

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE FOREST: PLANT SPIRITS IN AYAHUASCA  
SHAMANISM

by

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The University of the Forest: Plant Spirits in Ayahuasca Shamanism

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Abstract:

In the Upper Amazonian *vegetalismo* traditions of *ayahuasca* shamanism, shamans drink a highly potent psychoactive brew in order to learn medicine and acquire knowledge from plant teachers. *Ayahuasca* is thought to provide access to the spirit world, the unseen side of reality. *Vegetalistas* claim that they are only the intermediaries for spirits that guide and instruct them in the diagnosis and treatment of their patients, and the study of properties of plants and animals. Despite the pan-cultural prevalence of spiritual beings, spirits remain pathologized by the social sciences as “unreal,” the naïve cognitive error or category mistake of non-modernities. In my assessment, it is a critical error to equate “spirits” with autonomous agents transcendent to matter. Rather, I engage in a creative interpretation of Deleuze that approaches spirits as affects, the sub-personal, non-representational singularities of experience that fall outside any distinction of the interiority or exteriority characteristic of subjects and objects. By approaching *vegetalismo* traditions from a Deleuzian, posthumanist perspective, the centrality of spirits in acquiring knowledge of world and self takes on a radically different valence altogether, no longer a primitive form of proto-science, but a practical form of philosophical *askesis* that can serve to transform identity, ethics, and is suggestive of what critical theory can undergo as a discipline in learning from the altered states and categories of the “university of the forest.”

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: ARE SPIRITS REAL? – THE “ACTUAL PROBLEM

“We hear the word ‘spirits’ through a series of narrowing declensions of meaning that are worse almost than not understanding. Shamans speak of ‘spirit’ the way a quantum physicist might speak of ‘charm;’ it is a technical gloss for a very complicated concept” (McKenna 1991: 45).

In the Upper Amazonian *vegetalismo* traditions of *ayahuasca* shamanism, shamans drink a highly potent psychoactive brew in order to learn medicine and acquire knowledge from plant teachers. *Ayahuasca* is thought to provide access to the spirit world, the unseen side of reality. *Vegetalistas* claim that they are only the intermediaries for spirits that guide and instruct them in the diagnosis and treatment of their patients. As well, *ayahuasca* is used as a cognitive tool to study the properties of plants, animals, and accomplish tasks often considered to be paranormal or impossible, such as remote viewing (Gorman 2011). However, all of these capabilities are directly attributed to *ayahuasca*’s efficacy in summoning, clarifying, or attuning oneself to invisible forces and information from a spiritual dimension subjacent to human awareness (Razam 2010). Despite the very real information and faculties accessible through this spiritual dimension, as well as the pan-cultural prevalence of spiritual beings, an immaterial order of other-than-human agencies animating material persons and things is often pathologized by the social sciences as “unreal,” the naïve cognitive error or category mistake of non-modernities. But it is my contention that spirits have been dismissed as unreal on the basis of an unacknowledged humanist perceptual ontology that divorces and elevates “spirit” or “mind” as

paradoxically both privileged over and emergent from matter. Interaction with spirits, a central component of other-than-modern ways of being, has been roundly belittled by enlightenment humanism, scientific rationalism, and psychoanalysis due largely to the Western scientific and philosophical attitude that grounds knowledge acquisition in the dualistic perceptual ontology of a self-certain, thinking subject with respect to the knowledge and control of objectified being.

Yet *ayahuasca* shamanism is tied to an ideal of knowledge that operationally functions as an inversion of the objectivist epistemologies favored by western modernity (Viveiros de Castro 2005), for in the latter what cannot be objectified by calculative measurement remains unreal and abstract, but in the relational epistemology of the former, an object is that with which no communication is possible. In contrast to the empiricism of a transcendent subject characteristic of western modernity, in *vegetalismo* we find what Deleuze called a *transcendental empiricism* that does not order experience from the perspective of any pre-given foundation exterior to becoming (Deleuze 2005: 68-69). Instead, the transcendental empiricism of a shaman is grounded in an immanent cosmology, and thus turns toward the ontogenetic emergence of material forms from a “spiritual” background.

In my assessment, it is a critical error to equate “spirits” with autonomous agents transcendent to matter. Rather, in this paper, I engage in a creative interpretation of Deleuze that approaches spirits as affects, the sub-personal, non-representational singularities of experience that fall outside any distinction of the interiority or exteriority characteristic of subjects and objects. In this sense, I am thereby also opening up a different kind of Deleuzianism as well, innovating a novel turn in the application of Deleuze that, in the spirit of Deleuze himself,<sup>1</sup> takes

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<sup>1</sup> Deleuze was notorious for describing his own approach to philosophy as “buggery” (*enculage*), or “sneaking behind an author and producing an offspring which is recognizably his, yet also monstrous and different. I saw myself as taking an author from behind and giving him a child that would be his own offspring, yet monstrous. It was really important for it to be his own child, because the author had to actually say all I had him

the purity out of philosophy by channeling it into other cultural domains. Deleuze appropriated a famous adage from Proust on involuntary memory to discuss a “virtual” background to actual forms, rendering the virtual as “*real without being actual, ideal without being abstract.*” In this paper, I approach spirits as affects – the *virtual as point of view*, incorporeal yet perfectly real. With an immanent Deleuzian perspective of transcendental empiricism that refuses to posit a transcendent “outside” to experience, we get a radically different frame of reference for “spirits” in *vegetalismo* traditions of Amazonia and other animistic cosmologies. Spirits are not encountered in some kind of illusory transcendence of embodiment, but in the immanent, subtle movements of the body, the lost dimension of the virtual that can be found again in ecstasy. But ecstasy here does not entail, as in Eliade’s classic interpretive schema of shamanism, a “soul flight.” Rather, with a Deleuze-inspired approach to shamanism,<sup>2</sup> ecstasy entails an experience of being-beside-oneself in apprehending the immanent connectivity preceding and exceeding egological concerns. Shamanic techniques of ecstasy would therefore involve an attunement towards the virtual, subtle dimensions of the body instead of a flight therefrom, exposing and opening oneself to be receptive to otherwise “impossible” perspective and persons.

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saying. But the child was bound to be monstrous too, because it resulted from all sorts of shifting, slipping, dislocations, and hidden emission that I really enjoyed” (Deleuze 1995: 6).

<sup>2</sup> In addition to a Deleuze-inspired approach to shamanism, can we also detect an implicit affinity for psychedelic shamanism in Deleuze? Besides being perhaps the only known Western critical philosopher to engage the wildly popular books of Carlos Castaneda (Deleuze & Guattari 1987), Deleuze also turned to Antonin Artaud’s 1947 radio play “To Have Done with the Judgment of God” in articulating one of his most pivotal, influential concepts – the “Body without Organs” (Deleuze & Guattari 1983). Recall that Artaud spent a lengthy stay in Mexico in 1936 for the purpose of visiting the Tarahumara, a North Mexican Indian tribe. It was Artaud’s belief that by exploring peyote with the Tarahumara, he could gain access to a “knowledge” the West has supposedly lost, thus expecting a rebirth of himself in receiving a revelation of innate ontological truths upon returning to the metaphysical sources of existence (Artaud 1976). The psychedelic shamanism of Mexico is also engaged by the most notable contemporary Deleuzian. In an interview with Erik Davis (Davis 1992), Delanda admitted that he has returned yearly to Oaxaca since the age of nineteen to ritually trip with a Mazatec shaman. Gushing about his admiration for Deleuze and Guattari, Delanda remarked to Davis “I have no heroes and no one mystifies me except for those guys. I don’t know how they derive their knowledge. They must trip” (Davis 1992).

Although philosophy since Descartes tends to posit a modern, thinking subject who is intrinsically capable of truth, one of Foucault's major critical contributions was to highlight that in a modern context, liberating or discovering a "true self" merely reproduces the biopolitical project and its disciplinary techniques, whereas philosophy in Western antiquity demanded a self-transformation that transformed the very subject engaged in thinking and perceiving, not in *knowing* the truth but *becoming* the truth by means of an experimentation that reconfigures one's understanding and relationality (Foucault 2005). Following the work of the final Foucault, I close with a consideration of how *ayahuasca* can function as one such "technology of the self" for contemporary Western critical thought as well, for it is not just a site of humanistic and social scientific interest, but also avails us of a form of counterpractice to the historically contingent and ideologically specific truth claims of anthropocentric modernity, offering potentialities and possibilities of becoming otherwise – *other-than-human* and *other-than-modern* – and capable of redirecting futural possibilities of political and ethical relations. From this perspective, animism comes both before and after humanism, and *ayahuasca* usage in *vegetalismo* can be seen as an example of a transformative experience communicative of potential realities and modes of being that are "real without being actual" within prevailing regimes of truth.<sup>3</sup> By approaching

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<sup>3</sup> Note that from an emic perspective, spirits occupy an ambiguous, "virtual" dimension between real and actual. Despite being autonomous, having relatively consistent personalities, self-awareness, volition, speech, memory, and provide unknown information and insight, it is worth quoting Stephan Beyer at length on how spirits are also paradoxically akin to imaginary objects: "In many ways, spirits act very much like imaginary objects. First, spirits lack the *sensory coherence* of real things. That is, primarily, spirits cannot be touched, unlike real things, though they can often be heard and occasionally smelled; although, in fairness, perhaps I should add that I have felt spirits – for example, rubbing my head – but never been able to *touch* them. Second, spirits are, unlike real things, *not public*. Other people, in the same place at the same time, do not see the same spirit objects or persons I see. This point can be disputed by claims to the contrary, or by a claim that shamans, at least, can perceive the ayahuasca visions of others; but, as far as I know, these claims have not been well tested. Third, the *behavior* of spirits is unusual; spirits appear and disappear suddenly and unpredictably, fade away gradually, and transform themselves in ways inconsistent with the generally recognized behavior of real things. Fourth, the *appearance* of spirits may be significantly different from that of real objects and people. For example, the spirit of the ayahuma tree often appears as a person without a head, contrary to the normal appearance of real people, at least living ones. And the spirit of a particular plant may appear in a different form at different times – for example, as male

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or female, old or young, with one or several heads – unlike real objects and people, who are generally fairly consistent in appearance from meeting to meeting” (Beyer 2009: 111). I approach spirits as “virtual” as a way to clarify this impasse of real or imaginary. In my reading, spirits are *both* real *and* imaginary (i.e., not “actual” – empirically and causally measurable or predictable within metric space).

## CHAPTER II

### THE UNIVERSITY OF THE FOREST

“You hear so many existences, you hear so many silent wisdoms, when you hear the jungle” (Calvo 1995: 3).

Besides being taken solely for medical purposes in strengthening or cleansing the body, the main function of *ayahuasca* usage is to contact and acquire information from the unseen side of reality, the true forces behind everyday life, and it is therefore commonly believed throughout the indigenous cultures of the Amazon that *ayahuasca* is the primary vehicle for attaining knowledge.<sup>4</sup> Anthropologist and pioneering *ayahuasca* researcher Luis Eduardo Luna famously noted in his 1986 dissertation that one of the most frequent designations of the *ayahuasqueros* he encountered was the term “*vegetalista*,” an “expert in the use of plants” (Luna 1986).

“*Vegetalista*” refers to the origin of their knowledge, the spirit of certain plants (*vegetales*) which

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<sup>4</sup> The use of *ayahuasca* potions (also known as *yagé*, *caapi*, and numerous other vernacular names)—an admixture of the *Banisteriopsis caapi* jungle vine containing the Beta-carbolines harmine, harmaline, and tetrahydroharmine in conjunction with visionary inducing effect of various plants containing N,N-DMT (most commonly derived from the leaves of the *Psychotria viridis* bush or the *Diplopterys cabrerana* vine) – is extensive among Amerindians and mestizos of the Orinoco plains, Pacific lowlands, and Amazonian rainforest of Brazil, Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia, with at least 72 indigenous groups within these areas reported to have used the plant decoction thus far (Luna, 1986). Although this is a religious phenomenon that bears no written texts or uniform oral traditions, archaeological evidence of a drinking vessel suggests its use may potentially date as far back as five millennia (Naranjo, 1986), but others are more skeptical, disputing its pre-Colombian usage despite being unable to conclusively date its origin in time or space (Brabec de Mori, 2011). The term *ayahuasca* is a Quechua word meaning “vine of the dead” or “vine of the soul,” with its Quechua origin itself suggestive that the brew was in circulation contemporaneous to or preceding the Incan empire. Ogalade, Arriaza, and Soto (2009) have recently discovered evidence of harmine in Tiwanaku mummies from the Atacamu Desert of Chile, themselves interpreting this as evidence that the Tiwanaku – who expanded from their origins on the Bolivian shores of Lake Titicaca – were using *banisteriopsis* to alter their consciousness perhaps as early as 800 CE.

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are the shaman's master plant teachers (*maestros*) or spirit doctors (*doctores*) from which they learn medicine, ritual healing, and acquire visionary knowledge. *Vegetales que enseñan* – "plants who teach" – need not be psychoactive, although *ayahuasca* is involved as a vital cognitive tool for magnifying this process, the very means for directly accessing the spirit world to diagnose and cure illness. Brazilian new religious movements use the term *vegetalismo* to refer to both mestizo and indigenous *ayahuasca* shamanism, while mestizos use it to distinguish mestizo shamanism from more markedly indigenous forms (Beyer 2009: 196-197). For my purposes throughout this paper, I will be using *vegetalismo* in the former sense as shorthand to describe the phenomenon of contacting and learning from spirits of the plants within the *ayahuasca* shamanism of mestizo and indigenous Amazonia.

*Ayahuasqueros* consistently attribute their efficacy in healing to correspondence with supernatural beings, spirits, and various guiding and helping entities that instruct the shaman in both diagnosis and treatment. Overwhelmingly, the testimonies of *ayahuasqueros* is that they are merely the intermediaries for the *doctores*, and for this reason, *vegetalistas* of great knowledge are often referred to as a *banco* (Spanish for "bench"), entailing a "seat of power for the spirits" (Luna 1986: 33). *Vegetalista* Percy Garcia Lozano of Iquitos relates that "The doctors are the teachers, those who guide me to perform the healing . . . The spiritual masters, they fill me up with their gifts, but I'm just an intermediary" (Razam 2010: 20). Elias Mamallacta of Ecuador also agrees that "it's not me doing the curing – it's the *ayahuasca* (Razam 2010: 28). Famed *ayahuasquero* don Agustin Rivas Vasquez affirms this as well, discussing these spirit interventions at length:

"The spirits of plants and the spirits of dead shamans would come in visions and prescribe remedies to me. They would tell me what plants to treat my patients with. I would give my patients the plants, and they would be cured. According to the great shamans, the one who heals is another being . . . it's the elemental spirits

that heal! Humbly, I have to say that it is not I who cures . . . If one concentrates on them, singing one's power songs, they will manifest. One directs them with one's hand, telling them where to go, like conducting an orchestra. Telling them where to go, receiving the spirit's energy and transmitting it, but with confidence in what he is doing. This is important! And it won't be him who does the cure, but he is just a magnet, a conductor who knows the language of the spirits, and calls them through his icaros and maririrs, magical whistles and songs that attract spirits" (Adair, 1996).

In his cognitive-phenomenological study of *ayahuasca*, Benny Shanon explains the felt experience of these interactions:

"Typically, the person under the intoxication feels that a voice is addressing her and passing information or instructing her as to what to do or how to behave. In the previous sentence I say 'feels' and not 'hears' because often the experience is precisely that – that another agent is talking to one and that one understands what is being said, yet this communication is conducted silently. The code being deciphered is not phonological-linguistic but rather ideational, and the perception is not auditory but in, in a fashion, telepathic" (Shanon, 2003: 105).

