



UNIVERSIDADE
CATÓLICA
PORTUGUESA

**CULTURAL FACTORS AND INFLUENCES IN PSYCHEDELIC
RESEARCH AND PRACTICES:
AYAHUASCA IN MODERN CULTURE AND THERAPY**

Dissertation submitted to Universidade Católica Portuguesa to obtain a Master's
Degree in Culture Studies: Performance and Creativity

by

Robert Ian Ippolito

Universidade Católica Portuguesa: Faculty of Human Sciences

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ABSTRACT

This thesis reviews contemporary research on integrating psychedelic substances in modern psychotherapeutic practices, focusing on the case of ayahuasca; a psychoactive, medicinal brew native to the Amazon Basin. Traditionally, ayahuasca is used as a ritual sacrament in indigenous shamanic practices, and plays a central role in the social identity and ontology of these cultures, as a sacred communion of consciousness, spirit and nature.

The globalisation of ayahuasca demonstrates a complex case of cultural export, commodification, adaptation, and hybridisation. Commercial ayahuasca practices aimed at foreigners have become a substantial tourism industry in South America, while countless ayahuasca retreats are hosted internationally. The popularity of these practices reflects a state of disenchantment in modern, secular society; a desire to discover a sacred, spiritual ontology manifested in ritual sacrament, and validated by transcultural tradition and the explicit phenomenon of a psychedelic experience.

Ayahuasca practices are a significant research interest in psychotherapy and psychopharmacology, as they not only demonstrate the psychotherapeutic potential of psychedelics, but also provide a case example of a traditional, psychotherapeutic application of psychedelics. These practices demonstrate an exceptional effectivity in treating addiction, abuse and trauma disorder, and treatment-resistant depression. Ayahuasca has immense psychotherapeutic potential, but also presents a significant harm factor, dependent on cultural and transcultural factors of the ayahuasca practice itself, as well as its subject.

Ayahuasca research and practice demonstrates the essential importance of cultural and transcultural context in the psychotherapeutic process, indicating a gap in the critical discourse. This thesis examines this gap, articulating the critical implications of a psychotherapeutic methodology informed by cultural factors of ontology and identity, and acknowledging the critical significance of spiritual health and identity as a trans-cultural concept and psychotherapeutic method. This thesis argues for the critical, psychotherapeutic function of an expanded view of consciousness including a sacred ontological relationship to nature, by examining cultural and transcultural elements of contemporary ayahuasca practices in a psychotherapeutic context.

Keywords: transcultural discourses and practices; psychedelics; ayahuasca; psychotherapy; knowledge production; globalisation.

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I am far from knowing what spirit is in itself, and equally far from knowing what instincts are. The one is as mysterious to me as the other, yet I am unable to dismiss the one by explaining it in terms of the other. That would be to treat it as mere misunderstanding. There are no misunderstandings in nature; they are only to be found in the realms that man calls 'understanding'. Certainly instinct and spirit are beyond my understanding. They are terms that we allow to stand for powerful forces whose nature we do not know.

(Jung, 2001: 121)

This uncertainty at what we might call the fount of the system of magical curing has curious curative effects for us because it cautions against the search for magical power in a unitary being such as the Indian shaman, and instead advises us as to where that power creates itself; namely, in the relation between the shaman and the patient – between the figure who sees but will not talk of what he sees, and the one who talks, often beautifully, but cannot see.

(Taussig, 1987: 446)

INTRODUCTION

For centuries or more, ayahuasca has been used in the traditional practices of indigenous Amazonian cultures for therapeutic, medicinal and spiritual purposes. In recent decades, ayahuasca practices have been globalised, delocalised, and commodified through internationalised churches, a booming tourism industry in South America, and their general, enchanting appeal to a disenchanted modern culture. Modern commodified and fetishised ayahuasca practices have been heavily criticised for being culturally destructive and potentially harmful, yet there remains significant scientific and popular interest in the psychotherapeutic properties of ayahuasca practices, which have demonstrated remarkable efficacy in treating addiction, trauma disorders and treatment-resistant depression. This field of research is becoming increasingly popular, but remains largely confined to psychopharmacological and psychotherapeutic disciplines.

