly reported visions involve contact with snakes, anacondas, jaguars and other forest feline's (Harner 1973, p. 160). Sometimes, however, the same spirit may appear differently. The mother spirit of Ayahuasca usually appears as an anaconda (Dobkin de Rios 1972, p. 118), yet other common reports visualize *La Madre* (the mother) embodying a male or female human form (Beyer 2010, p. 118). Such imagery is deeply mythologized in the indigenous cosmologies of the Amazon, however, by drinking Ayahuasca anyone may develop the ability to contact spirits, usually invisible in ordinary reality (Narby 1998, p. 25). Considering this, Shanon suggests that the Ayahuasca experience is both 'cross-personal' and 'cross-cultural', identifying commonalities that represent a 'cognitive universal' (Shanon cited in Tupper 2011, pp. 39-40). Beyond the categorization of visions within the cross-personal experience of vision content, there are key thematic commonalities relating to the divine, birth, death and rebirth, celestial bodies, myth, platonic ideas and so forth (Shanon 2010, pp. 128-132). This visionary content of the individual's experience is described as a 'micro-level analysis', but a 'macro-level analysis' is also applied to thematic meaning relating to one's personality, the human predicament and life experiences of being, health, nature and the physical world (Shanon 2010, pp. 143-149). Meaning and content identified

throughout the structural typology reveals metaphysical insights that require researchers to develop contemporary methodologies aimed at a more suitable approach for exploring the phenomenological dimensions of the Ayahuasca paradigm.

To overcome representationalism, cognition can be viewed as both embodied and experiential. In the non-ordinary reality of the Ayahuasca experience the 'internal and the external are intertwined and there cannot be a sharp divide between the two' (Shanon 2010, p. 320). I draw the parallel here to relational epistemology discussed earlier regarding the new theoretical parameters of animism in anthropology. Similarly, Shanon seeks to challenge representationalism, as it limits reality to internal cognition and fails to account for relational understandings of consciousness. To outline the problem Shanon (2003, p. 138) points out:

Between the cognitive representation and the world there is always a gap that cannot be bridged. The question is how these representations connect with the world. If cognition, and with it the human faculty of knowledge, is to be accounted for in representational terms, then cognition is bound to be confined to the realm of the internal.

In Ayahuasca research the ties between mind and environment are interrelated and interdependent. Common Ayahuasca experiences often result in the realization that knowledge is circumvented between the two; it is what actually ties people with the world, and therefore a 'gap', in fact, does not exist (Shanon 2003, p. 138). The parameters of consciousness are reported to expand beyond the internal, and such experiences profoundly influence people's lives beyond. Shanon (2003, pp. 138-139) states that:

The differentiation between the inner and outer realms seems devoid of meaning. Thus, one feels that the individuated consciousness of each person is part of a higher, more extended suprapersonal consciousness.

Phenomenology contributes to the emerging multidisciplinary discourse of Ayahuasca, as a research framework for advancing insight into the experiential dimension of its use cross-culturally. By engaging with contemporary approaches to human consciousness and the complexity of Ayahuasca's effect on the mind, Shanon's research is contributing to advancing theoretical parameters, beyond the biological reductionism and scientific materialism of Western epistemology. In this way, the phenomenology of Ayahuasca is part of a neo-enchantment approach in scholarly work.

4.2 A 'Pragmatist Approach'

Ayahuasca research stimulates a necessity for expanding the methodological parameters of scientific materialism, as I have intended to outline throughout. The impetus is to develop knowledge of Ayahuasca less constrained by objectivist disciplinary limitations. Another recent example is Echenhofer's (2012, p. 63) phenomenology and electroencephalogram (EEG) research, which aims at a comparative mixed methods approach towards the study of Ayahuasca. The author provides a 'pragmatist approach' for analyzing multidisciplinary evidence of spiritual healing and creative benefits. Due to the complexity of Ayahuasca research, Echenhofer (2012, p. 63) maintains that a pragmatist approach is well suited for 'creating knowledge through lines of action ... that different groups or people can accomplish together'. The

appropriateness of a pragmatist approach towards Ayahuasca is the recognition of experiential complexity, whereby the existential reality has layers of subjective and objective meaning (Feilzer cited in Echenhofer 2012, p. 64).