For the apprentice (*aprendiz*), to learn the plants (*dominar*, "to master") is to "diet" with them (*dietar*) in a lengthy and rigorous fashion, but this extends far beyond food restrictions (such as salt, sugar, fruits, sweets, condiments, fats, etc.) to include social isolation and sexual segregation.<sup>5</sup> The ethos behind these restrictions center around forming a strong relationship with the plant spirits to render oneself transparent or porous enough to "hear" their essence in the sonic form of an *icaro* (magic melody), and thus be able to transact upon their instrumental value. Don Basilio Gordon, one of Luna's Shipibo shaman-informants, said that "it is enough to

<sup>5</sup> The idea is that certain foods *espantan a los vegetales*, "make the plants escape," so the diet is designed to amplify and maintain the persistent presence of plant-spirits for as lengthy a period as possible. Regulations and length vary greatly, although Luna mentions that "a minimum duration of six months is generally recognized as necessary, but it may be prolonged to several years," and also notes that informants have known *vegetalistas* who have followed the diet for twelve years (Luna 1986: 52). After initiation, the process can be reinitiated at will, with *vegetalistas* often renewing their energies and expanding their knowledge through dieting over much shorter periods of time. Generally, however, the "length of the diet determines the knowledge and power of the shaman" (Luna 1986: 52). Percy Garcia Lozano explains that "To the doctors and the mother *ayahuasca*, they love that one diets. In the opposite way [not dieting] they don't come near the *curandero*. Nor will he be able to receive teachings. The diet is the strength of the *curandero*. And with our spiritual force we perform healings. But everything is based on the diet, and then it doesn't matter which tool you use to heal once you have dieted and established a connection" (Razam 2010: 20).

know the songs of the plants to be able to cure. The plants are needed only if you do not know their song" (Luna 2011: 13). Don Emilio explained to Luna as well that besides studying the properties of other plants through interpreting the information conveyed during dreams and visions by adding them to the *ayahuasca* brew in its concoction, it is also possible to diet with “perfumes, certain minerals like pedernal (flintstone), and even metals such as steel so that one will be able to learn their *icaros*” (Luna 1986: 103). Qualities of certain animals can also be studied and incorporated through their *icaros* to identify with the animal and see the world accordingly. “Taking *ayahuasca*, one becomes something like a crystal,” writes Cesar Calvo, “One becomes a crystal exposed to all the spirits” (Calvo 1995: 155)

“It seems to me,” writes Luna, “that what has moved some *vegetalistas* to follow the prescriptions associated with the ingestions of plant-teachers was more a philosophical quest – the desire to learn, to understand – than a humanitarian vocation” (Luna 1986: 51).

*Ayahuasqueros* don Juan Flores Salazar (Tindall 2008: 150) and don Agustin Rivas Vasquez (Adair, 1996) have both described *ayahuasca* as a “university of the forest.” Don Agustin explained that

“I have very little schooling, and ayahuasca has been my university. I have been able to begin to recognize the energies not only of ayahuasca, but also of other plants that have their elementals, their spirits . . . For many years I have known that space is full of beings, like radio waves. All one needs is a radio. If one turns it on, one can hear voices that come through the air. Similarly, the spirits’ voices, and their sound, can only be heard and the spirits seen, when one uses ayahuasca or other psychoactive plants, and only then one sees that space is populated with a myriad of beings. It is very hard to understand. Many don’t understand . . . Ayahuasca is a plant that can make one see and feel the spirits and can teach one about true spiritual magic. But atheists and other skeptics don’t know about these things because they don’t know about the invisible, but only what they can see” (Adair, 1996).

Don Juan Tangoa Paima of Iquitos adds that “with *ayahuasca* you can enter into a world where information is readily available,” but “it’s an investigation that takes place in another dimension,

the spiritual dimension” (Razam 2010: 48). Don Romulo Magin told Stephan Beyer that “he is constantly aware of being surrounded by the spirits but that he sees them roughly, vaguely; drinking *ayahuasca*, he said, is ‘like putting on glasses’” (Beyer 2009: 120).<sup>6</sup> Beyer also notes the comments of don Carlos Perez Shuma, who says that the *icaros* are like radio waves: “‘Once you turn on the radio, you can pick them up . . . It’s like a tape recorder,’ don Carlos says. ‘You put it there, you turn it on, and already it starts singing. . . . You start singing along with it’” (Beyer 2009: 120).

Across the board, *vegetalistas* attribute their knowledge and prowess in healing to *ayahuasca* in its ability to summon and clarify spirits – immaterial, transpersonal agencies that are below the threshold of one’s conscious awareness, yet are “tuneable” through *ayahuasca*’s ability to amplify perception. Although very “real,” pragmatic information is acquired, the means of accessing this information is accomplished through psychoactive plants that tune in to don Agustin’s “voices that come through the air,” but, as he reminds us, atheists and skeptics don’t know about these things because they only know what they can see. It is the challenge that I am currently faced with to describe and explain one university – *vegetalismo*, the “*university of the forest*” – with the politically charged terms, rhetoric, and discourse of the “atheists and skeptics” of a very different kind of university – a *Division I institution of “higher education” and research*. But the task becomes even more difficult when the scientific materialism of the latter thoroughly discredits the belief in the existence of immaterial spirits, the driving force of the educational system of the former. Yet this is the motivation behind my project itself, for far too often scholars avoid focusing on extraordinary experiences and anomalous phenomena out of

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<sup>6</sup> Anthropologist Marie Perruchon, herself an initiated Shuar shaman, confirms that it provides a kind of visual prosthesis or corrective vision for immanence, stating that *ayahuasca* “is a plant which has the effect that when you drink it, it allows you to see what otherwise is invisible . . . It is not that the *ayahuasca* takes one to another world, otherwise unreachable; it just opens one’s eyes to what is normally hidden. There is only one world, which is shared by all beings, humans, spirits, and animals” (Perruchon 2003: 218).

career-driven reasons, fearing that they will not gain tenure, or will suffer backlash from the more conservative academic stance of their colleagues. Despite the overwhelming fact that “experiences of spirits (or other extraordinary beings) are reported in every society and culture, regardless of sociodevelopmental status, religious preferences, or the educational and class background of individuals” (Koss-Chioino 2010: 138), spirits (immaterial as opposed to material beings) and other extraordinary beings continue to be consistently dismissed as the culturally-constructed, nonrational, nonempirical product of non-Western, non-modern cultures –(*i.e.*, “*non-real*”) or pathologized as physiological, psychotic, or schizophrenic hallucinations, and thus are considered relatively rare cognitive errors. But many academics exposed to the direct experience of unexplainable or otherwise “impossible” phenomena have come to a similar conclusion as anthropologist Joan Koss-Chioino, who felt she had “accumulated so many experiences with spirits that I could no longer play the game of hiding behind someone else’s belief. I began to appreciate spirits as part of my world, although I remained very cautious regarding those with whom I shared this idea” (Koss-Chioino 2010: 132).

In *The Varieties of the Religious Experience*, William James said “Were one asked to characterize the life of religion in the broadest and most general terms possible, one might say that it consists of the belief that there is an unseen order, and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto” (James 1902: 53). But in the modern world, that invisible order is required to remain unseen, for as Max Weber wrote in describing modernity, its “growing process of rationalization . . . means we are not ruled by mysterious, unpredictable forces; (this is) the disenchantment of the world. Unlike the savage for whom such forces existed, we need no longer have recourse to magic in order to control the *spirits* or pray to them” (Weber, 2004: 145). Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno have similarly noted how the

standards of calculability and utility operative in the “enlightened world” of modern positivism has entailed the eradication of spirits, writing that the “disenchantment of the world means the extirpation of animism” (Horkheimer & Adorno 2002: 2). However, as Jane Bennett has argued in *The Enchantment of Modern Life*, “the very characterization of the world as disenchanted ignores and then discourages affective attachment to that world” (Bennett 2001: 3). Bennett suggests that the mood of enchantment is quite valuable for ethical life, and moreover that the contemporary world retains the power to enchant humans if we could only foster it through deliberate strategies that “hone sensory receptivity to the marvelous specificity of things,” while likewise learning to “resist the story of the disenchantment of modernity (Bennett 2001: 4). It is my contention that in *vegetalismo* we have just that: a contemporary nonmodernity that avails us of resources to locate a counternarrative to the disenchantment of modernity, and identity practices that hone sensory receptivity to the marvelous specificity of things. Secularism may have devalued “spiritual” experience as delusion, coincidence, trickery, or mere performance, but, as Vine Deloria, Jr. has written in *The World We Used to Live In*, this intellectual and political climate has:

“prevented us from seeing that higher spiritual powers are still active in the world. We cannot, for the most part, believe that a firm relationship with them can be cultivated today. We need to glimpse the old spiritual world that helped, healed, and honored us with its presence and companionship. We need to see where we have been before we see where we should go, we need to know how to get there, and we need to have help on our journey” (Deloria 2006: xix).

But please do not misunderstand me here. It is not my suggestion to uncritically adopt the culture of a fetishized Other, or press forward into some kind of neo-tribal revivalism. Rather, bringing the university of the forest into dialogue with the university of higher education suggests that some critical misunderstandings have been made. As we continue to transition further into what many are calling a posthuman condition, it becomes increasingly obvious that

considerations of ourselves as “human” were part and parcel of a historically-located moment that is rapidly drawing to a close, and has caused a great deal of confusion and hostility towards “other-than-modern” ways of existing. By extension, the liberal humanist subject that is representative of that mode of being has tended to front-load its dualistic perceptual ontology of a “spirit” utterly divorced from, or elevated above matter, into its interpretations of other cultures, religions, and strategies of experience. In my reading, it is a mistake to think of spirits as transcendent. Perhaps by approaching them instead as radically immanent, practices and altered states take on a different valence altogether, as do plant medicines that offer a site for a thoroughgoing rearticulation of perception as a “nonlinear and highly distributed system not ‘ownable’ by a self and navigable only through its practiced but always irreducible dissolution” (Doyle 2011: 11). Following the advice of Deloria, help on our journey begins with seeing where we have been before seeing where we should go. In the next section, I discuss how the emergence of animism as an academic category took place in an oppositional relationship with modernist, materialist assumptions encountering radically different worldviews. However, because animism was defined in contrast to materialistic philosophy, it is also being appropriated and reassessed under the banner of “neo-animism” to re-present alternatives to the disenchanting rationality of positivist social sciences.

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## CHAPTER III

### (NEO)ANIMISM – BEFORE AND AFTER ANTHROPOLOGICAL DOGMA

“I propose here, under the name of Animism, to investigate the deep-lying doctrine of Spiritual Beings, which embodies the very essence of Spiritualistic as opposed to Materialistic philosophy” – *Sir Edward Tylor (Tylor 1871: 425)*.

Animism is a contentious concept first developed by E.B. Tylor in his 1871 masterwork *Primitive Culture*. In the Tylorian sense, the term refers to a false belief in “spiritual” beings (i.e., “non-empirical entities”), which he considered the essence of religion itself. Working backwards from his disdain for contemporary Christianity, Tylor attempted to prove his own belief that materialist science alone was capable of deriving “true” knowledge of the world, writing about allegedly primitive stages of religion in which believed-in entities was even more rampant and absurd than the Christianity of his day. Largely ghettoized in contemporary academic contexts for its colonialist character of cognitive evolutionist explanatory schemas, cultural anthropologist Nurit Bird-David has written that a “twofold vicious cycle” has since ensued:

“The more the term is used in its old Tylorian sense, without benefit of critical revision, the more Tylor’s historically situated perspective is taken as ‘real,’ as the phenomenon which it only glosses, and as a ‘symbol that stands for itself.’ In turn, anthropology’s success in universalizing the use of the term itself reinforces derogatory images of indigenous people whose rehabilitation from them is one of its popular roles” (Bird-David 1999: S68).

At best a problematic label, and at worst a polemic wielded by early anthropological theorizing bespeaking its colonial origins and objectivist dogma, “animism” is a concept viewed from

modernist perspectives that is projected in anthropological and religious literature as a naïve, failed epistemology. Bird-David has written at length upon how classical theoreticians prejudged the attribution of “personhood” to natural objects as empirically unfounded against their own positivist ideas around nature, life, and personhood, directing their analytical efforts towards how this (mis)attribution was merely a symbolic or mistaken “belief” – a *category mistake* rather than practical knowledge.<sup>7</sup>

In contrast to its older usage, animism has been re-appropriated as a critical term that, understood anew, offers much to considerations of consciousness, environment, and ethics, offering vital alternatives to the exploitation levied by modernist Western culture.<sup>8</sup> “Neo-animism” challenges claims of human uniqueness by situating the human within a larger community of other-than-human persons that share characteristics previously considered the exclusive province of the human within objectivist epistemologies (intelligence, rationality, consciousness, volition, agency, intentionality, language, desire, etc.). Graham Harvey explains that animism is neither an analog of primitivism, nor a precursor to modernity, but “one of the many vitally present and contemporary *other-than-modern* ways of being human” (Harvey 2006: xxi, my italics). Harvey’s assessment of modernity (a la Bruno Latour’s argument that “we have never been modern”) is that the “culture of modernity has never entirely succeeded (despite vigorous attempts) in obliterating alternative ways of being human and living in a world where

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<sup>7</sup> See Bird-David’s seminal 1999 article, “Animism Revisited: Personhood, Environment, and Relational Epistemology” (*Current Anthropology* 40, pp. 67–91).

<sup>8</sup> For an extensive treatment of “neo-animism,” the reader is also referred to Harvey (2005) and Harvey (2006b).

all seeming dualities are entangled with one another” (Harvey 2006: xxi).<sup>9</sup> Revisiting animism thus offers powerful counter-rhythms to the rampant physical materialism and universalized categories and conceptions of a liberal humanist subject. In a supplement to Bird-David’s featured article in *Current Anthropology*, “‘Animism’ Revisited: Personhood, Environment, and Relational Epistemology” Tim Ingold commented upon the intellectual history of academic concerns with animism:

“The error, it seems, lies with their originators, in their assumption that the world is divided, a priori, between the inanimate and the animate, between the non-human and the human, and between the natural and the social. But above all, they make the mistake of assuming that life and mind are interior properties of individuals that are given, independently and in advance of their involvement in the world” (Bird-David 1999: S82).

In other words, the belief in spiritual beings reflects the modern premises and traditional concepts of an atheistic materialism that has legislated competing worldviews. From atomic weapons to the mapping of the human genome, we find ourselves in a period of extraordinary technoscientific change that is reshaping our relations to life, death, and human self-creation. The calculative and predictive power provided by the intersection of science and technology in modern culture has inspired a great deal of certainty with respect to modern science. Although science affords us with both conceptual and practical control over our experience, garnered by means of rational comprehension, methodical definition, and calculative measurement, and secured by its technological innovations, manipulative competence, and near-astonishing

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<sup>9</sup> Latour (1993) argued that modernism and modern critique become invincible through its paradoxes, capable of critiquing any view and thereby dismissing it as “premodern” without admitting that its guarantees, such as the following, are paradoxical:

- 1) Even though we construct Nature, Nature is as if we did not construct it
- 2) Even though we do not construct Society, Society is as if we did construct it
- 3) Nature and Society must remain absolutely distinct
- 4) God does not intervene in Nature or Society, but is nevertheless there, personal, and useful

Latour’s assertion is that the mechanism of modernity creates two entirely distinct ontological zones – human beings and nonhumans – yet proliferates hybrids of nature and culture.

predictive power, it has also afforded us with a kind of disenchanting rationality that is deeply suspicious of truth claims which elude or defy a scientific perspective, for the “unknown” would merely be a provocation, not the “unknowable,” but merely the “not-yet-known” scientifically. It is against this backdrop that the social sciences have approached the notion of “spirits” over the past several centuries. The very concept of autonomous, immaterial, invisible agents amounts to an impossibility for a positivist science that approaches physical phenomena as coextensive with “real” phenomena. Although the information, power, and curative abilities consistently obtained from spirits is a central component of an overwhelming number of societies to this day, spirits continue to be ignored by social scientists, either by dismissing them outright, or sympathetically translating them into Western academic terms that similarly dismiss them, albeit as metaphoric or symbolic proto-scientific processes – admirable cognitive errors, but unreal nevertheless. Yet as we will see in the following section, misunderstanding the shaman’s interaction with spiritual beings perhaps occurs largely due to the fact that it is a science which follows an inverted form of the interpretive conventions and methodology of objectivist epistemologies, affording a very different kind of knowledge than that which is cultivated or recognized by western modernity.