Ayahuasca's therapeutic potential is not pharmacologically reducible, it relies on multiple cultural and trans-cultural factors, which this thesis investigates. These factors are embedded in traditional ayahuasca practices and their ontological culture, and are also reflected in modern psychotherapeutic methodologies. By articulating and investigating these cultural and ontological factors, and reflecting on their relation to psychotherapeutic methodology, this thesis argues for the psychotherapeutic function of a spiritually inclusive identity and ontology, by identifying the trans-cultural presence of a sacred, spiritual relationship to the natural world as observed in traditional ayahuasca practices.

Ayahuasca practices present a unique and revealing object of study, appearing simultaneously natural, social and discursive; not only as an object but as practices. The therapeutic properties of ayahuasca practices are manifested in their cultural operations, where reductive operations fail to reduce meaningful discursive counterparts. This thesis proposes going a step further: to engage these practices as indicators of a symbolic order of knowledge production, which materialises in culture and is enacted by ritual and symbolic action; which can be recognised and methodologically verified by its transcultural properties. Rather than apply a reductive methodology, this thesis critically engages culture as it materialises in ayahuasca practices. As an object, culture is already reduced to irreducibility, even if its form or function (one or the other; never both at once) is recognised by many disciplines. This is because the research is never beyond culture, it is embedded in its own object of study. It appears that the only way beyond culture, is through culture itself, through knowing it completely and reducing it to formula. This is impossible though because culture, as recognisable as it may be, is always in the process of becoming that which it was not; that

which it informs. Hence it is necessary to accept the informed and informing power of culture as it is manifested in these practices, and to critically consider how this culture informs the discourse simultaneously as an object and as a discursive agent. This is done by articulating a discourse that reflects the fluid yet palpable nature of culture; that engages culture as an active agent in all research practices.

One of the fundamental methodological challenges of modern ayahuasca-assisted psychotherapy, is the ontological divide between the psychotherapeutic rationale as a discipline, and the spiritual methodology of ayahuasca practices. As a methodological practice, psychotherapy represents its therapeutic processes in models drawn from experiential and observational data. Ayahuasca practices then present an external phenomenon of therapeutic transformation validated by experiential data, and at the same time manifesting a blind spot in the methodological representation and investigation of the therapeutic process. This process of social data from below informing institutional research illustrates how science and society are not homogenous domains, but interdependent power structures influencing and informing one another from within (cf. Langlitz, 2013: 113).

The psychotherapeutic potential of ayahuasca practices is evidently structurally informed by its own implicit, spiritual modality of consciousness and knowledge production therein. Ayahuasca practices' modern history of syncretic adaptation demonstrates that cultural and symbolic contexts may be adapted according to subjective conditions, but are by no means relativistic. The shamanic ontology of traditional ayahuasca practices does not present an interchangeable religious mythology, but constitutes a complex ontological and methodological framework for the subjective and social investments of symbolic value; the explicit representation of implicit meaning and signification. The investment of sacred value through ritual and symbolic practices, is not simply a religious representation of subjective personal and social values, but a complex method of contextualising transpersonal modes of consciousness, and implicit modes of knowledge production therein, within an ontologically compatible social and cultural framework. This framework may be subjectively informed and signified, but is intersubjectively grounded in the sacred; that which is not reduced from symbolic form, but rather requires form in order to be personally and socially significant.

In spite of the profoundly transformative effects of ayahuasca itself, its therapeutic efficacy is crucially determined by integration. Integrating experiences of altered states of consciousness requires practice and reflection, as "The usual cognitive processes have to be adapted to new experiential frameworks that are radically new and devoid of any familiar frame of reference." (Read, 2008: 4). The shamanic ontology of consciousness in traditional

ayahuasca practices provides the essential physical, psychological, social and spiritual frameworks for this process of adaptation and integration. These practices constitute an imperative methodology for integrating the physical, psychological and social dimensions of consciousness. Hence, shamanism is not a culturally and socially coded object but an encoding system, with consciousness itself acting as an implicit and universal source of reference.