The author's work is focused on Ayahuasca, yet it is significantly related to the psychology of religion and spirituality. Paloutzian and Park (cited in Echenhofer 2012, p. 64) suggest there is a lack of theory mediating between psychology and religion in addressing 'the range of topics in the field that serve as comprehensive integrative devices [and] it is precisely such integrating themes that the field needs'. Echenhofer (2012, p. 63) develops a Creative Cycle Process (CCP) model to map the sequential stages of images and psychological processes, to provide a greater understanding of narrative coherence and wholeness of the Ayahuasca experience. The CCP is aimed at depicting processes of the self in relation to the world, so that variables such as gender, culture, genetics and world-view, being spiritual or aesthetic, play important roles in the uniqueness of the Ayahuasca experience (Echenhofer 2012, p. 65). The intention of the CCP is integrative, aiming to bring together many seemingly unrelated aspects of Ayahuasca research. Echenhofer (2012, p. 84) posits that a 'transdisciplinary collaboration involving further integration of disciplinary knowledge and methods is needed'. The pragmatist approach and CCP model represent theoretical and methodological approaches for overcoming the Western dichotomy of science and spirituality. This dialectic is significant for moving beyond materialist limitations, by developing a multidisciplinary discourse I consider to fit within the parameters of neo-enchantment. The next chapter further develops this dialectic.

5. NEO-ENCHANTMENT & AYAHUASCA: A DIALECTICAL APPROACH

5.1. Science & Spirituality

Ayahuasca is becoming of increasing interest in biomedical research aimed at assessing its efficacy, safety, clinical and pharmacological potentialities. It is necessary, however, to be critical of materialist approaches that seek to 'rationalize the irrational' (Cabieses cited in Mabit 2007, p. 2), by failing to acknowledge the complex importance of cultural context in its use. To do this requires dialectic reasoning in research that seeks to synthesize Western and non-Western epistemologies as they apply to the discursive and practical developments of Ayahuasca healing paradigms. From a medical anthropology perspective, efficacy is conceptualized as fluid and constantly shifting across plural medical systems between patient and healer (Waldram 2000, p. 615). Ayahuasca research, as has been outlined in my descriptive analysis, challenges biological assumptions of causation and healing, and thus requires a pluralistic approach in Western research parameters. For example, *mestizo* and indigenous populations in the Amazon make sharp distinctions between 'disease' and 'illness', which as pointed out earlier, is significant in the etiologies of Ayahuasca shamanism.

Disease fits within the biomedical framework of biological pathogenic malfunctions, whereas illness has a cultural context and is caused by sorcery or *envidia* (Beyer 2010, p. 132). The very lack of understanding between these two paradigms in the West has inevitably proven problematic, and has been evident in the study of tradition-based medicines such as Ayahuasca. As Waldram (2000, p. 616) suggests:

To employ a controlled clinical trial necessitates the removal of traditional medicine from its proper cultural context, but to assess it in situ using criteria of the controlled clinical trail applies a standard that biomedicine does not normally apply to itself.

Attempting to classify Ayahuasca by its chemical compounds without considering the wider cultural contexts of its use and appropriation, promulgates the hegemony of Western science, which fails to engage with indigenous knowledge in favor of its own secular determinations of truth. Bravo & Grob (1989, p. 124) note that it is important that shamanistic paradigms are studied, to safely and effectively use psychedelic substances in modern societies. The appropriation of Ayahuasca into a Western therapeutic context can potentially be problematic for both patient and therapist. The ASC induced by Ayahuasca makes 'the subject less accessible through rational linear language and requires a symbolic and metaphorical language based on energetic modulations' (Mabit 2007, p. 9). This in turn challenges the hegemonic doctor/patient relationship in the West. Foucault outlined how patients/individuals were dehumanized and objectified as 'bodies' of 'scientific classification', subjugated to the 'medical gaze' (Letcher 2007, p. 76). Ayahuasca healing is an antithetical approach to the observer/subject paradigm dominant in Western biomedicine. Contemporary studies of Ayahuasca are seeking to engage with scientific and spiritual knowledge, synthesizing theory and practice, epistemology and ontology. A neo-enchantment of research possibilities are emerging, below I analyze some of the contemporary approaches that fit this paradigm.