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## CHAPTER IV

### DELEUZIAN ANTHROPOLOGY

"Shamanism is a way of doing things which implies a way of knowing them," explains Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (Viveiros de Castro 2005: 42). Viveiros de Castro understands the importance of shamanism in Amazonian cosmologies to be tied to a certain ideal of knowledge, an ideal that is the "polar opposite of objectivist epistemologies favoured by western modernity" (Viveiros de Castro 2005: 42). Viveiros de Castro explains this key epistemological difference in knowledge acquisition between Amerindian shamanism and western modernity as follows:

"In the latter [western modernity], the category of object provides the telos: to know is to objectify; it is to be able to distinguish in the object what is intrinsic to it from what pertains to the knowing subject and which as such was unwittingly and/or inevitably projected onto the object. Thus to know is to desubjectify, to render explicit the part of the subject present in the object in order to reduce it to an ideal minimum. Just like objects, subjects are seen as resulting from processes of objectification: the subject is constituted by or recognizes itself in the object it produces and knows itself objectively when it succeeds in seeing itself 'from the outside', as a 'that'. The name of our epistemological game is objectification. What is not objectified remains unreal and abstract. The Other takes the form of a thing. Amerindian shamanism appears to be guided by the inverse principle. To know is to personify, to take the point of view of that which is to be known – of what or rather of who; for shamanic knowledge envisages 'something' which is 'someone', another subject or agent. The Other takes the form of a person" (Viveiros de Castro 2005: 42).

Shamanic personification or subjectification thus constitutes an epistemological ideal that, in contrast to the objectivist epistemologies of Western scientific materialism dominating

contemporary truth-claims, follows the inverse principle of interpretative convention.<sup>10</sup> Rather than reducing surrounding intentionality in order to attain an objective representation, the shaman aims at revealing a maximum of intentionality. Hence, it is necessary to personify in order to know. In a footnote, Viveiros de Castro mentions that this shamanic principle of knowledge goes against a special case of Occam's Razor in physicalist psychology known as Lloyd Morgan's Canon of Parsimony, veritably reversing its critical assumptions in praxis. Quoting Daniel Dennett, he relates that "it [Lloyd Morgan's Canon of Parsimony] is the principle that one should attribute to an organism as little intelligence or consciousness or rationality or mind as will suffice to account for its behavior" (Viveiros de Castro 2005: 67 n.17). Instead, the opposite is in effect within the shamanic science of Amerindian cosmologies, for they engage in processes of personification of species and natural phenomena, viewing these as a society of persons in which things and beings are points of view. The "object" of knowledge is thus subjectivated to determine the worlds described through them, requiring an exchange of perspectives to discern the world of which they are the point of view. Thus, Viveiros de Castro terms this characterization of the ontology of Amazonian spirits perspectivism, a "process of discrete switching of points of view between the different forms of agency populating the cosmos" (Viveiros de Castro, 2004). "True knowledge," writes Viveiros de Castro, "aims at the revelation of a maximum of intentionality, by way of a process of systematic and deliberate 'abduction of agency' . . . The success of the interpretation is directly proportional to the order of intentionality which can be attributed to the object'" (Viveiros de Castro, 2005: 42-43). In other

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<sup>10</sup> Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison propose that the articulation of scientific objectivity as the suppression of subjectivity dates back to Kant, with the institutionalization of scientific objectivity coinciding with the rise of neo-Kantianism in German academia following the failed revolution of 1848. The rise of scientific objectivity was intimately intertwined with an ethos of self-abnegation at play in nineteenth-century scientists' adaptation of Kant's philosophy. Daston and Galison describe the ideal post-Kantian scientist as a moral virtuoso engaged in a special kind of asceticism, for to embrace objectivity meant "not only to practice a science but also to pattern a self" (Daston & Galison 2007: 10).

words, because objects are insufficiently analyzed subjects, the “object of interpretation is the counter-interpretation of the object” (Viveiros de Castro 2005: 43).

Particularly striking here is that shamanism aims at uncovering the social relationships and intentionalities inaccessible to empirical vision precisely through processes of abducting their own self-control and centric identifications, for “abduction” is a concept that entails, by definition, a profound decentering, or “being beside oneself” in an act of having one’s experience being “caught” or “seized.” Interestingly, the American philosopher, logician, mathematician, and scientist Charles Sanders Peirce wrote that all explanatory content of theories are reached through abduction, arguing that induction and deduction, the two standard inferential methods valorized as “rational processes” merely traffic in the known.<sup>11</sup> In Peirce’s conception, breaks in habit in the form of surprising phenomena demand our understanding, requiring a change in our rational habit of belief to render the surprising phenomenon into a reasonable one. Peirce proposed that abduction differs in kind from induction and deduction in that it is not strictly a consciously-used rational process. Rather, the process that gives rise to a hypothesis is initiated by the visceral experience of a decentering that provokes an affective experience of surprised wonderment. In his consideration, hypotheses arise for the purpose of dissipating surprise. Abduction, says Peirce is a ‘feeling kind of knowing’ – a kind of knowing that isn’t yet established by the objective application of data, but attributed by Peirce instead to “the spontaneous conjectures of instinctive reason” (Peirce 1932: 6.475). The starting point of research is always abduction for Peirce, for the source of hypotheses, scientific theories, or new ideas in his view occurs in being caught off guard, a being beside oneself that demands an explanation to account for that which has surprised one, thereby forcing a hypothesis to dissipate

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<sup>11</sup> For a treatment of abduction by the mature Peirce, see K.T. Fann’s (1970) and Jamie Nubiola (2005).

the jarring sensation.<sup>12</sup> Thus, in Peirce's view, a bodily sensibility, a visceral form of information processing is vital for successful problem-solving as the abductive origin of scientific discovery as well, even though this experience paradoxically betrays the scientific ideal of a highly-controlled, "objective" rational composure. As well, this origin is not the product of a mind, but of pure affect, autonomic response characterized by lack of conscious control – an ontological bifurcation in which one is *beside* one's ordinary perspective. Not the self-abnegating, feigned transcendence of objectivist epistemologies, but an abiding of multiplicity in an invitive opening of a privatized interiority – a porosity of exposure toward what is being investigated.

From an Amerindian perspective, "objects" are beings with which no communication is possible, for the capacity for communication renders "things" as social beings. Because shamans come to know themselves and their worlds through relationships with subjectified, communicative persons by means of abducting agency, cultural anthropologist Fernando Santos-Granero has come to refer to this as a "fractal personhood," as it "involves relations of incorporation of the Other into the Self at different scales, which are always similar to each other" (Santos Granero 2009: 14). Viveiros de Castro has stated in a rather pithy soundbite, within the Amerindian framework of a relational epistemology, "the self is the gift of the other" (Viveiros de Castro 2004b: 480). In Amazonian ontologies, engaging objects as subjects – as points of view held together by dominant affects that constitute a habitus – approaches even objects not typically thought to have an intrinsic living dimension as potentially endowed with subjectivities possessed of a social life. Santos-Granero explains that the lives of what in

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<sup>12</sup> In his well-known passage at the beginning of *Metaphysics*, Aristotle also asserted that wonder is the starting point of all searches for knowledge. "For from wonder men, both now and at the first, began to philosophize, having felt astonishment originally at the things which were more obvious, indeed, amongst those that were doubtful; then, by degrees, in this way having advanced onwards," (*The Metaphysics*, Book 1, Chapter 2).

western modernity are considered strictly “material objects” (such as tools or other artifacts) can also carry an “occult” life to them, “occult because their lives are extraordinary, and occult because their personas are normally not visible to lay people” (Santos-Granero 2009: 2). People and objects are thus both things and embodied social relations.

Amazonian theories of personhood are plural, composite, constructional, and relational, entailing a very different conception of embodiment than many in the Western social sciences and humanities are normatively accustomed to – social bodies fabricated upon relatedness, “a social mode by which every being is a synthesis of the combined efforts of all the beings who have contributed – socially and bodily – to his or her existence” (Santos-Granero 2009: 7). The shaman is capable of crossing bodily boundaries to engage in transpecific dialogues, encountering and exchanging perspectives with non-human beings. Clearly, this notion of embodiment is far from the Cartesian, scientific body that understands the body as corporeal substance. Instead, we find a Deleuzian anthropology in which the body is not inherently human, but rather composite, relational, and prone to fluid transformation and metamorphosis. “In Deleuze’s reading,” explains professor of philosophy, Brett Buchanan,

“bodies are not considered in terms of their function or form, but in terms of how they can be affected, how they can undergo transitions, and, at bottom, how they define what a body can do . . . Each living thing entails a different set of relations to the environment at large. The capacity to affect and be affected is what constitutes the individuality of each particular thing” (Buchanan 2008: 158).

Consistent with our discussions thus far of relational epistemology, fractal personhood, and perspectivism in indigenous Amerindian cosmology, Deleuze scholar Timothy S. Murphy has characterized the vision we find in Deleuze as a “quantum ontology” (Murphy, 1998). Here, the body is not the reified “individual organism,” for in the Deleuzian reading, this is merely a sense of fully organized self-consistency. Instead, in a twist itself characteristic of a shamanic “counter-interpretation of the object,” Deleuze approaches the static condition of entities that

we've grown accustomed to in traditional empiricism in an ethological fashion, turning his attention instead to the body as the composition or accumulation of relations. In the Deleuzian consideration, the organism – the “molar,” static condition of a stratified, particular entity – is not the body. Rather, the organism is immanently composed of “molecular” relations and capacities formed with other bodies in a pre-personal, differential degrees of capacity to affect and be affected.

Surprising and utterly fascinating is that Viveiros de Castro interprets “spirits” as the molecular background and structure of stratified molar forms. In equating spirits with affects, “rather than designating a class of distinct beings, the concept of spirit “announces a region or moment of indiscernibility” (Viveiros de Castro, 2004). Worlds are described through bodies because substances and forms are not the ultimate reality of an organism, but rather are expressions of their respective perspectival realities. “What I call the body,” explains Viveiros de Castro, “is an assemblage of affects or ways of being that constitute a *habitus*” (Viveiros de Castro 2005: 62). “So far from being a super-individual,” writes Viveiros de Castro, a shaman is a “super-divided being: a federation of supernatural agents” (Viveiros de Castro, 2004). Anthropologist David Rodgers has also interpreted the shaman as a population of molecular affects, suggesting that “the shaman is a multiple being, a micro-population of shamanic agencies sheltered in one body” (Rodgers 2002: n18).<sup>13</sup> In indigenous Amazonia, the visible

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<sup>13</sup> Keep in mind that descriptors of identity such as “super-divided being: a federation of supernatural agents;” or a “micro-poulation of shamanic agencies sheltered in one body” are not that far from theories of the self that are emerging from contemporary poststructuralist critical theory, for “in today’s world,” writes Cultural Studies scholar Jason Zingsheim, “we are all mutants” (Zingsheim 2011: 35). Zingsheim turns to images of mutants in popular culture (such as the X-Men, for example) as a heuristic metaphor for understanding the radically contextual nature of contemporary identity. Important for our considerations, Zingsheim applies the Deleuzian (and implicitly, the Amerindian shamanic) understanding of body-as-assemblage to embrace the instability and mobility of discursive processes of identity construction. Zingsheim first clarifies the distinction between subjectivities (intelligible and discursively possible subject positions) and identity (our relationship to ourselves) to convey the constantly morphing reconstructions of what is all-too-easily classified as our “individual” existence.

bodies of organisms are thought to be ‘clothing,’ ‘masks,’ or ‘envelopes’ that express the perspectival realities of subject positions. Thus, personification within this relational epistemology entails an abduction of agency, a being beside oneself in being seized by an Other. This process necessitates that the shaman experimentally dismantle the organism to clarify ontologically what makes up each respective composition, “counter-interpreting” the object in what Viveiros de Castro calls an “intensive filiation” or “rhizomatic conception of kinship” (Viveiros de Castro, 2010). Spirit allies and animal-becomings are not dismissed as mere imaginative enterprises or cognitive errors when one takes up the interpretive approach of Deleuzian anthropology, for these concepts can instead be read as activating the powers of a different body to function *as* those bodies, equipment of their respective perspectivities “akin to diving equipment or space suits . . . endowed with the affects and capacities which define each animal” (Viveiros de Castro 2005: 62). Here the hypercommunicative knowledge stemming from a subjectifying relationality of intensive filiation reflects a change in the shaman’s assemblage-body, essentially embodying those powers as capabilities, as emergent properties, equipment, and instrumentation for benevolent and malevolent ends, whether that be in the form of locating animals in the forest, remote viewing, or diagnosing the etiologies of various maladies and their respective ailments. In the next section, I will continue in this vein of approaching spirits – the “occult life of things” – as affects, approximating Deluze’s adaptation of Proust’s “lost time” in

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Mutational identity “leads us to view identity and individuals as composed of multiple mutants or subjectivities,” adding that an “individual is not simply a mutant; rather he or she is composed of a multitude of mutants—a team of subjectivities—each shifting and morphing, with his or her own power, and with unpredictable relationships to others” (Zingsheim 2011: 28). Such an understanding of identity views the individual as a protean agency that marshals tactical and strategic performances from a collective of subjectivities whose origin and conduit is the materiality of the body. Moreover, Zingsheim’s mutational approach to identity stresses that identity is always moving, developing, and evolving as an ever-changing process. As opposed to the Cartesian, liberal humanist subject, a mutational identity entails drawing on differential capacities in shifting fields of connections, locating an embodied identity as assemblage (linkage and connection) instead of a transcendent, rational mind. Identity is capable of abiding multiplicity, and the collectivity of superpowers that that one can draw upon is directly related to one’s ability in personifying resourceful subject positions, drawing them in as one’s own as instrumentation for more effectively navigating the cosmos, courtroom, or classroom.

his consideration of affect as being *real without being actual, ideal without being abstract*.

Under objectivist epistemologies, autonomous agencies resistant to empirical vision and measurement are not real. I argue instead that they are real as the virtual dimensions of the body, despite being inherently resistant to the representational schemas of objectivist epistemologies that would render them as actual – quantifiable, objectifiable “things.”

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## CHAPTER V

### IN SEARCH OF LOST SPIRITS – ON FINDING THE VIRTUAL DIMENSION OF THE BODY

“The being which had been reborn in me when with a sudden shudder of happiness I had heard the noise that was common to the spoon touching the plate and the hammer striking the wheel, or had felt, beneath my feet, the unevenness that was common to the paving-stones of the Guermantes courtyard and to those of the baptistery of St Mark’s, this being is nourished only by the essences of things, in these alone does it find its sustenance and delight. In the observation of the present, where the senses cannot feed it with this food, it languishes, as it does in the consideration of a past made arid by the intellect or in the anticipation of a future which the will constructs with fragments of the present and the past, fragments whose reality it still further reduces by preserving of them only what is suitable for the utilitarian, narrowly human purpose for which it intends them. But let a noise or a scent, once heard or once smelt, be heard or smelt again in the present and at the same time in the past, real without being actual, ideal without being abstract, and immediately the permanent and habitually concealed essence of things is liberated and our true self, which seemed—had perhaps for long years seemed – to be dead but was not altogether dead, is awakened and reanimated as it receives the celestial nourishment that it has brought to it. A minute freed from the order of time has re-created in us, to feel it, the man freed from the order of time” (Proust 1981: 264).