The contemporary global phenomenon of psychedelic use and practices has stressed the political and ethical framework of institutional research, both by revealing the limits of its scientific methodology as well as exposing gaping vulnerabilities in its regulatory function. Historically, research on psychedelically induced altered states of consciousness has been characterised by an inversion of subject and object of study. To study consciousness is to study the very foundation of the scientific mode of knowledge production. Psychedelics have proven to not simply be complex objects of study, but an investigative method in themselves for understanding and methodologically encoding states of consciousness; thereby expanding theoretical and methodological frameworks of modelling and investigating consciousness and its modes of perception and conception. This expansion is a result psychedelics' acute effects on consciousness, as well as the cultural context of their traditional use in indigenous practices.

The observable and measurable results of implicit knowledge production in psychotherapeutic practice and transformation reveal a gap between the discourse on knowledge, and its practical application. The empirical paradigm of scientific methodology serves to institutionalise and democratise knowledge through its processes of research and education, making knowledge an impersonal resource. Ayahuasca-assisted psychotherapy has demonstrated its efficacy through a growing amount of experiential data, while pioneering neuroscientific research continues to provide neurological and psychopharmacological confirmation of ayahuasca's therapeutic efficacy. Psychedelic research continues to inform the disciplinary interpolation of neurosciences, providing a critical precedence for the study of natural as well as social and cultural components of consciousness, perception, and conception.

The objective of this thesis is to seek a position for psychedelic culture within cultural studies, where the increasing interpolation of socialised and naturalised research methods may articulate an interdisciplinary, qualitative dialogue within the parameters of culture. By performing a comprehensive literature review of psychedelic research and culture, and studying the case of ayahuasca as an object of study with multiple ontological statuses, it locates the cultural factors and influences informing the ontological status of consciousness and its altered states in a therapeutic context, as well as the epistemic conditions under which consciousness and psychotherapy are researched and practiced. The irreducibility of

ayahuasca's form and function makes it a particularly revealing object of study, as it demonstrates the interdependency of its conditions and effects implicitly within consciousness itself, and reveals the critical function of its cultural forms and practices as indispensable methods of integrating implicit experiences with socially explicit forms.

Chapter 1 introduces the subject of ayahuasca practices and ayahuasca-assisted psychotherapy in the context of cultural studies. Section 1.1 addresses the essential disciplinary knowledge on ayahuasca in research and practices, and presents the critical argument for its therapeutic precedence and use. Section 1.2 navigates the multiple disciplinary discourses pertaining to ayahuasca practices and the precedence of sacred plants as therapeutic tools. It summarises the variety of ways research on ayahuasca problematises many fields of scientific and academic investigation, and illustrates the inherent political and cultural agency of this research; in the challenge it presents to its methodologies. Section 1.3 introduces the conceptual framework of the thesis: an interdisciplinary discourse on the explicit culture of implicit knowledge. It locates the limits of methodological knowledge production, and articulates the cultural and transcultural phenomena beyond these limits. It concludes by opening a discussion on implicit knowledge as it is manifested by culture, and considers how culture informs therapeutic ayahuasca practices, as well as how the culture of ayahuasca and other sacred plant practices inform modern psychotherapeutic research and practice.

Chapter 2 provides a brief summary of the commonly known history of ayahuasca and sacred plant practices, in the context of colonialism and modernism, as well as an essential social and political history of modern psychedelic culture and research. Section 2.1 outlines the key historical and methodological challenges of studying traditional ayahuasca practices, and locates the modern attraction and commercialisation of practices within cultural and ontological determinants. Section 2.2 addresses psychedelics and ayahuasca in modern history and culture, outlining the cultural, political, methodological, and therapeutic characteristics of this history and its contemporary context.

Chapter 3 opens the discourse on psychedelics and ayahuasca in modern culture and therapy. Section 3.1 addresses the cultural and methodological challenges currently facing contemporary psychedelic research on the therapeutic effects of ayahuasca practices, and the regulatory challenges that ensue. Section 3.2 contextualises these challenges within institutional research, psychotherapeutic practice, knowledge production, and cultural exchange and evolution. In its conclusion, this thesis summarises its key findings, their implications for research and practices of ayahuasca-assisted psychotherapy, and for the culture of modern ayahuasca practices in the context of cultural studies.