5.2 Clinical Studies

The clinical study of Ayahuasca is a central for analyzing the potential use and appropriation of Ayahuasca outside of its tradition-based practices. As it is now a part of the discursive realm of knowledge in the West, it is also politically realized through liberal-democratic policy-making transnationally (see Tupper 2011 for detailed analysis). In assessing potential drug treatments in the West, Winkelman (2001, p. 340) notes that ‘substance abuse rehabilitation treatment programs have failed to incorporate the knowledge provided by a vast literature indicating the important health benefits of altered states of consciousness’. The *a priori* epistemological assumptions of Western professionals has resulted in a lack of understanding of ASCs, coupled with the negative social stigma attached, due to a lack of training (Winkelman 2001, p. 341). The use of ASCs and shamanic practices are a potential for treating substance abusers, as it may provide a ‘holistic paradigm for integrating spiritual dimensions within a biopsychosocial approach’ (Winkelman 2001, p. 345). Such integration fits within the concept of a neo-enchantment, by bringing together spirituality and Western science. This presents, of course, a difficult endeavor, and one that requires biomedical practitioners to see the use of plants beyond merely a ‘collocation of molecules’ (Beyer 2010, p. 175). To do this, the medical observer may need to engage themselves in the experiential process and enter the epistemological realm of plant knowledge through their own subjective proclivities.

An example of an integrative approach to healing, one that fits the neo-enchantment paradigm is the *Takiwasi Center* in the Peruvian high-Amazon. *Takiwasi* is a drug addiction treatment center that brings together traditional medicine with Western practices of psychology. The center operates a

tripartite treatment process; 'the use of medicinal plants; psychotherapeutic follow-up; and daily group cohabitation (community life)' (Mabit 2007, p. 10). Central to the healing process at *Takiwasi* is the use of Ayahuasca for facilitating experiences integral to successful treatment (Mabit 2007, p. 11). It is the subjective experiences, both symbolic and spiritual that demand drug addiction treatment to overcome 'the modern taboo that excludes spirituality from investigative work ... to dare to consider the subjective experiences of the individual as a departure point for research' (Mabit 2007, p. 11). The 'phenomenon of addiction' is considered to represent a social illness or pathology in the West, which requires conceptualizing drug use in context of individual intention and socio-cultural environment.

Researchers at *Takiwasi* consider the desire to explore consciousness as a legitimate human aspiration. It is hypothesized that in many cases it is not substances themselves that are so much the issue, but rather their inadequate use (Mabit 2007, p. 3). The importance of 'ritual' in the treatment process at *Takiwasi* is posited on assimilating the phenomenological experience. In other words, rather than being disassociated, the subject feels unification between the non-ordinary world of the ASC and the ordinary state of consciousness that they inevitably return to (Mabit 2007, p. 5). The ritual context is given further support by psychological therapists at *Takiwasi*, who require participants to follow a structured ritual framework throughout. Significantly, therapists also ingest Ayahuasca in the ritual process of healing to 'tune in' with their patients. This requires therapists trained in traditional practices to utilize means of the non-rational medicine of Ayahuasca, and at the same time maintain their patient's psychic integrity and security (Mabit 2007, p. 9). *Takiwasi* offers a treatment for drug addiction that brings together pluralistic medical practices with spirituality through Ayahuasca medicine. Further research on Mabit's work

at *Takiwasi* is needed to legitimate and explore the potentiality of such treatment programs (Tupper 2011, p. 43). As a neo-enchanted healing approach, it is dialectically engaged between two paradigms of drug treatment, bringing together Western and non-Western epistemologies and spirituality.

Takiwasi is contributing to an expanding body of research that is legitimating not only Ayahuasca for healing, but also potential advancements for synthesizing science and spirituality. Mabit's (2007, p. 7) research correlates with the increasing literature that confirms Ayahuasca to be safe and efficacious when administered with the necessary support. Providing the appropriate environment, substances such as Ayahuasca that elicit an ASC, rarely result in adverse reactions (Santos 2013, p. 71). As can be seen, Ayahuasca healing can be used pluralistically and applied cross-culturally for healing body, mind and spirit.