Throughout his seven-part novel *In Search of Lost Time*, Proust sets forth a surface/depth model with the idea that underneath the flow of historical time there is a depth of “lost time” subjacent to it that becomes revealed in moments of “involuntary memory.” Proust’s “lost time” contains a reservoir of unconscious life in which the past is not dead, but still living and capable of being reconstituted by chance triggers of involuntary memory. Proust contrasts the

successiveness of linear/historical time with this “lost time,” unconsciously recorded memories that erupt in chance encounters to provide an experience of the simultaneity of past and present while exceeding both. Surprise sensations that repeat prior impressions can prompt the feeling of stepping outside of time to experience all the sensual aspects of that “lost time,” but—and this is key for Proust—it is as if one was experiencing the essence or totality of that prior experience in a manner that voluntary memory is simply incapable of accessing. Only an openness to chance can reveal the past as distilled in its idea. Art for Proust is nothing if not the effort to transcribe or translate the depths of our psyche, redeeming the fragmentary nature of modern life by sharing these dis-locative and ultimately unitive shards of lost time.<sup>14</sup>

The aesthetic of Proust begins not with agency but with passivity, being open to the world and being “struck.” Because it displaces volition and conditioning, engaging chance was a way for Proust and other artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to occupy a space immune from ideology and false consciousness. Furthermore, renouncing pre-meditated goals for an immersion within the spontaneity of creation recovered a direct relationship between the artist and their work without imposed constraints or expectations. Narrowing the gap between art and life was thought to be a

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<sup>14</sup> Leo Bersani (1990) has famously criticized Proust in *The Culture of Redemption* on the grounds that the translation of experience into art requires a departicularization, or a truth liberated from phenomena which requires the displaced volition of the particular in its “spectral” repetition. In other words, the retrieval of the past for Proust is thought by Bersani to do violence to “the absolute singularity of human experience—the source of both its tragedy and its beauty . . . in the trivializing nobility of a redemption through art” (Bersani, 21). Although one could take the stance of Bersani that Proust dissipates the singularity of objects through a retroactive responsiveness, I would push for a counter-reading, namely that Proust demonstrates an extreme responsiveness to the singularity of objects in a manner that is faithful to Adorno’s extension of aesthetic negativity into interaction with one’s surroundings. Recall that throughout Proust’s writing, “lost time” is found only when triggered by chance encounters with the particularity of objects, whether those involuntary memories are catalyzed by missteps upon unevenly laid paving stones, the sound of “a spoon against a plate, or the feel of a napkin. Perhaps what irks Bersani the most is that repetition redeems the past in the present, that displacing and estranging the world comes from a secondary, retroactive, perspective that repeats the past in the present from the vantage of a safe remove. But what Bersani overlooks is that this vantage point is rendered possible from the immediacy of an encounter with the particular. And, taking this one step further, without an encounter with stone or spoon, the reader neither would have had an encounter with Proust, nor with an appraisal of their own past as seed for potential aesthetic project and site of communicating otherness. Contrary to Bersani’s presentation, singularity of the particular in Proust functions as the hinge for involuntary memory, and thus for the possibility of openness to experience and entering into non-instrumental relations with others.

by-product of this decision because it made one more open to (and aware of) existence, a mode of re-enchantment that stumbles upon the marvelous in the everyday.<sup>15</sup> Repetition of memory in an involuntary form reveals a kind of core self, yet is productive not of the lived past, but an essential past, seeing something that was not there prior to finding lost time again. Refuge is sought in a form of heightened openness grounded in aesthetic passivity, and art is productive of—and produced *by*—the displacement of suspect volition and conditioning. For Proust, a somewhat “unlived” past is the reservoir of unconscious life that can be resurrected in the present, in that “lost time” is found only when triggered by chance encounters with the *particularity* of objects, whether those involuntary memories are catalyzed by missteps upon unevenly laid paving stones, the sound of a spoon against a plate, or the feel of a napkin – gestures, textures, smells, and memories that open new and hidden worlds.

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<sup>15</sup> Note the similarity here to Surrealism and its relevance to our considerations of abduction in Amazonian shamanism and a Deleuzian virtual. Like the Dadaists before them, the Surrealists also attempted to remove art from the sway of conscious faculties, but the heavy influence of Freud distanced them from the anarchic nature of Dada, proffering instead a somewhat utopic vision grounded in the liberation of the unconscious to blur the boundaries between art and life. Surrealism sought to recover unconscious drives that had become overlaid with a robotic habituation of the modern subject, attempting to break up the sway of conscious faculties to recover something about ourselves from the overlay of habit. Towards the beginning of his first Surrealist manifesto, André Breton (1969) remarks that the word “freedom” is the only one that still excites him. Breton goes on to state that “Imagination alone offers me some intimation of what can be” (5), providing a stark contrast and alternative to the “realistic attitude” of positivism, a “reign of logic” (9) whose absolute rationalism he views as “hostile to any intellectual or moral advancement” (6). The picture that Breton presents us with is essentially the repression of imagination under the pretense of civilization and progress, but, with the discoveries of Sigmund Freud, he also conjectures that there is hope: “The imagination is perhaps on the point of reasserting itself, of reclaiming its rights. If the depths of our mind contain within it strange forces capable of augmenting those on the surface, or of waging a victorious battle against them, there is every reason to seize them” (10). Like the imagination, Breton believes that the psychic activity of the dream has been “reduced to a mere parenthesis” (11), and similar to the imagination, faces a “phenomenon of interference” (12): the waking state. Both imagination and the dream are brought together in a third term, the “marvelous,” which for Breton is the sole source of beauty (14), poetic imagination (18) and genius (26). But Breton’s strategy for “seizing” the marvelous isn’t solely restricted to artistic production. Rather, Surrealism is presented as a life praxis, the telos of which is “Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express” the “actual functioning of thought” in the “absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern” (26). In other words, Breton is proposing that we strive towards minimizing the interference of control and reason over the psychic energy of our impulses, a move that would further erode the sharp distinction between dream and reality in a way that privileges the “omnipotence” (26) of the former in bestowing a greater deal of freedom to the latter.

Proust's "lost time" was adapted by Deleuze in his consideration of the autonomy of affect, or the non-representational singularities of experience that fall outside any distinction of the interiority or exteriority characteristic of subjects and objects, and thus are *im-* or *sub-*personal. Deleuze attempts to think becoming (process and metamorphosis) with these "virtual" intensive moments of change that are in the dynamic process of "actual"-ization into the extensive states of "things" and their qualities. In this sense, "virtual" is not what we have come to associate with a term like "virtual reality"<sup>16</sup> – a *representational double* of the experienced world – but as the exact opposite of this, the *nonrepresentational* "real" of the actual.<sup>17</sup> When discussing the virtual, Deleuze commonly quotes Proust's famous adage on involuntary memory: "Real without being actual, ideal without being abstract." In *Parables for the Virtual*, Brian Massumi unpacks this gloss, explaining that a "word for the 'real but abstract' incorporeality of the body is the virtual" (Massumi 2002: 21), with abstract here "pertaining to the transitional immediacy of a real relation—that of a body to its own indeterminacy (its openness to an elsewhere and otherwise than it is, in any here and now)" (Massumi 2002: 5). To the extent that

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<sup>16</sup> It is worth noting that the origin of the term "virtual reality" can be traced directly to Artaud in *Theater and Its Double*. Describing the "Great Work" of the theater, Artaud explains that it "is to be realized spiritually, while waiting for it to be realized actually and materially . . . All true alchemists know that the alchemical symbol is a mirage as the theater is a mirage. And this perpetual allusion to the materials and the principle of the theater found in almost all alchemical books should be understood as the expression of an identity (of which alchemists are extremely aware) existing between the world in which the characters, objects, images, and in a general way all that constitutes the virtual reality of the theater develops, and the purely fictitious and illusory world in which the symbols of alchemy are evolved" (Artaud 1958: 49).

<sup>17</sup> The virtual should *not* be confused with virtual reality. As well, I cannot stress enough that one needs to resist hearing the "virtual" as the unreal. Levi Bryant offers us further clarification, explaining that the Deleuzian virtual is not a simulacrum of reality, a sort of false or computer generated reality. Rather, "the virtual is entirely real without, for all that, being actual. The term "virtuality" comes from the Latin *virtus*, which has connotations of potency and efficacy. As such, the virtual, as *virtus*, refers to powers and capacities belonging to an entity. And in order for an entity to have powers or capacities, it must actually exist. In this connection, while the virtual refers to potentiality, it would be a mistake to conflate this potentiality with the concept of a potential object. A potential object is an object that does not exist but which could come to exist. By contrast, the virtual is strictly a part of a real and existing object. The virtual consists of the volcanic powers coiled within an object. It is that substantiality, that structure and those singularities that endure as the object undergoes qualitative transformations at the level of local manifestations" (Bryant 2011: 83)

the body is dynamic and alive, it is always in passage or process, so in Massumi's interpretation, "to think the body in movement thus means accepting the paradox that there is an incorporeal dimension of the body. Of it, but not it. Real, material, but incorporeal. Inseparable, coincident, but disjunct" (Massumi 2002: 5).<sup>18</sup> Similar to "lost time" in Proust and the notion of an unseen spiritual background in animistic cosmologies, we therefore have "an order of reality other than the measurable, divisible space it can be confirmed as having crossed," inadvertently "thinking away its dynamic unity, the continuity of its movement," and thus "we are looking at only one dimension of reality" (Massumi 2002: 6).

The problem for Massumi is that poststructuralist critical theory has rendered the body into an exclusively "discursive body," a move in the humanities and identity politics more broadly that has subtracted sensation<sup>19</sup> and movement in its concerns with a subject entirely constructed by the systemic structuring capacities and exercises of power of external mechanisms. Concern with these preformative dimensions of the subject subordinated sensation and movement to positionality, a model that considers the body to be constructed by culture through its signifying practices of ideological mediation, with any notion of unmediated experience (i.e., sensation, movement, and any form of qualitative transformation) considered the wishful thinking of a naive subjectivism. Therefore, Massumi's suggestion is to emphasize the intensive processes prior to signification or coding, while also considering analyses of the "discursive body" as

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<sup>18</sup> Note that *vegetalistas* do think the body in movement. With the framework of spirits as being the virtual background of actual forms, Pablo Amaringo's gloss that "Spirits are pure energy in constant motion" (Luna and Amaringo 1991: 32n40) takes on a much greater depth of meaning and insight.

<sup>19</sup> Massumi distinguishes perception (object-oriented experience) from sensation (perception of perception, or "self-referential experience"). Whereas the former is quantifiable (extensive), the latter is qualitative (intensive). Massumi also importantly mentions that "this usage departs sharply from the customary usage in experiential psychology and analytic philosophy, where 'sensation' is synonymous with 'sense-datum'" (Massumi 2002: 258-259n11)

“not false or unreal . . . It’s just that their sphere of applicability must be recognized as limited to a particular mode of existence, or a particular dimension of the real (the degree to which things coincide with their own arrest). Einstein’s theories of relativity did not prove Newton’s laws wrong. It showed them to be of limited applicability; accurate, but only at a certain scale of things” (Massumi 2002: 7).

Reorienting ourselves towards *virtual* forces thus takes up the possibility of life beyond specific observation or experience, as opposed to the facts or state of affairs of *actual* (i.e. representable) “things,” for as Deleuze phrased it, “The actual is the complement or the product, the object of actualization, *which has nothing but the virtual as its subject*” (Deleuze 2006: 113). In other words, the actual is an emergent effect of *affect*, which is precisely why Deleuze turns to Proust in articulating how the synthesis, order, and purposive viewpoints of organizing systems are composed of intensive, impersonal singularities which themselves are non-objectifiable or quantifiable by those forms and methods of composition.

To think life as becoming – as a constant emergence, individuation, or *actualization* of virtual forces – without a ground or foundation outside itself, Deleuze took up the challenge of what he oxymoronically termed a “transcendental empiricism”<sup>20</sup> Deleuze writes that

“Singularities are the true transcendental events . . . Far from being individual or personal, singularities preside over the genesis of individuals and persons; they are distinguished in a ‘potential’ which admits neither Self nor I, but which produces them by actualizing or realizing itself . . . Only a theory of the singular point is capable of transcending the synthesis of the person and the analysis of the individual as these are (or are made) in consciousness . . . Only when the world, teeming with anonymous and nomadic, impersonal and pre-individual singularities, opens up, do we tread at last on the field of the transcendental” (Deleuze 1990: 103).

<sup>20</sup> “Transcendental empiricism” plays upon Kant’s position of “transcendental idealism” in which objects conform to the mind, rather than the mind to objects, and thus attempts to problematize any consciousness-centered philosophical stances. Deleuze also used the term “superior empiricism,” and Valentine Moulard-Leonard suggests that it “could equally be called ‘virtual empiricism’” (Moulard-Leonard 2008: 3).

Although Massumi notes that “the word ‘transcendental’ may trouble some readers,” he explains that “for Deleuze, transcendental refers to the ontogenetic difference between emergence and the emerged” (Massumi 2002: 257 n8). Like Foucault, who said that he was trying to break free from a “subjection to transcendence” in a tradition of Western thought tending to afford a pre-given foundation to that which is exterior to becoming, movement, and change (Foucault 1972: 203), Deleuze’s commitment to immanence turned to an “empiricism” that refused any principle that could order experience from an outside to that experience.

Instead of an *outside*, the autonomy of affect is a *beside*, which as Massumi explains is “autonomous to the degree to which it escapes confinement in the particular body whose vitality, or potential for interaction, it is” (Massumi 2002: 35). Affect is the “virtual as point of view” (Massumi 2002: 35), “an incorporeal, yet perfectly real, dimension of pressing potential” (Massumi 2002: 31).<sup>21</sup> The abductive experience of being beside oneself stands in place of a transcendental perspective precisely to the extent that it is a lived paradox: “The virtual is a lived paradox where what are normally opposites coexist, coalesce, and connect; where what cannot be experienced cannot but be felt – albeit reduced and contained” (Massumi 2002: 31). Restated, I suggest we can read affect – the interruptive experience of the virtual – as consistent with Paul Bains’ Deleuzian phraseology of “subjectless subjectivities.”<sup>22</sup> “Affect or intensity in the present account,” explains Massumi, “is akin to what is called a critical point, or a bifurcation point, or singular point, in chaos theory and the theory of dissipative structures. This is the

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<sup>21</sup> “Virtual as point of view” is consistent with the Proustian background of Deleuze’s virtual. In Valentine Moulard-Leonard’s reading, she suggests “that in Proust the interpreters are not selves; rather, they are affects: jealousy, anxiety, sorrow – all of those dark, surprising, and troubling strangers within that we habitually prefer to keep at bay, that we refuse to recognize or integrate whenever they distastefully show up at the door” (Moulard-Leonard 2008: 133).

<sup>22</sup> See Bains’ 2002 article “Subjectless Subjectivities” in *A Shock to Thought: Expression after Deleuze and Guattari* (Brian Massumi, ed.)

turning point at which a physical system paradoxically embodies multiple and normally mutually exclusive potentials, only one of which is ‘selected’” (Massumi 2002: 32). The intensive experience of affect is therefore a virtual transcendence, a transcendental empiricism, wherein a dispossessive experience of abductive, self-othering occurs.

Ending with where we began, recall the opening excerpt for this section from Proust:

“immediately the permanent and habitually concealed essence of things is liberated and our true self, which seemed—had perhaps for long years seemed – to be dead but was not altogether dead, is awakened and reanimated as it receives the celestial nourishment that it has brought to it. A minute freed from the order of time has re-created in us, to feel it, the man freed from the order of time” (Proust 1981: 264).