CHAPTER 1

Ayahuasca: state of the arts, conceptual framework

Introducing the topic of ayahuasca-assisted psychotherapy poses a significant disciplinary challenge, because this topic falls under a multitude of disciplinary domains (cf. Roberts, 2016: 4). Recognising the therapeutic benefits of ayahuasca practices requires an interdisciplinary methodology: medical and therapeutic research and analysis reveals a political and ontological dimension of discourse, which has wide-reaching implications for public law and policy, and by extension the public and cultural domains in which law and policy are embedded. The psychopharmacological and psychotherapeutic irreducibility of ayahuasca practices reveals an inherent ontological dimension of not only these practices in themselves, but also of their modern therapeutic counterparts, and subsequently their discourses. This chapter briefly outlines the reducible discursive limits of the topic, pertaining to the ‘facts and effects’ of ayahuasca practices and their therapeutic properties. Then it addresses the ideological and ontological agency of this discourse within power structures, before articulating the discursive dilemma presented by disciplinary domains’ methodological inability to engage an object as simultaneously natural, social and discursive (cf. Latour, 1993).

1.1 Facts and effects

Ayahuasca occupies a multitude of ontological statuses (cf. Tupper and Labate, 2014: 73): a psychedelic compound technically derived from plants with natural psychoactive properties; a sacred, indigenous tradition of spiritual practice and knowledge production with personal and social utility; a medicinal tool for facilitating psychotherapeutic transformation, personal and transpersonal growth; a contemporary, global phenomenon of hybrid spiritual and shamanic practices; a highly coveted, experiential product within a widespread market of commercial spiritual disciplines and ethno-tourism. This makes ayahuasca a compelling object of interdisciplinary study: its multiple states and their correlative relations are readily observable, yet the most discernible origin of its properties appear in the irreducible experience it affords consciousness.

As an object of science, ayahuasca reveals the position of this experience of consciousness as an active relationship extending between ayahuasca itself and consciousness, yet its origin is neither entirely natural nor social. It is in a constant state of becoming, a relationship continuously informing and re-informing itself with every conscious encounter. Tracing ayahuasca’s critical historical and scientific context then requires delineating its various ontological statuses, not in order to discern a natural or social origin, but to articulate

the observable processes of its continuous state of becoming; the expansion and evolution of its relationship to consciousness.

1.1.1 Physiological, anthropological

Ayahuasca is a medicinal, psychoactive brew native to the Amazon basin, where it has been used in the traditional shamanic practices of many indigenous cultures and communities (cf. McKenna, 2004). The pre-colonial history of these cultures is largely oral, and some anthropologists suggest these practices date back three thousand years or more (cf. Furst, 1976: 44; Narby, 1998: 154). Other researchers question the validity of this claim, both for its extremity as well as the absence of concrete archaeological evidence (cf. Beyer, 2012). Ayahuasca practices are an integral part of the social and ontological structure of these cultures, wherein it is used as a ritual sacrament (cf. Tupper, 2008). The social and cultural function of these shamanic ayahuasca practices has been extensively explored in anthropological literature (cf. Riba, 2003), which emphasises how these practices produce social cohesion, reinforce psycho-spiritual culture and communal bonds, and generally aid the community in practices of ritual, healing and divination (cf. Schultes, 1957).

Ayahuasca is produced by combining two or more plants with distinctive psychoactive properties. Its psychedelic compound, N,N-dimethyltryptamine (DMT), is most commonly found in *Psychotria vidiris*, but is orally inactive unless combined with a monoamine oxidase inhibitor (MAOI). *Banisteriopsis caapi* is the most commonly used MAO-inhibiting plant in traditional ayahuasca brewing, containing several harmala alkaloids that function as MAOIs. These alkaloids are in and for themselves chemically classified as antidepressants (cf. Tupper, 2008), as they inhibit the metabolising of monoamine compounds such as serotonin, dopamine and adrenaline, stimulating their uptake in the nervous system. Combined with DMT, another monoamine compound, the MAOIs prevent the body's monoamine oxidase enzymes from metabolising the DMT, allowing it to be absorbed in the bloodstream and cross the blood-brain barrier, where it is received by the brain's serotonin receptors. This induces an altered state of consciousness; a psychedelic experience. This experience is characterised by an altered state of consciousness, synaesthesia, psychological and spiritual introspection, the experience of a holistic sense of self, and conscious access to a spiritual reality (cf. Tupper, 2008; Metzner, 1998; Dobkin de Rios, 1971).