Takiwasi brings together theory and practice from non-Western and Western traditions. This nascent approach to healing is dialectically engaged, therefore challenging materialist and objectivist hegemony. Furthermore, it is giving legitimacy to the efficacy of shamanic practices, and therefore aligns with the concept of neo-enchantment. Other studies of Ayahuasca are also contributing to the multidisciplinary field, seeking to interrelate scientific safety and efficacy with the spiritual and ritual context of its use and appropriation.

Recent studies are offering insight into the efficacy of Ayahuasca by analyzing its physical, psychological and spiritual healing possibilities. As a field for investigating Ayahuasca, the UDV church has been a suitable and enthusiastic participatory organization. The UDV places high import in the empirical search for scientific truth, yet determines no conflict between science and religion

(McKenna 2004, p. 117). In 1993, what was later to become known as the 'Hoasca Project' (see; Grob et al. 1996, Callaway et al. 1999, McKenna 2004), a multinational collaborative investigation was put together to investigate the effects of Ayahuasca on long-term members of the church (Grob et al. 1996, p. 86). Research was carried out in the field at a UDV temple, and in a laboratory setting (McKenna 2004, p. 118). The Hoasca Project was conducted as a pilot study of 15 subjects and yielded some important results. 11 of the 15 participants reported profound changes in their lives due to ritual Ayahuasca use. As well as a cessation of drug and alcohol use, many subjects stated that their conduct and world-view had significantly changed through practicing good deeds, respecting nature and being conscious of their chosen words (Dobkin de Rios, Grob & Baker 2002, p. 242). Despite being a small study, it was the first of its kind and two main results were outlined. Firstly, long-term use showed no signs of physical or psychological deterioration (Callaway 1999, p. 255). Secondly, regular ceremonial use 'seems to increase one's ability to psychologically adapt to the larger process of life' (Grob et al. cited in Callaway 1999, p. 255). The study rationale recognized that any potential therapeutic application of Ayahuasca requires investigation that fits within regulatory protocols. As a pilot study, the Hoasca project provided preliminary scientific data that qualified Ayahuasca as safe to use in religious or medical practice (McKenna 2004, p. 122). In addition, contextual considerations of Ayahuasca use were addressed as key factors regarding its safety and efficacy. In other words, beyond analyzing human neuropsychological functions whilst in an ASC, the study recognized the importance of the community and religious support of the UDV church as integral in facilitating effective outcomes for participants (Dobkin de Rios & Grob 2005, p. 120). The Hoasca project brought together religion, science and indigenous medicine towards understanding its use, efficacy and safety. By dialectically engaging between

ideological approaches, the collaboration of the UDV and the Hoasca project has generated new insights for science and spirituality that align with the motif of neo-enchantment explored here.

Barbosa et al. (2009) conducted a six-month prospective evaluation of UDV and *Santo Daime* subjects to measure personality variables and psychiatric symptoms. 23 newly initiated members participated in the evaluation, which was followed up six months later with a final analysis. The author's findings reported no adverse effects regarding psychiatric symptoms or quality of life due to participation (Barbosa et al. 2009, p. 210). In addition, results suggest that the benefits of Ayahuasca use in either clinical research settings or naturalistic religious settings may be of psychological benefit. Other variables such as social support and religious setting were also reported to contribute to mental health improvements of participants (Barbosa et al. 2009, p. 210). Whilst recognizing the pharmacological factors, such as positive psychological effects on serotonergic systems (Barbosa et al. 2009, p. 210), the authors also state the importance of spiritual context. Both the UDV and *Santo Daime* provided a 'social religious setting' and a 'fellowship' for overcoming negative thoughts and behaviors, as well as facilitating a world-view and ethos integrative in the psychedelic experience of the ritual (Barbosa et al. 2009, p. 208). To understand Ayahuasca without the contextual considerations, purely from a biomedical perspective, fails to grasp the social and religious centrality of the healing process for church members.