Conventionally concealed in its constitution as a habitus, the “lost” dimension of the virtual – “real without being actual, ideal without being abstract” – can be “found again” in abductive, intensive encounters of embodying multiple and normally mutually exclusive potentials, for in essence, this is the molecular (virtual) background of molar (actual) forms. If spirits are not *actual* it does not entail they are not *real*. With an immanent Deleuzian approach of transcendental empiricism that refuses to posit a transcendent “outside” to experience, we get a radically different perspective on “spirits” in *vegetalismo* and other animistic cosmologies, which themselves similarly do not acknowledge transcendent aspect of actual “things,” but rather affective, virtual dimensions of the actual which are *autonomous to the degree to which it escapes confinement in the particular body whose vitality, or potential for interaction, it is*. Spirits are not encountered in some kind of illusory transcendence of embodiment. On the contrary, they reside in the immanent depth of the body, the lost dimension of the virtual that can be found again in ecstasy. For Mircea Eliade, ecstasy was the defining characteristic of shamanism, going as far as to say that “The shaman, and he alone, is the great master of ecstasy. A first definition of this complex phenomenon, and perhaps the least hazardous, will be

shamanism = *techniques of ecstasy*” (Eliade 1972: 4). However, I feel that Eliade made a critical mistake in narrowly associating ecstasy with transcendence from the body, a bizarre formulation “soul flight” that bespeaks more his own historico-intellectual background than that of the figures he was attempting to classify. Doyle notes that “while recent usage tends to conjoin the ‘ecstatic’ with enjoyment, its etymology suggests an ontological bifurcation – a ‘being beside oneself’ in which the very location, if not existence, of a self is put into disarray and language takes on an unpredictable and lively agency” (Doyle 2011: 105). It is towards this ecstasy and unpredictable and lively agency of language of the shaman to which we now turn.

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## CHAPTER VI

### THE ECODELIC INSIGHT – ECSTASIS, AFFECTIVITY, AND SOUNDING THE VIRTUAL

Doyle refers to plant technologies that systematically alter consciousness as “transhuman technologies” due to their degree of acuity in “amplifying human perception of the connections in their environment and allowing those connections to be mimed and investigated” (Doyle 2011: 33). Perhaps the reason that *ayahuasca* has held such a strong curiosity and attraction for Westerners outside of the Upper Amazon is that it manifests a vision not of things but their meshed interconnection, providing a radically liberating contrast to prevailing models of epistemology, ontology, and identity. The story gets even more interesting when we take into account the arguments of Michael Taussig (1987) and Peter Gow (1994) that *ayahuasca* shamanism evolved precisely to cure the disease of Westerners’ colonial experience in the Amazon. Although the humanist subject position is centered upon the illusion of autonomy – of a hierarchical distinction between organism and environment lending itself to practices of privileging the dominion of the former over the latter – it is Doyle’s claim that psychedelics are rhetorical adjuncts towards immanence in that they persuade humans of their meshed inseparability with the life and intelligence of terrestrial and extraterrestrial ecologies, forcing an encounter with ecosystemic interconnection amidst the felt experience of egoic dissolution.

Yet, as Evgenia Fotiou has pointed out in her research on *ayahuasca* tourism, there is a great deal of difference between the ways Westerners versus Amerindians and mestizos interpret

and perceive their visionary experiences in that "the more individualistic Westerners tend to look inward and see visions as internal processes, that is, as a property of their own bodies" (Fotiou 2010: 201). "For them," writes Fotiou, "the ceremonies were like an exercise in self-reliance that reinforced their individualism" (Fotiou 2010: 201). Whereas indigenous and mestizo shamans tend to interpret the *ayahuasca* experience as a cognitive tool for subjectivating and thus acquiring potential perspectives from an infinite number of spirit-worlds, Westerners have tended to approach it as an amplification of attention towards the antipodes of interiority – Mind, sub-/unconscious, or psyche – and hence the somewhat unfortunate and oft-contested term "psyche-delic" ("mind-manifesting"). As an alternative to the term, "entheogen" has been widely used to more broadly encompass both contemporary and ancient shamanic practice, a neologism that literally means "realizing the divine within" (Ott 1993: 19). However, Doyle contests both of these designations for their implicit assumptions, because "given the non-local feeling of the experiences" a "reliance on a 'within' and 'without' is less than ideal" (Doyle 2011: 26). Instead, Doyle proffers "ecodelic" as his own neologism to emphasize the characteristic insight of these psychoactive plant medicines that

"makes legible the nature of perception itself as a nonlinear and highly distributed system not 'ownable' by a self and navigable only through its practiced but always irreducible dissolution, the sometimes shattering detachment from 'distinctness' before which a sense of interior and exterior dissolves in awareness and awe" (Doyle 2011: 11).

In short, rather than manifesting the *transcendent* depths of a hidden psychic interiority, Doyle suggests we interpret the experiences these plant medicines offer instead in terms of manifesting a "sudden apprehension of *immanence*, a connectivity that exceeds the rhetorical capacities of an ego" that thereby "render the ego into a non sequitur, the self becoming tangibly a gift manifested by a much larger dissipative structure – the planet, the galaxy, the cosmos" (Doyle

2011: 20-21).<sup>23</sup> Ecodeletics are thus “an imaging technology for interconnection” tuning perception towards an apprehension and facility for interconnection (Doyle 2011: 74).

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<sup>23</sup> David Bohm’s implicate/explicate distinction is yet another route to understanding and approaching a virtual/actual distinction. Note that Massumi himself has stated that “affect [\*spirits\*] is as good a general term as any for the interface between implicate and explicate order” (Massumi 2002: 37). Doyle as well has turned to the elegance of Bohm in his own work on ecodeletics: “Bohm offers an immanent view of consciousness in which it is ‘implicit’ or enfolded within the only apparently separate order of matter” (Doyle 2011: 145). With his landmark work, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, physicist David Bohm proposed that an atomistic scientific approach to reality, though valid in a limited context, is a simplification and abstraction that cannot account for the implications of relativity and quantum theory. Bohm characterized scientific materialism—best exemplified in classical (“Newtonian”) physics—as being based upon the reduction of observable data to mechanistic laws, principles, and basic components that act amidst hierarchical compounds, and predicated upon the objectivity afforded by detached observation.

His claim is that science unconsciously thinks and perceives with a fragmentary worldview, projecting autonomy and stability onto events that are implicitly interpenetrating and indivisible from a universal flux of movement. Bohm suggests that “any describable event, object, entity, etc., is an abstraction from an unknown and indefinable totality of flowing movement. This means that no matter how far our knowledge of the laws of physics may go, the content of these laws will still deal with such abstractions, having only a relative independence of existence and independence of behavior” (Bohm 1980: 49). Independent, localizable objects that can be mapped by the positional grid of a Cartesian coordinate system are deemed by Bohm to be perceptually “explicated” (unfolded, made relevant) from an “implicate” (enfolded) order. “Things” can therefore be better represented as “sub-totalities” because “in some sense each region contains a total structure ‘enfolded’ within it” (Bohm 1980: 149). Bohm explains that: “The new form of insight can perhaps best be called Undivided Wholeness in Flowing Movement. This view implies that flow is, in some sense, prior to that of ‘things’ that can be seen to form and dissolve in this flow. There is a universal flux that cannot be defined explicitly but which can be known only implicitly, as indicated by the explicitly definable forms and shapes, some stable and some unstable, that can be abstracted from the universal flux. In this flow, mind and matter are not separate substances. Rather, they are different aspects of one whole and unbroken movement.” (Bohm 1980: 11). Graspable observables (solid matter and discrete units of space) are unfolded (“made explicit”) from an unbroken, energetic continuum. Though they are therefore absent of inherent, independent existence, phenomena are nevertheless pragmatically real, but are more accurately considered the explicate ornamentation of an immanent, “virtual” enfoldment.

For Bohm, the localized objects and particles observed are actually the momentary unfolding of enfolded processes, misrecognized as static in large part because of the hypnotic influence of noun-oriented, European languages. The conditioned habits of language bring about a fragmentation in thought: “The subject-verb-object structure of modern languages implies that all action arises in a separate subject, and acts either on a separate object, or else reflexively on itself. This pervasive structure leads in the whole of life to a function that divides the totality of existence into separate entities, which are considered to be essentially fixed and static in their nature” (Bohm xii). Bohm hypothesized that introducing a new mode of language could alleviate the fragmentary effect of nouns by asserting verbs as primary in the function of language. He dubbed this new mode the “rheomode” (‘rheo’ is a Greek verb, meaning “to flow”). Although not fully developed in his writings, the rheomode represents the playful experimentation with language that attempts to ground meaning in the movement of process by utilizing root verb forms, rather than the discontinuous parceling which results from noun-orientations arrest of motion to abstract (literally “dragged away” entities). Dan Moonhawk Alford, linguist and Benjamin Lee Whorf apologist, recognized the blatant similarities between the thought of Whorf and Bohm, asking the latter point-blank at a conference whether he was acquainted with Whorf’s body of work. Bohm responded enthusiastically with an exclamatory affirmative. Alford’s claim is that Bohm not only adopted his views on language from Whorf, but also refashioned Whorf’s terminology of ‘manifesting’ and ‘manifested’ (taken from the article, “An American Indian Model of the Universe”) into his ‘implicate’ and ‘explicate’ orders. Alford conjectures that the reason nary a footnote was given to credit the borrowing is likely attributable to the potentially derailing controversy

Ecodelics, in sum, are imaging technologies for the ecological connections that precede ecological fixation, providing an undeniable, affective experience suggestive of a deep implication within a “more-than-human” world.

The ecodelic insight bestows upon the user the “sudden and absolute conviction” of being “involved in a densely interconnected ecosystem for which contemporary tactics of identity are insufficient” (Doyle 2011: 20). Because the self is rendered into a continuum between inside and outside, ecodelics enable a recursive perspective on egoic awareness, but to manage and navigate this vertiginous experience, what is required are new tactics of identity that cede interpretation and control while simultaneously organizing one’s attention. In the context of upper Amazonian *ayahuasca* practices, this comes in the form of *icaros*, whistled songs that guide the drinker in rhythm, cadence, and pitch in a disciplining of attention. Doyle suggest *icaros* provide a “sonic handhold,” a “place to dwell within the multiplicity presented by ayahuasca” (Doyle 2011: 25), and reads them against Felix Guattari’s notion of “existential refrains,” which “help the diverse bodies of which we are made up dwell together and repeat even as they undergo massive

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surrounding the “Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis.” See Alford’s article “Stealing the Fire: A Linguistic Overview of This Century’s Advances in Physics,” posted online at his website (<http://www.enformy.com/alford>).

Specializing in Amerindian languages, Whorf believed that the difference between the unified space-time worldview of the Hopi and the Newtonian mechanism of scientific materialism lies in the former’s assertion that linguistic meaning is something similar to events emerging out of a fluid, constantly moving, interconnected flux. A Theosophist himself, Whorf’s concern was with a “noumenal” world of hyperspace/higher dimensions, the inevitable discovery of which he conjectured would unify the sciences. For Whorf, the structures of languages structure our relative experiences of the world (Whorf 1956: 254). He equated the projection of provisional linguistic relationships (reference/lexical segmentation) upon the universe with the Hindu notion of *maya* (“illusion”) (Whorf 1956: 262). In his view, there is a progression of planes/levels of reality that are distinguishable by their gestalt patterning. Whorf proposed mantra as a form of language that can overcome relativistic lexical segmentation—potentially an example of the “natural language” that he was searching for, and posited as a kind of gnostic scientific tool, which is an eerily accurate translation of the Sanskrit term *vidya*, a particularly tantric form of mantra (Whorf 1956: 266). The mantric or yogic use of language—specifically patterned formula-languages—was thought capable of intensifying, transmitting, and manipulating a noumenal force that is typically only transmitted at low intensities, which he sees as analogous to the mathematical languages involved in radio stations or power plants (Whorf 1956: 250). Whorf’s belief was that we could transform erroneous scientific paradigms and our appreciation of the cosmos through mantra’s ability to strategically repattern states in the nervous system and amplify and activate latent forces (Whorf 1956: 250). Substituting *icaro* for mantra here would be equally consistent with Whorf’s presentation.

transformation” (Doyle 2011: 16). As such, Doyle refers to *icaros* as akin to a form of “rhetorical software,” or “linguistic, visual, musical, and narrative sequences whose function reside less in the ‘meaning’ than in their capacity to be repeated and help generate patterns of response . . . They are compositions that suggest, but do not exhaust what one may very well *become* in contact with entheogens” (Doyle 2011: 52). What one may very well become in contact with entheogens is virtual, for they are notorious for providing unprecedented access to moments of metamorphic disequilibrium. Furthermore, as we shall see, *icaros* by definition are the sonic embodiment of these flows and fluxes of human and nonhuman elements.

Quite interesting is that these forms of rhetorical software themselves are “coded” by shamans capable of enduring the uncertainty of the ecstatic experience of ecodelics, for both speaking and listening require an intensification of the (eco-)Logos. In fact, the former is akin to the latter, for, as Doyle puts it, these shamanic healers “do not wield ecstasy but are taught by it,” deploying intoxication for eloquence in giving themselves over to an ecstatic form of signification (Doyle 2011: 104). Ayahuasquera Adela Navas de Garcia of Iquitos explains that “it’s not just singing a normal song, that’s not enough to heal, the songs come from the spirits themselves” (Razam 2010: 7). This phenomenon of ecstatic signification in psychedelic states is not the intensification of an interior eloquence, but rather “involves the blockage of the self rather than its cultivation,” a “practice [that] takes place on the very precipice of agency” (Doyle 2011: 111). Doyle explains that “By dialing down the ego toward a vanishing point, human subjectivity is pulled inside out and the transhuman other broadcasts on that track usually labeled ‘interior’ but whose very experience is itself contingent on an opening to a state in which inside and outside dissolve” (Doyle 2011: 111). In other words, the ecstatic signification involved in shamanic signification requires an opening towards the affective tonalities of the virtual realms

subtending our actual experience. This kind of listening – a listening *beyond* the human – “requires a recognition that threatens the contours of human identity itself – a focusing not on the self but on those nonhuman entities troubling the very distinction between the inner world and the outer world, entities whose appearance is linked to the disappearance of the self through its gradual or sudden dwindling” (Doyle 2011: 112).<sup>24</sup> Ecodeletics are indispensable for this task precisely because they put the control of an ego into disarray in a manner not amenable to