The word *ayahuasca* comes from the native Quechuan language, meaning 'vine of the soul' or 'vine of the dead' (cf. Metzner, 1999). Ayahuasca is used in a variety of practices among indigenous communities in the Amazon basin. It is used by shamans, *ayahuasqueros*,

to diagnose illness, to gain knowledge and insight by practicing divination, and to access engage with the spirit world; to practice shamanic journeying, or ‘soul journeying’ (cf. Harner, 1973). It is also used collectively in ceremonies: a social-spiritual communion with the ayahuasca spirit, guided by a shaman (cf. Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1990). The common, transcultural function of ayahuasca is in its shamanic properties, and how it crucially informs these cultures’ cosmology, ontology and social identity. More than simply a spiritual tool, it is a considered conscious, spiritual entity in and for itself (Metzner, 1999: 15). Sacred, ‘teaching’ plants are used in many shamanic cultures, and inform a sacred cosmological relationship between human consciousness, spirit and nature. The spirit of a sacred plant exists outside of the experience it induces, and can even appear without ingestion, as a spiritual ‘ally’ or ‘helper’ (Metzner, 1990: 82). Hence, altered states of consciousness are not a psycho-spiritual *product* of using psychoactive plants, but rather a *practice* of consciously engaging with a spiritual reality.

1.1.2 Social, spiritual

Ayahuasca practices and experiences facilitate social identity and cohesion by way of form as well as function. Unlike the classical definition of a sacrament, ayahuasca’s sacred quality is not merely a product of religious endowment, but an explicit function of the altered states of consciousness it produces. Some indigenous cultures include ayahuasca in their creation myths, crediting its spirit with the origin of social order and even language (cf. Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1990; Furst, 1976). The ritual use of ayahuasca is a technique as well as a practice of spiritual exploration and consciousness expansion, characterised by a sacred relationship with nature. This shamanic ontology emphasises the value of social and spiritual bonds and relationships, to a community and its culture as well as nature, encouraging a social identity constituted by its role in and relationship to the collective social and natural ecology. The collective social values taught in the community’s culture and applied in shamanic practices and education, are credited to the ayahuasca spirit and its teachings; the spiritual communion with ayahuasca in an explicitly induced altered state of consciousness then serves to reinforce the individual’s social and cultural identity, and collective, communal values (cf. Furst, 1976: 45).

The modern interest in traditional, indigenous practices of altered states of consciousness and the plants used to induce them, reflects a wider colonial tradition of cultural appropriation and consumption. Modern subjects approached ayahuasca practices under the assumption that the practices’ ritual and symbolic context were products of interchangeable

cultural representations, implying that the potential of therapeutic and spiritual transformation is reducible to culturally independent factors (cf. Mabit, 2007: 2). The inherent irony of this contribution of transformative power to an implicit source, is that it reflects a dominator mentality accrediting cultural superiority and inferiority of practices and traditions according to objective, culturally independent determinants. Mabit argues that traditional ayahuasca practices demonstrate the critical validity and necessity of universal symbolic forms that “...represent indispensable mechanisms for contention and integration of such experiences of the ‘beyond’ that reach trans-cultural, archetypal realms.” (Ibid). Thus, the modern desire for re-enchantment merely produces a reductive view of a spiritual consciousness, determined by neuropharmacological processes. The desire to discover a sacred relationship to self, spirit and nature, is reduced to the desire for a materially reductive explanation of the sacred in secular terms. The apparently genuine desire for spiritual fulfilment is merely a desire for a superior mode of knowledge production, that discounts the very knowledge produced by this modality and its hundreds, possibly thousands of years of practice and exploration. This conception assumes that this mode of knowledge production is culturally independent, and that its indigenous cultural framework is simply an interchangeable cultural make-up. It assumes that consciousness and knowledge thereof exists solely within the ego; anything exterior is merely cultural.