Contemporary Ayahuasca research is faced with the challenge of integrating paradigms of science and spirituality. From the research approaches analyzed so far, it is possible to see how Ayahuasca potentiates insights into the non-Western context of healing. The task of developing understandings of spiritual

healing for Western scholars requires reconsidering *a priori* assumptions of biomedical approaches to health, illness and disease. Perhaps one of the reasons the biomedical paradigm has failed to integrate the spiritual dimensions of human health, is that for the last 350 years, 'physical well-being' has primarily been easier to measure (Seaward 2000, p. 242). Throughout the last century, however, cross-cultural research has increasingly provided new insights into alternative world-views and ways of being. Contrasting biomedical, mono-causal explanations that conceptualize a mechanical view of the human body, tradition-based healing seeks to restore balance to the body, mind and soul through natural remedies (Ross 2013, p. 26). As an entheogenic medicine, Ayahuasca is a tangible psychoactive substance that facilitates experiential approaches to healing accessed through an ASC. This state of consciousness experienced in a supportive ritual setting, allows for individuals to overcome psychological blocks, neuroses, frightening or painful memories and anxieties, to report improvements in happiness, confidence and inner peace (Blainey 2014, p. 8).

The recognition of the spiritual context of Ayahuasca healing is multifarious and explicit in its efficacy. Tritcher, Klimo & Krippner (2009, p. 133) report that spirituality is becoming increasingly valuable in people's lives, and those who drink Ayahuasca 'tend to have positive spiritual experiences during ceremonies ... and then take these positive experiences and integrate them into their daily lives'. Clinical research and integrative healing practices continue to approach Ayahuasca healing with dialectical reasoning to overcome the reductionist science/spiritual separation of Western epistemology. The following discussion applies the same stratagem of synthesis, it engages anthropologically by integrating indigenous and scientific knowledge through Ayahuasca research.

5.3 The Cosmic Serpent: An Anthropological Hypothesis

Jeremy Narby's hypothesis in *The Cosmic Serpent: DNA and the Origins of Knowledge* (1998) identifies the limits of scientific materialism and recognizes the potentialities of integrative research of Ayahuasca by bringing together Western and non-Western epistemologies. Narby correlates the indigenous traditions of Ayahuasca shamanism with that of molecular biology and DNA research. Whilst conducting fieldwork on *Ashininca* ecology in the Amazon, he identified an 'enigma' in shamanic knowledge. What astounded Narby (1998, p. 10) was that the *Ashininca* claimed their 'botanical knowledge came from plant induced hallucinations ... all the more intriguing because the botanical knowledge of Indigenous Amazonians has long astonished scientists'. Insight into *Ashininca* use of Ayahuasca, leads the author to posit an interconnection of consciousness between humans and other life forms, through a network of DNA. In line with the relationality of animism theory discussed earlier, Narby (1998, p. 61) observes a communication existing between 'animate essences' throughout the living world, between human and non-human entities.

For materialist science, however, this relational concept of being is problematic. Modern biology is built upon the presuppositions that nature is inanimate and unintelligent (Narby 1998, p. 132), yet it is also limited by its own objectivism, as to postulate otherwise would nullify any claims to scientific legitimacy (Narby 1998, p. 139). Paradoxically, however, molecular biology does point out that all organic life is built from the same language. The genetic code of life on Earth is made up of the four letters A, G, C & T contained in the double helix of DNA (Narby 1998, p. 61). Due to the vastly limited knowledge about DNA discovered so far by science, the mystery of its unknown function has often been negated. For example, 97 percent of DNA is considered by

molecular biologists as 'junk DNA'; a pejorative reflex, which far from being objective, reflects the hegemonic tendency to belittle that, which is unknown or unable to be measured (Narby 1998, p. 139). To develop contemporary investigations into junk DNA perhaps deserves recognizing the fundamental contradictions in biology (Narby 1998, p. 140) and the limits of a materialist view of the human/nature relationship. Ayahuasca and the insights of shamanic knowledge are further discussed to hypothesize the functional capacity of DNA as it relates to supraconsciousness.