<sup>24</sup> Are we peopled by spirits concealed by a self? Or are we a non-dual, non-local continuum that constructs “spirits” as outward manifestations of inward realities? Perhaps both. Perhaps neither. A panentheistic model would posit the latter, for it posits the doctrine that the divine is both immanent and transcendent to the universe. What Deleuze brings to the table is a ruthless concern with immanence that would be suspicious of sneaking in a unified self, divine or otherwise, at the moment of egoic dissolution. Eugene Thacker has fittingly referred to the picture we get from Deleuze as a “heretical panentheism” (Thacker 229). However, many process theologians (particularly, and most effectively, Catherine Keller and Roland Faber) have read Deleuze in conjunction with Whitehead to advance a very interesting revision of panentheism. As well-crafted and interesting as Keller and Faber’s theological articulations appear, they nevertheless hold firm to a sovereign creator and source, whereas with Deleuze (and with the cosmology of *vegetalistas*) we are, as Thacker explains, “asked to think of a concept of pure immanence and a concept of dynamic, inventive life in one and the same thought. Something that is everywhere and at all times, but always differently. But this also implies a ‘something’ that, since it is everywhere at all times differently, is also not-something, a ‘nothing.’ And yet this nothing-that-is-everywhere is constantly differentiating, a nothing that is also a superlative excess and affirmation” (Thacker 2010: 229). Admittedly, my own affinity is for the resolution put forward in *rdzogs chen* (Sanskrit: *mahasandhi*) traditions of Tibetan Buddhism and Bön, wherein that “something” is simultaneously a “nothing” lacking inherent existence – the basic space of phenomena which is also dynamic and intelligent. However, this is not space as inert negativity, but space as dynamic, inventive, constantly differentiating. The Trika Śaivism of Kashmir, which has many parallels and historical intersections with Dzogchen, likewise posits a spiritual fullness attainable through attention to intermediary space and time between any two things, happenings, or experiences (*madhya* or *sandhi*). Bettina Bäumer, a noted scholar of Trika Śaivism, relates that one of the most ancient Sanskrit words for void is *kha*, which means the nave of the wheel, the empty space which makes movement and dynamism possible (Bäumer 2005: 160). Although further elaboration is prohibited by an altogether different set of “space concerns,” elsewhere I have discussed practices found in the *Vijñāna Bhairava*, an 8th century Trika Śaivite text oriented towards attaining the “form of the void,” within a similar analytic of abduction and “subtle” bodies in non-objectivist epistemologies. Regardless of interpretation, I side with Beyer’s cogent insight that “It is a question of how we valorize our encounters. Whether *ayahuasca* lends solidity to imagination, or opens the door to the spirit realms, or transports the user to distant dimensions, it is still the quality of our meeting that matters, what we are willing to learn, whether we are willing to be taught by what we encounter, whether we will take our chances in the epistemic murk of a transformed world” (Beyer 2009: 266). I am less concerned with matters of ultimate interpretation than the re-enchantment afforded by comparison and epistemic brinkmanship, what we can perhaps refer to in this vein as my own attempt at “epistemic murk-raking.” Comparison thereby takes its cue from the university of the forest, a form of knowledge acquisition that is utterly and solely dependent upon abductive, transformative encounters with immanence. In my view, it is the quality of the encounter that matters, the degree of transformation and wonder that it affords in abductively suspending interpretation, rather than the gap-filling processes of induction and deduction that ensue to render that suspensive encounter into a reasonable one. In short, the logics and interpretive schemas of shamanic, Tantric, or Deleuzian systems are far less important than the encounters with the virtual itself, encounters which, by definition, are surprising and resistant to representation, for the abductive encounter logically and ontologically precedes any secondary attempt at fixation.

strategies of control. “By releasing the attention from the cognitive self or ego,” writes Doyle, “human subjects can focus their attention on the orderly structures ‘below’ conscious awareness and distributed across their embodiment and environments” (119).

In the seemingly different context of posthuman media ecologies, this process of active affection is illustrative of what media theorist Mark B.N. Hansen has termed *affectivity*, which he defines as the

“capacity of the body to experience itself as ‘more than itself’ and thus to deploy its sensorimotor power to create the unpredictable, the experimental, the new . . . a capacity to experience its own intensity, its own margin of indeterminacy, affectivity comprises a power of the body that cannot be assimilated to the bait-driven, associational logic governing perception . . . precisely that mode of bodily experience which mediates between the individual and the preindividual, the body and its ‘virtual’ milieu: whereas perception appeals to structure already constituted in the interior of the individuated being, affectivity indicates and comprises this relation between the individualized being and preindividual reality: it is thus to a certain extent heterogeneous in relation to individualized reality, and appears to bring it something from the exterior, indicating to the individualized being that it is not a complete and closed set [ensemble] of reality” (Hansen 2004: 6-7).

Here we can understand why anthropologist Michael Taussig has described the shaman as a “strategic zone of vacuity, a palette of imageric possibility” (Taussig 1987: 444), for the affectivity required for mediating the preindividual, virtual reality is dependent upon a disjunctive synthesis, or hetero-genesis of becoming other in a kenosis of self-emptying ecstasis.<sup>25</sup> Abduction, affectivity, and ecstasis are all synonomic, descriptors of an interruption of interiority in suddenly finding oneself pluralized and non-local. But although language is insufficient for compressing a thoroughly distributed, immanent experience into a representational logic, the astonishment characteristic of these ineffable states is likewise a

<sup>25</sup> Taussig (1987) discusses *ayahuasca* in the context of montage, and Viveiros de Castro similarly associates both shamans and spirits with the interval, the *disruption* of bodies: “a spirit is something that only has too little body insofar as it possesses too many bodies, capable as it is of assuming different corporal forms. The interval between any two bodies rather than a non-body or no body at all” (Viveiros de Castro 2004).

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*provocation* to language in attempting to speak the intensive rhythms of that synaesthetic, affective tonality. However, language takes on an entirely different valence here at this virtual level of expression as a bodily phenomenon, concerned less with representation than texture, reverberation, resonance, and felt significance as a bodying of sound is coextensive with and as the bodying of a sonic immanence – gesturing and speaking *as* the seamless landscape rather than detached therefrom. In fact, one of the central functions of *icaros* is to modulate and metabolize the visions of participants in the *ayahuasca* ceremony, the contents of which would otherwise be assumed to be the province of an “interior” within a dualistic perceptual ontology, but here occur upon a shared plane of immanence.

Terence McKenna explains that under the influence of tryptamines, “exotic synaesthesias occur, including the generation of three-dimensional language; a situation where, using voice, one can create three-dimensional colored modalities that have linguistic content . . . It is as though language has a potential that is only rarely expressed” (McKenna 1991: 53). Diana Reed-Slattery’s dissertation has covered this phenomenon at length, approaching it from the perspective of xenolinguistics, or the study of nonhuman or otherwise “alien” languages (Reed-Slattery, 2011). Elaborating further, McKenna describes that:

“These entities are dynamically contorting topological modules that are somehow distinct from the surrounding background, which is itself undergoing a continuous transformation . . . What they’re doing is emitting sounds like music, like language. These sounds pass without any quantized moment of distinction – as Philo Judaeus said that the Logos would when it became perfect – from things heard into things beheld. One hears and beholds a language of alien meaning that is conveying alien information that cannot be Englished . . . One discovers one can make the extradimensional objects – the feeling-toned, meaning-toned, three-

dimensional rotating complexes of transforming light and color” (McKenna 1991: 27-28).<sup>26</sup>

Although exotic synaesthesias may appear “alien” to “actual” representational languages, they are part and parcel of an immanent, “virtual” language attuned to sub-sensate excitations.<sup>27</sup>

*Icaros* – the magic chants or melodies central within *vegetalismo* that are taught by the spirits of plants, animals, or any number of non-human persons – are considered the sound bodies, the “equipment” of those beings, as well as a means for facilitating communication with them. If shamans approach *ayahuasca* as a sort of university for acquiring knowledge, it is these *icaros* that are the desired results of a rigorous education. Luis Eduardo Luna writes that they are the “quintessence of shamanic power and wisdom,” the quantity and quality of which determine a tacit hierarchy among shamans (Luna 1986: 109). Similar to mantras in a Hindu and Buddhist Tantric context, the degree of abstraction from semantic meaning tends to be a marker of power: “the more abstract, less conceptual, less overtly intelligible the *icaro*, the more powerful it is” (Beyer 2009: 74), with the most powerful uses of sound in this context taking the form of *silbando* – a breathy, near-inaudible whistle – and the even more refined *soplando*, the near-

<sup>26</sup> Himself a rhetorician by trade, Doyle (2011) disagrees with McKenna that this “alien” information cannot be “Englished.” Rather, in his view, it is more a matter of rhetorically deploying and investigating these first-person scientific reports in more effectively rendering altered states into altered traits. Towards this end, he interprets trip reports and ecstatic forms of signification (such as the psilocybin-induced *veladas* of the Mazatecs, or the *icaros* of *ayahuasqueros*) as practices of learning and teaching eloquence, persuasion, and information architecture, rendering algorithms that reveal the choices of expression and interpretation of non-ordinary but nevertheless “tuneable” experiences.

<sup>27</sup> Massumi calls the medium where all five senses cross and meet “mesoperception,” a medium-depth perception of proprioception in conjunction with viscerality that registers the in-betweenness of the quasi-corporeal event of “sensations” (Massumi 2002: 62). Massumi’s take, following Paul Schilder, is that perception is synesthetic; separation of the senses is secondary: “Although in actual perception the separation of the sense may be ‘secondary,’ philosophically the fusion and separation must be considered co-primary, since the potential for each conditions the actual exercise of both. The philosophical task it describes is the virtual conditions for the senses’ operating separately-together” (Massumi 2002: 282-283n31). Massumi also cites the work of Eleanor J. Gibson and Daphne Mauer, who have convincingly written that infant perception is synesthetic, perhaps indicating that the separation of the senses into distinct modalities is a learned behavior, which would entail that mesoperceptive synesthesia is not an anomaly, but the continuance of an almost primordial mode of preconceptual engagement with the world. Note also that Merleau-Ponty often referenced mescaline in making describing the interdependence of the senses. For examples, see (1958: 281-282) and (1964: 49).

silent "*pshoo*" sound of blowing that is used to both cure (with tobacco) and kill (by sending forth *virotas*, pathogenic projectiles). Lost or otherwise inaccessible archaic tongues and even the "computer languages" of outer space spirits mark a "continuum of sound from the concrete, verbal, and intelligible at one end to the abstract, sonic, and unintelligible at the other" (Beyer 2009: 78). Important here is that the performance of subtle metaphysical *operations* requires subtle metaphysical *instrumentation* – sound bodies that permit the shaman to accomplish what “actual” human bodies are otherwise incapable of accomplishing through a heterogenesis that embodies the respective virtual perspectives of which those bodies are the actual expression, sounding the virtual in crystallizing the blocks of molecular affect that constitute their molar forms, and thereby affording the shaman with alternative affect worlds, sensations, and uncanny potentials outside the register of known possibilities.

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## CHAPTER VII

### VEGETAL ASKESIS – TENDRIL LISTENING AND THE “ROOTS” OF KNOWLEDGE

"What *ayahuasca* 'gives you'," suggests Doyle, is "a capacity to open . . . to be dosed with *ayahuasca* means to be given the capacity to give up the contents of an interior" (Doyle 2011: 202). Considerations of the body in all facets of *ayahuasca* shamanism center around its openness, morphability, and implicate relationality. Emetics and purgatives are central to the region in combating parasitic illness, with Beyer noting that communal vomiting is far from uncommon among indigenous Amazonian people – families of the Shuar Indians are known to drink a coffee-like morning stimulant that evokes familial vomiting, and *ojé* (the latex of *Ficus insipida*) is used as a vermifuge throughout the Upper Amazon, especially by shamans to begin their *dieta* (Beyer 2009: 214). Anthropologist Evgenia Fotiou adds that yawning, crying, and sweating are also prized by shamans for their purgative value (Fotiou 2010: 195). The *ayahuasca* brew itself is notorious for its violent vomiting accompanied by occasional bouts of diarrhea. Beyer notes that the drink is sometimes referred to as "*la purga*" (*ayahuasqueros* are occasionally called "*purgueros*"), and he also relates a common refrain he encountered in the mestizo shamanism of the Upper Amazon: "*La purga misma te enseña*, they say; vomiting itself teaches you" (Beyer 2009: 209). The emetic effect has a spiritual valence as well, for vomiting shows that the drinker is being energetically, spiritually, and psychologically cleansed.

The purpose of the *dieta* is also to thoroughly open oneself, to render oneself transparent, subtle, or porous enough to “hear” their essence in the sonic form of an *icaro* (magic melody), and thus be able to transact upon their instrumental value as extensions of the shaman's assemblage-body. Scholar of religion Stephan Beyer understands the goal of the diet as:

"to maintain an ongoing connection and dialogue with the plant; to allow the plant to interact with the body, often in subtle ways; and to wait for its spirit to appear, as the spirit wishes, to teach and give counsel . . . the plants become your body and give you the power to heal; they become – through this lengthy, dreamlike, silent, sacred process – your allies" (Beyer, 2009: 60).

Learning in this process has nothing to do with books, measurement, or human instruction.

Rather, it is a form of care of the self in which one is articulating the virtual by increasingly opening their experience towards moments of indiscernibility and transparency in the attempt to enter into dialogue with an Other. Percy Garcia Lozano of Iquitos explains that “Everything can be done if the curandero overcomes himself and achieves his diet” (Razam 2010: 20).

Quite interesting about this process is that learning from the virtual spirits of the plants demands oneself as well to become more plant-like in listening for them. David Michael Levin writes that:

“the nature of our listening in its primordial moment is suggested by the vegetative tendril, the plant’s system of roots. Both words, intentionality and tendril, stem from the same etymological root. If we want to retrieve our primordial experience, the initiatory moment of listening, we need to learn the ways of the plants; we need to heed the teachings in their simple presence: rootedness, openness to the ground, bending with the winds, obedience to earth and sky, silence” (Levin 1989: 69).

This is definitely the case in *vegetalismo*, for the *dieta* process is often explicitly conceived and expressed as a process of plant-like growth. Don Alejandro puts it thus: “A man is like a tree. Under the appropriate conditions he grows branches. These branches are the *icaros*” (Luna 1986: 97). Even one’s odor has to become plant-like from not washing one’s tunic, acquiring

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*olor a monte*, the “smell of the jungle” in divesting oneself of a human scent to become non-distinct from one’s surroundings (Beyer, 2011: 53). Likewise, it also entails the perceiving personified components of vegetal existence, with Pablo Amaringo sharing that

“Every tree, every plant, has a spirit. People may say that a plant has no mind. I tell them that a plant is alive and conscious. A plant may not talk, but there is a spirit in it that is conscious, that sees everything, which is the soul of the plant, its essence, what makes it alive. The channels through which water and sap move are the veins of the spirit” (Luna 1991: 33).

It is as if the kenosis is amplified by increasingly personifying and attuning one’s attention towards animal and vegetal others, for during the period in which the novice is following the diet, a primary task is to watch carefully the animals and plants of the jungle, studying their behavior to see the world accordingly (Luna 1986: 104). As well, the attempt to establish a rapport with these spirit-guests can be a dangerous enterprise. If the diet is broken, the offender can be suffer an illness or even death (Luna 1986: 54). Luna states that oftentimes there becomes a hidden erotic rapport between the dieting shaman and the spirits: “*Vegetalistas* often say that the mothers of the plants are *celosas* (jealous), as if they were spiritual wives of the shaman. They will punish the person who ingests the plants and do not follow the prescriptions” (Luna 1986: 88-89). Self-control is such a critical component of the *dieta* process that “what distinguishes a healer from a sorcerer is self-control . . . Shamans who master their desires may use their powers to heal; those who give in to desire, by their lack of self-control, become sorcerers, followers of the easy path” (Beyer 95). Sometimes, explains Stephan Beyer, this is “put in terms of turning down gifts from the spirits. The spirits of the plants may offer the apprentice great powers and gifts that can cause harm. If the apprentice is weak and accepts them, he will become a sorcerer,” for “Only later will the spirits present him with other and greater gifts – the gifts of healing” (Beyer 96). Only by thoroughly opening oneself and ceding

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self-interest in controlling the self can the shaman acquire powerful, knowledgeable plant and animal protective spirits that can thereby be summoned or activated by the singing of their affective tonality; their *icaro* or magical melody. Beyer sums up these considerations nicely, explaining how “for those on the *ayahuasca* path, the giving up of control to the *doctores*, the plant teachers, is a lesson in itself” (Beyer 2011: 22).

Terence McKenna reminds us that the “experience of an interior guiding voice with a higher level of knowledge is not alien in Western history,” even though “the intellectual adventure of the last thousand years has made an idea like that seem preposterous if not psychopathological” (McKenna 1991: 27-28). Voices of impersonal powers more-than-human that intervene in one’s life are frequent throughout Western philosophical thought as well. In particular, for the Pythagoreans and Socrates, this took the form of a *daemon*, audible intermediate beings other than oneself who would sometimes speak to them and lead them to modify their behavior, as well as dispatching dreams and other subtle premonitions. Likewise, it is often overlooked or forgotten that contemplative practice was a fundamental part of Greek and Hellenistic education and early Western philosophy, for philosophical practice was considered a form of care, of acquiring a new relation of the self with itself, opening up new paths for thought in an exploratory curiosity of crafting oneself that Foucault described as “a readiness to find strange and singular what surrounds us; a certain relentlessness to break up our familiarities and to regard otherwise the same things” (Foucault 1996: 305). Whereas in modern philosophy the subject is thought capable of accessing true knowledge only through objective method and evidence, Foucault excavated “technologies of the self” in philosophers of antiquity wherein the essence of wisdom was thought to consist in dilating the self beyond itself in subjectively transforming and surpassing limited, normalized, pre-given modes of identification. Theory was

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never considered an end in itself, for philosophy was the practice of a method, training in the transformation of one's existential vision of the world, which is a far cry from the abstract moral knowledge conveyed by modern philosophy's system of propositions and concepts.

In his 1981-1982 lectures at the Collège de France, Foucault took up the notion of “care of oneself” (*epimeleia heautou*) in analyzing the relations between the “subject” and “truth.” Although *epimeleia heautou* enjoyed a long-life throughout Greek culture, he points out that the historiography of philosophy had hitherto attached little importance to it, instead opting for the Delphic prescription of *gnothi seauton* (“know yourself”) as the founding expression of the question of relations between the subject and truth. Foucault's lectures convey his stance that *gnothi seauton* did not originally enjoy the status it later came to acquire. Besides it being incorrect to understand “know yourself” in the philosophical sense of the phrase, whenever the Delphic precept appeared in philosophical thought it clearly appeared within the more general framework of the *epimeleia heautou*, that is, the exercise of self upon the self to transform one's mode of being. Though it clearly emerged in the life and figure of Socrates during the fifth century BCE, Foucault demonstrates that the notion of *epimeleia heautou* remained a fundamental principle permeating the philosophical attitude from the first Platonic dialogue to the major texts of the later Stoics, its meanings multiplied and modified to eventually provide the matrix of Christian asceticism up to the fifth century A.D. “Generally speaking,” Foucault remarks, “the principle that one must take care of oneself became the principle of all rational conduct in all forms of active life that would truly conform to the principle of moral rationality” (Foucault 2005: 9). *Epimeleia heautou* thus constitutes both a general cultural phenomenon and an event in thought, “a decisive moment that is still significant for our modern mode of being subject” (Foucault 2005: 9). Care of the self, in sum, has radically permeated all ethical thought.

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But if, as Foucault claims, it is one of the primary threads in the history of practices of subjectivity, why has it been forsakenly suspect in Western thought and philosophy's reflective reconstruction of its own history, displaced for the *gnothi seauton*?

Foucault hypothesizes that the strict morality and austere rules arising from the egoism of "care of oneself" have been transposed into a very different ethical context of non-egoism, either that of Christian obligation to salvation via self-renunciation, or a "modern" obligation towards others. Concern with oneself has become incompatible with such a morality that is irrevocably linked with asceticism, for the self has become that which one has to reject in order to be moral. Additionally, a process of disconnecting and concealing the necessity of spirituality (the subject's work on himself, the transformation of himself and his being) from the knowing subject's access to truth did not take place with the advent of science, but had its origins in theology; a slow process culminating in the *cogito* of the "Cartesian moment." Philosophy since Descartes posits a modern, thinking subject who is intrinsically capable of truth, rendering the deciphering of thoughts or eradication of false views as primary and fully-sufficient, and care of the self practically irrelevant. For the modern subject, knowing oneself then renouncing that self for the sake of objectivity or collectivity trumps an ethics that demands the care of the self to arrive at truth in one's own being. For Foucault, the primary element of ethics in antiquity was towards this end – making one's existence into an object of knowledge and values by way of philosophical *askesis*, an exercise of oneself in the activity of thought to perfect and develop one's capacities.

Philosophy was originally structured by spirituality, rather than being secured by the methods and evidence of situated, local forms of disciplinary power, normalization, and biopolitics that merely reproduce the formation and "truth" of a self that are already inf(lect)ed

by relations and techniques of power. In other words, Foucault's major critical contribution was to highlight that in a modern context, to "know thyself," to liberate or discover a "true self" merely reproduces the biopolitical project and its disciplinary techniques, inadvertently preventing possibilities of becoming otherwise. Professor of philosophy Edward McGushin explains how:

"Foucault revealed that modern individuals are the 'effects' of technologies and relations of power that function by training their bodies, their thoughts, and their desires. According to this schema, the self we are supposed to know and to liberate is, to a large degree, a fabrication of power and knowledge relations. These power-knowledge relations maintain themselves through leading individuals to become certain kinds of selves; normalized and well-disciplined selves. Relations of power and knowledge subject individuals to identities and lead them to recognize these identities as who they truly are. Therefore, the truth of the self, and the obligation to be true to oneself, cannot be accepted uncritically" (McGushin 2007: xviii).

Care of the self was important for the final Foucault precisely because it provided a *counterpractice* to accessing truth in the form of recognizing and reproducing normalized knowledge. Philosophy in Western antiquity demanded self-transformation, a creative work that does not seek to achieve objective historical and truth, but to transform the very subject engaged in thinking and perceiving, freeing futural potentialities and possibilities not in *knowing* the truth but *becoming* the truth, transforming oneself to counter-interpret conventional truth-claims.

It is therefore no surprise that drugs factor into this realm of "technologies of the self" and Foucault's attempt to overcome humanistic modernity in countering regimes of truth and the self-assertion of Reason as agents of experimentation and unforeseen becomings.<sup>28</sup> To the extent

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<sup>28</sup> Foucault dropped LSD with two young Americans in Death Valley during his 1975 visiting lectures at Berkeley. Simeon Wade, the organizer of the event who was at the time an assistant professor of philosophy at Claremont, was interviewed by Foucault biographer, James Miller, whose account was also corroborated by Daniel Defert, Leo Bersani, and many others whom Miller interviewed for *The Passion of Michel Foucault*. Miller shares that the "Death Valley 'limit-experience' was in fact, so important to Foucault that he frequently mentioned it to friends and acquaintances, both in the United States and France – it is perhaps the one episode in his personal life

that spiritual exercises hinge upon transforming one's point of view, attitude, and set of convictions, every spiritual exercise is *dialogical*, in that it involves a struggle over the relation of the self with itself, and of the self to others. Quite interesting is the claim of cognitive anthropologist Josep Fericgla that this is inherently what *ayahuasca* and other entheogens offer:

*“el uso de ciertos enteógenos permite despertar la experiencia de lo que denomino consciencia dialógica, una tipo de consciencia que es capaz de conversar consigo misma, de observarse”*

[“the use of entheogens can raise some experience of what I call dialogical consciousness, a kind of consciousness that is able to converse with itself, observed”] (Fericgla, 1999).

In fact, I would claim that any attempt to classify psyche-/eco- delic experiences as “altered states” attests to the biopolitical component of constructing the Real. An “outside” to Reason is not outside to the Real, or rather, an “altered state” is an outside to the very “real” effect of biopower’s demarcation and control over canalizing sensation into “reasonable” and pathological forms of embodiment. In other words, the astonishment and awe characteristic of ecodelics is largely attributable to a recursive perspective – a being beside oneself – on a heretofore “real” self now discovered to itself be a pathological construction. The dialogical consciousness afforded by the selfless, distributed experience of ecodelics therefore offers a *trans*-human perspective from which one can re-engineer and re-imagine the relation of the self to itself from that vantage. Ecodelics open the self beyond itself, a form of counterpractice to the conventional

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that virtually every person I interviewed had heard about from Foucault himself” (Miller 1993: 437-8n1). Amongst his close friends, Foucault called it the “greatest experience of his life” (Miller 1993: 246). He later wrote to Wade that “his Death Valley trip had led him to shelve almost everything that he had previously written about sexuality,” perhaps indicating a direct link between Foucault’s transformative experience with psychedelics and the somewhat puzzling turn in the final Foucault towards care of the self. In a 1984 interview centered around the work of Raymond Roussel that drifted towards Roussel’s use of drugs, Foucault commented that “It’s a subject which interests me greatly, but one which I’ve had to put aside – the study of the culture of drugs or drugs as culture in the West from the beginning of the nineteenth century. No doubt it started much earlier, but it would come up to the present, it’s so closely tied to the artistic life of the West” (Foucault 2007: 185).

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truth claims of anthropocentric modernity that similarly offers etho-poetical potentialities and possibilities of becoming *otherwise* – other-than-human, other-than modern – for the body is experienced under the effect of ecodelics not as egological, but rather as *ecological*, a multiplicity of autonomous agents. French anthropologist Philippe Descola shares his own experience taking *ayahuasca* with the Shuar tribe:

“I am a benevolent spectator watching my own delirium, observing the changes in my sensibilities with as much curiosity as external events. It is not so much a dissociation of the physical and mental – if such a thing be possible outside Cartesian metaphysics – rather an agreeable fragmentation of the body, in which every element has become autonomous and seems to be endowed with an intelligence of its own, offering a series of different points of view on the dismembered composition from which it has emerged” (Descola 1998: 102).

The body under *ayahuasca* is the immanent ecological background, the bodying-forth of a multiplicity of affects that afford their own points of view to a non-local, distributed spectator that abides that multiplicity. Mind and body in this experience appear as the emergent molar effects of a molecular background, “the background that comes to the surface in shamanism, in dreams and in hallucinations, when the human and the non-human, the visible and invisible trade places” (Viveiros de Castro 2004). Thus, we have seen that the *dieta* process undertakes this trading of places between the visible and invisible, human and non-human through a process of care of the self that aims at a profound emptying of the self in drawing forth the background to the surface. Spiritual practices rather than modern philosophical practices, the knowledge bestowed by more-than-human audible beings is available only to those who undergo a rigorous transformation of the self, and therefore remains resistant to systems of propositions and concepts incapable of undergoing a dispossessive opening to becoming in the service of thought.

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## CHAPTER VIII

### BEFORE AND AFTER HUMANISM – JAMMING THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL MACHINE

“Prior to all our verbal reflections, at the level of our spontaneous, sensorial engagement with the world around us, we are *all* animists” (Abram, 1997: 57).

Interaction with spirits, a central component of other-than-modern ways of being, has been roundly belittled by enlightenment humanism, scientific rationalism, and psychoanalysis due largely to a Western scientific and philosophical attitude that grounds knowledge acquisition in the dualistic perceptual ontology of a self-certain, thinking subject with respect to the knowledge and control of objectified being. Since 1871, anthropologists have dismissed this as “animism” as distinct from their own methodology and ideological background of “humanism.” But what happens when the anthropocentric arrogance of humanism is questioned by *other-than-human* ways of being?

When shamans claim access to a spiritual dimension, a virtual realm where information is readily available, teeming with non-visible persons with whom one can communicate, let us not forget that this is also, paradoxically, a living reality for us as well. For the modern scientific world picture, the physical world is the totality of reality, its extension providing the only conceivable territory. But this inability of materialist monism to accommodate other kinds of space is at odds with our contemporary experience of a new kind of nonphysical space that has emerged outside of physical space. The Internet has afforded us with a *digital* space not subject

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to the laws and limitations of physical particles and forces, nor measurable by any physical metric, an entirely “other” realm in which mechanistic, relativistic, and quantum laws do not apply. “Yet,” as science writer Margaret Wertheim has written in *The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace*, “while physical space and cyberspace are not entirely separate, neither is the latter contained in the former” (Wertheim 1999: 230). “Let me stress this point,” urges Wertheim, “*Just because something is not material does not mean it is unreal,*” for “despite its lack of physicality, cyberspace is a real place. *I am there,* whatever this statement may ultimately turn out to mean” (Wertheim 1999: 231). Thus we have the Internet a parallel data space in which communication, investigation, and self-creation occur, a “spiritual” (virtual) realm outside of empirical space that nonetheless emerged from the physicality of connected networks and can be both accessed from, and experienced within, metric space.

Here we have an instance where digital and communications technology are radically calling into question the definition of what it means to be human, perhaps offering new forms of cognition and perception. British artist and theorist Roy Ascott claims that our Internet experience bestows a kind of “double consciousness,” a state of being that gives us access to two distinctly different fields of experience” (Ascott 2003: 257). Aided by computer technology, we are now capable of navigating cyberspace while simultaneously accommodating ourselves within the material world, a double consciousness that Ascott suggests mirrors that of an *ayahuasquero* who, aided by “plant technology,” is granted access to the outermost limits of psychic spaces while remaining in the everyday world. For Ascott, the double-gaze of cyberperception “points to the possibility of eroding the boundaries between states of mind, between conception and construction, between the internalization and the realization of our desires, dreams, and needs of our everyday existence” (Ascott 2003: 359). Thus, states Ascott, “we are weaving what I would

call a ‘shamantic’ web, combining the sense of shamanic and semantic, the navigation of consciousness and the construction of meaning” (Ascott 2003: 359). With new forms of identity, cognition, and information processing available to us in a non-physical realm of information, it is no surprise that thinkers like Ascott are turning to the figure of the shaman as mirrors for their experience, for technoscientific interventions and communication technologies are transforming the human condition, and thereby challenging the cherished modernist assumptions from which they emerged.<sup>29</sup>

Foucault famously declared in the closing paragraph of *The Order of Things* that “man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end” (Foucault 1970: 387). Usage of the term ‘posthuman’ need not signal the intervention of nonbiological components into the body for the purposes of advancing human perfectability, or dreams of transcending embodiment. Rather, it is a term with many valences that has largely emerged in the critical lexicon to express the view heralded by Foucault within the realm of a literary, philosophical-theoretical framework, drawing attention to the “human” as a historically-specific construction undergoing significant shifts in underlying assumptions and applicability. Posthumanism here is more properly *posthumanist*, directing its attention towards new theoretical paradigms capable of

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<sup>29</sup> For a consideration of *ayahuasca* and other plant technologies as “cognitive tools,” see also Kenneth Tupper (2002). The historical convergence between the technological move to virtualize reality and the psychedelic usage of technologists has been extensively documented by Adam Brate (2002), John Markoff (2005), and Fred Turner (2006), and received increased media attention following the death of the pioneer of the personal computer, Steve Jobs, who famously discussed his LSD experimentation as “one of the two or three most important things [he had] done in [his] life” (Markoff, 2005: xix). Psychedelics are well-known by their users as problem-solving adjuncts, with the most notable occurrence of this efficacy demonstrated by three Nobel laureates who directly attributed their breakthroughs to experiences with LSD: Francis Crick (co-discoverer of the structure of the DNA molecule), Kary Mullis (developer of PCR, the polymerase chain reaction crucial for DNA cloning and sequencing), and Richard Feynman (founder of quantum electrodynamics, theorizing how light and matter interact (Adams 2010). Cameron Adams also noted that Carl Sagan and evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould attributed much of their creativity during highly productive periods of their scientific career to their cannabis usage (Adams 2010). Sagan actually wrote an article in support of marijuana under the pen name “Mr. X” in Lester Grinspoon’s classic 1971 defense of cannabis, *Marihuana Reconsidered*.

twisting free from the historically specific phenomenon of a humanism that reproduces a normative subjectivity and perceptual ontology on the basis of anthropocentrism and speciesism.