The psychoactive effects of Ayahuasca offers a way to investigate animistic consciousness, which Narby correlates with molecular biology and DNA. Hallucinations or ASCs can be a source of knowledge transmitted between the mind and communicated through 'defocalized consciousness within the global network of DNA-based life' (Narby 1998, p. 132). All life cells in living beings emit photons or 'biophotons' of which DNA is the source. According to Narby (1998, pp. 125-126) these photon emissions, or the 'narrow band of visible light' of which DNA is the *axis mundi*, could also be the source of shamanic knowledge and visions. If DNA can transmit information and knowledge, then non-ordinary states of consciousness gained through drinking Ayahuasca can possibly facilitate human access to such knowledge. Narby (1998, p. 127) outlines the connection as:

The molecules of nicotine or dimethyltryptamine, contained in tobacco or Ayahuasca, activate their respective receptors, which set off a cascade of electrochemical reactions inside the neurons, leading to the stimulation of DNA and, more particularly, to its emission of visible waves, which shamans perceive as hallucinogens.

Furthermore, it could also be that Ayahuasca may induce not only access to emissions, but function as a receptor. In other words, it provides the 'capacity to pick up' photon emissions transmitted through the global network of DNA based life (Narby 1998, p. 131). It is posited that DNA could be both a receptor and transmitter of knowledge and information that correlates with shamanic cosmology, that is, receiving knowledge from non-material sources.

One of the methodological aims of Narby's hypothesis is to move away from focalized scientific research and widen the discursive parameters. This means critically engaging with the limits of Western science to fully account for the functions of DNA and the claims of Ayahuasca as a source of knowledge for indigenous shamans. To defocalize the gaze means engaging across disciplinary, cultural and spiritual fields. This potentiates a new dialog and a dialectical approach to knowledge; from non-Western traditions to biology and anthropology, for rediscovering 'a sense of wonder' that rational discourse had denied (Narby 1998, p. 157). Whilst being limited by its hypothetical parameters, Narby's argument may certainly open up new ventures into the understanding of Ayahuasca shamanism and the function of DNA. This research fits with the neo-enchantment dialectic, connecting indigenous and scientific epistemologies, observing research limitations and seeking to postulate future possibilities and answers to unknown aspects of consciousness and life on Earth.

Section II has analyzed contemporary scholarly approaches that align with the concept of neo-enchantment. The theories and methodologies presented here challenges the hegemonic limitations imposed by Western epistemology by engaging dialectically in Ayahuasca research. In the section below, I will make some final remarks about Western epistemology and the future of Ayahuasca

research. This will be followed by a brief analysis of contemporary approaches in anthropology for overcoming the very limitations that have been discussed throughout this thesis, and for harnessing future potentialities in research.

SECTION III - CONCLUSION

6. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS: MOVING FORWARD

6.1 Knowledge, Truth & Ayahuasca

The epistemological and ontological issues raised in Ayahuasca research elucidate wider concerns regarding Western knowledge and the limitations of scientific materialism in determining concepts of truth. It is the latter that has become the pervasive perspective in the modern world; a hegemonic knowledge paradigm, which I will follow as being inherently Eurocentric (Lander & Past, 2002). Historically in the West, scientific claims to truth have delegitimized non-Western epistemologies, such as those of indigenous people the world over. In other words, the development and maintenance of Eurocentric epistemological domination has entailed a colonial endeavor that has perpetuated the negation of other forms of knowledge in maintaining its own hegemonic claims to truth. Lander and Past (2002, p. 41) elucidate the power dimensions of Eurocentrism and point out that 'Western scientific knowledge - is understood to be true, universal, and objective - the form by which all other ways of knowing are ... defined as ignorance or superstition'. Ayahuasca research outlines alternative ideological perspectives, being developed out of multidisciplinary approaches that seek to integrate the shamanic/spiritual dimensions with scientific insights. Ayahuasca offers participants an opportunity for healing that has been predominantly absent in Western society. For individuals exogenous to Amazonian traditions, it represents a new concept for experiencing the divine, as Soibelman (1995, pp. 91-92) explains;

Something that has a history, like the old religions, but is totally new at the same time ... It offers a spiritual journey, an opportunity to get deeply in touch with one's real personality, story and values. It is something in which people can believe through their own, vivid, personal and direct experience, with the possibility of performing religion in a total participatory way and not only as a passive observer.

My explicit intention has been to argue that our Western epistemological perspectives are increasingly recognized as insufficient in understanding body, mind and spirit in the 21st century. The popularity of Ayahuasca, as it becomes globally recognized, indicates the inadequacy of capitalist values and secular society. The state of global affairs, be it ecological, political, economic or social, demonstrate a system in disarray. Ethno-pharmacologist and Ayahuasca researcher Dennis McKenna (2005, p. 232) identifies the current period in human history to be overtly obsessed with consumerism, entertainment and distractions; 'a civilization that has lost its compass'. In the face of the deterministic dominance of Westernization, Ayahuasca has potentially arrived out of the Amazon in a timely fashion. McKenna (2005, p. 233) alludes to the 'clever little plant intelligence' of Ayahuasca that spreads globally as an anathema to secular industrialized society.

Ayahuasca is embedded in Amazonian cosmology and ecology, yet for non-indigenous populations it is opening up alternative visions for the meaning of life and our place as humans in the world. The use of Ayahuasca facilitates experience that challenge the 'imbalance and separation' of Western civilization. This is what Metzner (1999) calls 'ecological postmodernism'; an ideological engagement seeking to countermand the hegemonic excesses of modernity with an alternate vision 'more organic and holistic in nature'

(Krippner & Sulla 2000, p. 59). For contemporary scholars it is important to address the challenges and limitations of our own Western knowledge systems whilst seeking deeper understanding of others. Grof (1983, p. 33) states:

It seems that we are approaching a phenomenal synthesis of ancient and modern and a far reaching integration of the great achievements of East and West that might have profound consequences for life on this planet.

Ayahuasca research is a field that may increasingly contribute to the development of such a synthesis. As a multidisciplinary project, the study of Ayahuasca offers an 'opportunity to advance our knowledge of the human condition and the myriad conditions that influence it' (Metzner 2006, p. 88). Further research requires widening the theoretical and methodological scope, adapting and overcoming limitations of objectivism, materialism and rationalism for expanding the neo-enchanted paradigm. Anthropologists have an integral role in this endeavor, and contemporary research methods reflect the potential of future fieldwork parameters.

6.2 Extraordinary Anthropology

Some anthropologists are now seeking to redefine the ethnographic experience and engage with the 'mystery' and 'ecstasy' of fieldwork in new ways. Such methodological developments fit within the broader concept of neo-enchancement, as fieldworkers pursue research through experiential and intersubjective encounters, often engaging with the non-materialist subjectivity of ASCs. *Extraordinary Anthropology* (Goulett & Miller eds. 2007) is a

discursive field of scholarly work that seeks to delve deeper into the magic and mystery of human life. To do this means a reconfiguration of the conventional role of the researcher, to overcome objectivity through participatory fieldwork in the study of religion, spirituality and witchcraft (Goulett & Miller eds. 2007, p. 125). These contemporary developments seek to interrelate embodied experience and subjectivity into ethnographic research.

Scholars engaging with extraordinary anthropology advocate entering into the experiences of their hosts 'to the greatest extent possible, even if that requires feeling literally out of one's mind (unstable or confused within a different reality)' (Koss-Chioino 2010, p. 132). The intersubjectivity of extraordinary anthropology aims at a deeper understanding of what is real, that is, experiencing what is real for the ethnographic other, as real for oneself (Goulett & Miller cited in Koss-Chioino 2010, p. 132). In this sense, unusual and extraordinary experiences are considered to deserve more attention, as they challenge the rational distinction between observer and observed (Goulett & Miller eds. 2007, p. 3). The social sciences still largely ignore and dismiss spirits as unreal or metaphoric (Horner 2012, p. 17), but for extraordinary anthropology, it is exactly those encounters with otherworldly phenomenon that deserve validity for producing ethnographic knowledge (Goulett & Miller eds. 2007, p. 5). The concept of 'ecstasis' of which the ethnographer engages, is the side of fieldwork that provides a 'potential to step outside of one's taken for granted body of knowledge (academic and worldly) and truly enter the realm of the Other's lifeworld' (Goulett & Miller eds. 2007, p. 5). Ayahuasca healing embodies this ecstasis, as imbibers experience the spiritual and the sacred. Participation of anthropologists who enter trance states or ASCs can help overcome the alterity of 'us' and 'them' in research (Goulett & Miller eds. 2007, p. 155). These experiential insights may assist in further possibilities of

synthesis between science and spirituality through contemporary ethnographic work. Extraordinary anthropology could also offer a discursive and methodological field for further study of Ayahuasca.