In *How We Became Posthuman*, N. Katherine Hayles has argued that the liberal humanist subject has historically been constructed in terms of the universality of the European, capitalist white male who bears a unified, consistent identity as ontologically and ethically divided from a universe of nonhuman subjects. Normative assumptions of the modern human subject have consistently entailed an erasure of embodiment, wherein the body is an object, a “thing” that the rational mind possesses, rather than an intrinsic part of experience. “Only because the body is not identified with the self,” writes Hayles, “is it possible to claim for the liberal subject its notorious universality, a claim that depends on erasing markers of bodily difference, including sex, race, and ethnicity” (Hayles 1999: 4). Because the locus of the liberal humanist subject necessarily lies in the mind, Hayles claims that humanist assumptions of self-control or possession *over* the body and other material forms as manipulatable objects is almost inevitably tied to projects of domination and control, the “material testimony” of which she finds in Gillian Brown’s demonstration of the relation between possessive humanist approaches to the body and anorexia.<sup>30</sup>

Because the Western model of subjectivity is undergirded by an epistemological framework in which the logic of identity is expressed through binary oppositions, the naturalization of Descartes’ dualistic perceptual ontology within empirical claims to truth has standardized a metaphysical separationism as the norm, generating a host of problematic dualisms, of which the first binary is thought to “possess” that of the second as an irresolvable polarity: mind/body, humanity/animality, culture/nature, sameness/difference, the One/the

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<sup>30</sup> “The anorexic interdiction against food removes the self from social space in order to secure as well as redraw the dominion of selfhood. Thus the ultimate aim of the anorexic critique of humanism is to compose a sturdier model of self-possession by clearing the space of the self’s operations” (Brown, 1991)

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many, et al. The Western subject has as its basis a mind-body dualism, yet as the sense of an organic, stable, self-contained “natural” body becomes increasingly *denaturalized* through new biological discourses and incredible spikes in intimate connections forged with technologies, strictly demarcated categories that had previously articulated the Western subject have begun to fracture, serving to destabilize the logic of identity and mode of subjectivity it demands. As Donna Haraway presciently forecasted in her “Cyborg Manifesto” almost thirty years ago:

“High-tech culture challenges these dualisms in intriguing ways. It is not clear who makes and who is made in the relation between human and machine. It is not clear what is mind and what body in machines that resolve into coding practices. In so far as we know ourselves in both formal discourse . . . and in daily practice. . . we find ourselves to be cyborgs, hybrids, mosaics, chimeras. Biological organisms have become communications devices like others. There is no fundamental, ontological separation in our formal knowledge of machine and organism, of technical and organic.” (Haraway 1991: 177).

Like Foucault before them in his rejection of anthropological, political, and scientific dogmas in tension with the Enlightenment, the accelerating tradition of literary-philosophical posthumanism does not herald the “end of humanity,” nor does it aim at the wholesale elimination of admirable humanist values and aspirations. Rather, it is highly critical of the philosophical and theoretical frameworks that have reproduced a specific, normative conception of the human, “a conception that may have applied, at best, to that fraction of humanity who had the wealth, power, and leisure to conceptualize themselves as autonomous beings exercising their will through individual agency and choice” (Hayles 1999: 286). Posthumanist approaches are alerting us to the fact that deeply inculcated assumptions about individuality, embodiment, and rationality are no longer theoretically, politically, or ecologically sustainable, nor were they ever

universally applicable to begin with.<sup>31</sup> In this sense, Cary Wolfe has suggested in his book *What is Posthumanism?* that the term:

“comes both before and after humanism: before in the sense that it names the embodiment and embeddedness of the human being in not just its biological but also its technological world, the prosthetic coevolution of the human animal with the technicity of tools and external archival mechanisms (such as language and culture) . . . it comes after in the sense that posthumanism names a historical moment in which the decentering of the human by its imbrication in technical, medical, informatics, and economic networks is increasingly impossible to ignore, a historical development that points toward the necessity of new theoretical paradigms (but also thrusts them on us) a new mode of thought that comes after the cultural repressions and fantasies, the philosophical protocols and evasions, of humanism as a historically specific phenomenon” (Wolfe 2009: xv-xvi).

Note Wolfe’s assertion here that posthumanism comes both before *and* after humanism in the sense that the human is achieved by escaping or repressing its animal origins in nature, and attempting to transcend materiality and embodiment. Therefore, our present situation of “after” humanism “*points toward the necessity of new theoretical paradigms . . . a new mode of thought.*” Continuing further along these lines, Wolfe suggests that “*the human occupies a new place in the universe, a universe now populated by what I am prepared to call nonhuman subjects,*” and that therefore “*what is needed here, of course, is a disarticulation of the question of ‘persons’ from the question of membership in the species Homo sapiens*” (Wolfe 2009: 47, 60). What I find remarkable about Wolfe’s cogent analysis is that the non-objectivist epistemologies of (neo)animism have *already* disarticulated the question of persons from the question of membership in the species Homo sapiens, yet still retain the stigma of operating out of a “primitive” form of knowledge acquisition, relationality, and cosmological understandings

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<sup>31</sup> Characteristics considered to typify the human (autonomy, rationality, self-consciousness, etc.) are not even present in many humans, instances of which have been referred to as “marginal cases” (genetic/developmental anomalies, diseases, and accidents). Citing Geoffrey Harpham’s critique of Martha Nussbaum, Wolfe underscores Harpham’s incredulity at how idealized conceptions about what a ‘human’ is suggests that repressing “marginal cases” reflect how Nussbaum’s conservative formulation of humanism has “unwittingly suggested that Stevie Wonder and Stephen Hawking are “less-than-human.” (Wolfe 2009: 68).

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because they deviate from, if not entirely invert, these components of scientific materialism. However, scientific materialism itself is directly wed to the same “*cultural repressions and fantasies, the philosophical protocols and evasions*” whose decentering Wolfe claims is *increasingly impossible to ignore*. Perhaps a more nuanced reconsideration of nonmodern cosmologies that have been disregarded as “animistic” for being grounded precisely in the recognition *of*, and relationality *with*, non-human persons might offer novel resources for new modes of perception, environmental coupling, and patterns of organization beyond the increasingly untenable and pernicious effects of the liberal humanist subject.

To belabor my point a bit further, the Western Enlightenment’s metaphysical project of isolating a human essence in the image of the liberal humanist subject has become thoroughly embedded in the State, law, and recognition of life. Agamben (2004) has described this connection as an “anthropological machine” that produces the human against the figure of the animal. The production of the categorical divide sets up the very possibility for contemporary bio-politics by establishing a polis over and against an external *dehumanized* threat to the proper citizen. Descartes’ metaphysical separationism that isolates humans as a separate, privileged form of life has bled into a biological continuism, the modern version of the anthropological machine that produces the space of the animal, the not-quite-human, as the constitutive *outside* of humanity. However, it also functions as the constitutive *inside* as well, enabling justification for violating allegedly *subhuman* forms of life with enslavement and cruelty. Violence, in other words, is both enacted and reflected in the maintenance of an ontological divide between humanity and animality. The distinction of *non-* or *sub-* human is thus deeply implicated within incidents of forced subservience, incarceration, torture, and violence. Questioning normalized

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forms of Western cosmology is not just an intellectual exercise in comparison. Rather, it has far reaching ethico-political ramifications.

The human-animal distinction has been central to Western metaphysics and its reductionist determination of life. The rise of animality studies naturally dovetails with the turn towards a “posthumanities” critical of the liberal humanist subject, for both look to the liberal humanist subject and its anthropocentric dimensions and consequent ties to the State, law, and recognition of life. Poststructuralists’ concerns with the pre-formative conditions of subjectivity often recognize that these conditions extend to non-human animals as well, and therefore that the excess or exposure prior to subject-formation can be a potential site for reimagining our ethico-political relationality with, and responsibility towards, more-than-human others in and through a non-anthropocentric ontology of life—non-sovereign, non-judicial forms of political life that humanism and democracy do not afford, possible only in a new economy of human/animal and nature/culture relations.

Note that this is also a thoroughly (neo)animist move, for as Harvey has written, an animist engagement assumes a “world that is full of persons, only some of whom are human,” recognizing a much broader spectrum of persons, for unlike modernist approaches, humans are not the primary exemplars of personhood (Harvey 2006: xviii). “People become animists,” says Harvey, “by learning how to recognize persons and, far more important, how to engage with them. The ubiquity of terms like respect and reciprocity in animist discourse demonstrates that the key identifier of a person is someone who responds to or initiates approaches to other persons” (Harvey 2006: xvii). In contrast to objectivist epistemologies and the human subject it articulates, Amerindian cosmologies have never articulated the aforementioned series of

troublesome – and increasingly *troubled* – series of binary splits between nature and culture, and humanity distantiated from animality.

Perhaps here we can locate a way to sidestep or circumvent biopolitics, for (neo)animism does not entertain speciesism or anthropocentrism. Thus, the anthropocentric machine that perpetuates a state of human exceptionalism – and thereby perpetuates a state of human exceptionalism to underwrite violence and articulate control over populations by perpetuating a threatening outside to the polis – cannot take hold, presenting us with other-than-modern solutions to “jamming” the anthropological machine. If the human cannot conceivably stand apart from its deeper ecological imbrication, we get a radically different political orientation that recognizes a multiplicity of heretofore unrecognizable or “impossible” persons and worlds.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> An example of how Amerindian cosmologies play out politically can be found in recent changes taking place in Bolivia. President Evo Morales, Bolivia’s first indigenous leader, has garnered headlines for spearheading a massively supported new law that will protect and guarantee the “political rights” of the Earth. In an unprecedented move, Morales positioned the human community of Bolivia as implicated within the living system of “La Madre Tierra,” or “Mother Earth,” which is defined in Article 3 of Morales’ proposition as “a unique, indivisible, self-regulating community of interrelated beings that sustains, contains and reproduces all beings.” Article 4 delineates these “living systems” as “complex and dynamic communities of plants, animals, micro-organisms, and other beings and their environments.” Oscar Coca, Minister of the Presidency, told a large number of supporters that “President Evo Morales says the planet can live without humans, but humans cannot live without the planet and reminds the world today that the rights of nature should be rights equal to those we, ourselves, enjoy.”

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## CHAPTER IX

### CONCLUSION

“In the Amazon and other places where plant hallucinogens are understood and used, you are conveyed into worlds that are appallingly different from ordinary reality. Their vividness cannot be stressed enough. They are more real than real. And that’s something that you sense intuitively. They establish an ontological priority. They are more real than real, and once you get that under your belt and let it rattle around in your mind, then the compass of our life begins to spin and you realize that you are not looking in on the Other, the Other is looking in on you. This is a tremendous challenge to the intellectual structures that have carried us so far during the last thousand years” (McKenna 1991: 78).

My project is guided by the assumption that non-Occidental, “animistic” ontologies and cosmologies are not just curios to be investigated and speculated about, nor subaltern voices that need to be spoken in order to exorcise white guilt. The animism of Amerindian cosmologies provide invaluable resources for living, perceiving, and knowing in a critical time of the planet when the continuation of modernity and the liberal humanist subject spells the continuation of the militarism, nuclearism, and ecological devastation in which it is historically and politically implicated.

Despite the tendency in post-Heideggerean Continental philosophy to be self-critical and emphasize an ethics centered upon a differential relation, too often critical theorists are content to merely underline difference in a somewhat conservative fashion, endorsing ethical principles without engaging in a the transformative experiences that would actually be communicative of those other realities and modes of being. Following the work of Jane Bennett (2001 & 2009), I find that it is rather inadequate and irresponsible to simply diagnose that something has gone

terribly wrong in Western thought without taking that additional, requisite step of literally re-forming one's ethical sensibilities and social responsibilities with actual bodily disciplines. Without a micropolitical transformation of one's affective landscape hospitable to those moral effects, mere academic critique is bound to forever remain impotent in redirecting futural possibilities of political and ethical relations. As we have seen, the *ayahuasca* usage of *vegetalistas* not only transforms one's affective landscape, but also learns directly from it in practices of opening and exposure that welcome the virtual amidst a relinquishment of control, self-possession, and centric identification.

Western scientific (and to a lesser extent, philosophical and social scientific) empiricism founded upon a dualistic Cartesian perceptual ontology has occupied the central and most acclaimed positions of inquiry into the nature of the world for over three centuries, and has thus served as the accepted methodology to achieve the proof of what is justifiably "real," "true," or "existent." Because the scientific materialism of Western modernity holds a monopoly on legislating truth claims in the contemporary landscape, scholars of "spiritual" traditions face a rather difficult time in communicating the validity of seemingly paranormal powers, extraordinary experiences, and more-than-human others that not only abound in these other-than-modern modes of being, but appear to be ubiquitous cross-culturally. However, it often goes unrecognized that Western philosophy and science are practices that pattern certain types of selves and prohibit others, neglecting the insight we encountered from the final Foucault that the "truth" is not discovered because that which is sought is itself the fabricated effect of systems of power and knowledge in which one is embedded. Disciplines – bodily or otherwise – are ontologically creative, producing that which is sought through the practices and relations that are prescribed or entertained, rather than discovering pre-given principles that are universally

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applicable. Ecodelics central to the shamanisms of “animistic” cultures are no different, affording their own set of “real-izable” worlds, sensations, and potentials, rendering visible otherwise invisible persons and powers. By learning from the “university of the forest,” there is much to be gained from a practiced affectivity attuned to immanence that crosses the boundaries of our epistemic certainty, for in it we can locate opportune crenellations for articulating an alternative critical account of ourselves before and after the humanist tradition.

But this is not simply a challenge to the current parameters and practices of the humanities. Theorists such as Brian Rotman (2008) have drawn our attention to how every medium projects a virtual user specific to it, for information processing and representation inherently pattern cognitive processing, effecting the background conditions of one’s psychic organization during their continued reception. The seriality and linear protocol of alphabetized reading and writing continually demand a privately enclosed, interiorized mind, but as Rotman suggests, massive shifts in computational media have brought an influx of parallel computation that is increasingly displacing the linearity of a “lettered self” mediated by the inscription of spoken language. The distributed agencies, collective thought processes, and networked media characteristic of virtual computing technologies are reconfiguring human subjectivity as distributed assemblage, producing a digital self for which the previous hypostatized “ghost effects” of singular, disembodied, authoritative forms of being are increasingly incompatible. As modern communication, recording, and information technologies continue to explore provisional modes of embodiment, the shamanic navigation of psychedelic states becomes a critical site for learning how to more effectively become parallel amidst the mediological departure of the West’s ontotheological metaphysics. To quote the prescient words of psychedelic pioneer Terence McKenna from over twenty years ago,

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“History is going to end. This is the astonishing conclusion that I draw out of the psychedelic experience . . . we will be unrecognizable to ourselves, that what we take to be our creations, computers and technology, are actually another level of ourselves. And that when we have worked out this peregrination through the profane labyrinth of history, we will recover what we knew in the beginning: the archaic union with nature that was seamless, unmediated by language, unmediated by notions of self and other, of life and death, of civilization and nature” (McKenna 1991: 18).

The transformation of technical culture occurs in simultaneity with the transformation of consciousness, for they are expressions of each other. But whereas the academic industry of critical-theoretical posthumanists proliferating throughout the University of Minnesota Press’ series on posthumanism and “Theory Out of Bounds” are merely heralding interdisciplinary challenges to the Renaissance-humanist idea of the human, *vegetalistas* – students of the “university of the forest” – occupy an ecologically understood thinking body that is not impeded by the medialogically engendered constraints and conditioning of disembodied writing. Rather than just *diagnosing or prescribing* a porous, distributed, pluralized “I” proper to the technologies of the virtual, vegetal psychedelics enact that very program with *la medicina*, recalibrating the ontological and ethical horizons of the human amidst an assemblage of virtual states in perpetual states of becoming. By approaching *vegetalismo* traditions from a Deleuzian, posthumanist perspective, the centrality of spirits in acquiring knowledge of world and self takes on a radically different valence altogether, no longer a primitive form of proto-science, but a practical form of philosophical *askesis* that can serve to transform identity, ethics, and is suggestive of what critical theory as well can undergo in learning from the indigenuity of the “university of the forest.”

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