6.3 Conclusion

At the beginning of this thesis I posited two objectives for determining whether Ayahuasca healing is a legitimate field for identifying neo-enchantment. Firstly, a descriptive analysis of Ayahuasca healing paradigms provided insight into the socio-cultural context of its use and appropriation. This elucidated the shamanic, spiritual and religious dimensions of Ayahuasca use, both past and present. I also explored the implications of Ayahuasca globalization to give insight into the wider arguments regarding its safety, legality and the exploitative potentialities of cultural exchange. These discussions were pertinent for an understanding of what Ayahuasca is, how it is used and the ways that it challenges the dominant precepts of rationalism, secularism and objectivism in Western epistemology. As a cross-cultural phenomenon, Ayahuasca healing is explicitly spiritual and antithetical to the biomedical paradigm. This is clear in the discussion of *Vegetalismo* etiology that claim illness causation and subsequent healing power stem from the non-material realm of the spirits. People exogenous to the Amazon are using Ayahuasca increasingly, which in turn is attracting attention from an array of researchers seeking to develop understandings of its healing potentialities.

Secondly, to identify neo-enchantment in Ayahuasca research, I have provided an analysis of recent theories and methodologies that are seeking to overcome limitations of scientific materialism and explore alternative approaches to the

Cartesian perspective dominant in Western science. I have reviewed contemporary scholarly work that aligns with the neo-enchantment paradigm as it develops new potentialities for researching Ayahuasca. The anthropological considerations of animism have addressed alternative perceptions of personhood and the relationship between human and non-human life. These conceptualizations seek to overcome Humanist perceptions of the self, by engaging with indigenous epistemologies and symbiotic perspectives of relationality. The phenomenological study of Ayahuasca has contributed to overcoming orthodox views of human cognition, through analysis of the experiential typology of Ayahuasca and the ASC it facilitates. It reveals deeper insight into human consciousness as it relates to the visionary mythology of indigenous shamanism.

This thesis has outlined the limitations of Western epistemology for adequately accounting for the complexity of Ayahuasca and its uses. I have shown how contemporary research is taking a dialectical approach by synthesizing Western and non-Western knowledge. Rather than a return to the sacred, or to a so called pre-modern non-rationality, contemporary approaches are bringing together science and spirituality in new ways, which I have outlined as fitting the neo-enchantment paradigm. Chapter five provided an analysis of these approaches that recognize the imperative of bringing together science and spirituality in Ayahuasca research. New healing methods such as practiced at *Takiwasi*, reveal the possibilities of synthesizing shamanism and psychology for healing. Clinical studies are also showing the benefit of multidisciplinary approaches to research. The results are promising for future research of Ayahuasca and for interrelating science and indigenous knowledge, ritual and psychological insights into healing. Jeremy Narby's hypothesis exemplifies the

dialectic approach, as contemporary scholarship that is attempting to widen epistemological boundaries.

My closing discussion of knowledge and truth discussed the historical developments of Western epistemology and its impeding limitations for understanding phenomenon such as Ayahuasca. As a paradigm of neo-enchantment, further Ayahuasca research can continue to provide a framework for developing future theories and methodologies that expand scientific knowledge and deepen understandings of spirituality, consciousness and the relationship between human beings to each other and the world around them. By analyzing contemporary scholarship for the study of Ayahuasca, it is clear that continued effort is required to overcome the anomalous aspects of research that do not fit the materialist paradigm. As I postulated with extraordinary anthropology, it requires moving beyond the objectivist view and engaging in new ways that may open up possibilities that narrow the gap between Western and non-Western world views. Further Ayahuasca research may still offer such potentialities and further expand the concept of neo-enchantment in scholarly work.

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