As a mode of knowledge production, traditional ayahuasca practices say something quite different: consciousness and knowledge thereof are indispensably extended beyond the individual ego, through a spiritual reality integrated with the natural world. While these mechanisms and relationships may be represented by a particular cultural codex, which may indeed be interchangeable depending on individual subjects and circumstances, they are by no means products of mere cultural conception. There is a universal, transcultural system of consciousness and conscious states, inextricably connected to and dependent on a fundamental, ‘absolute’ reality. However, this reality is not validated by quantitative measure and observation, but rather by implicit experience of and conscious engagement with this reality through an altered state of consciousness.

This is arguably not a dominant cultural model, even if it may appear this way to subjects seeking out a dominant model where their own has failed to deliver them existential validation. This is demonstrated by the fact that, while ayahuasca practices are widespread, indigenous ayahuasca traditions have no ‘missionary’ objective. On the contrary, traditional ayahuasca practices produce a remarkably resilient social and spiritual culture, as demonstrated by the inability of colonial sources to indoctrinate these cultures with Judaeo-Christian

tradition (cf. Furst, 1976). Hence, traditional ayahuasca practices are also a practice of cultural conservation, not of cultural domination but a defence mechanism against dominator cultures and cultural oppression. Yet in spite of this conservational element of the practice, not to mention its practical restrictions, indigenous ayahuasca practices are remarkably open to foreign interest, as evidenced by the volume of anthropological and ethnographic literature detailing foreign authors' introduction to and participation in these practices. Ayahuasca practices are a widespread sacred traditional practice, but are ultimately exactly that: a practice with specific, transcultural intentions and purposes that may be shared by any individual regardless of their cultural or ethnic background and identity.

1.1.3 In practice

Ritual, sacramental use of psychoactive plants and their properties is one of the most common shamanic techniques for altering and expanding states of consciousness, and ayahuasca is recognised as one of the most powerful and widespread examples of such techniques (Metzner, 1999: 2-3). *Shamanism* refers to prehistoric, globally prevalent practices of spiritual communion and healing, with universal ontological and methodological consistencies; including induced altered states of consciousness and the practice of spiritual power and agency (cf. Winkelman, 2010). Shamanism is a universal phenomenon of human culture, manifesting within indigenous as well as modern societies; the latter is often characterised as 'neo-shamanism' as these practices often refer to a holistic spiritual cosmology as opposed to more traditionally defined indigenous mythologies (cf. Braun, 2013). Ayahuasca practices are arguably paradigmatic examples of shamanic practices, as they manifest simultaneously as culturally specific as well as transcultural, universal phenomena.

Even within traditional, indigenous practices, ayahuasca has a wide variety of applications, both in individual shamanic work and in shared collective contexts. An *ayahuasquero* may enter an altered state of consciousness with ayahuasca, in order to commune with the spirit world, to diagnose conditions and identify their cause, to journey trans-dimensionally and divine strategic knowledge for their community, as well as simply to learn and practice navigating altered states of consciousness; as a mode of knowledge production. The *ayahuasquero* is then also a source of knowledge and guidance, who carefully conducts practices and ceremonies to maximise benefit and minimise harm. Their practice exercises a sacred relationship with the natural world explicitly manifested by their consumption of and communion with sacred teaching plants and their spirits. When performing a communal ceremony, the *ayahuasquero* administers ayahuasca and other plant medicines

according to the individual's needs and tolerance, assists in guiding the experience, and facilitates the communal sharing and integration of the experience. Sharing is a significant part of traditional communal ayahuasca ceremonies, with participants even describing the experience as it occurs, and being offered guidance and interpretation in 'real-time' (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1990: 110).

In addition to traditional indigenous practices, ayahuasca is part of more generally widespread *vegetalismo* practices. *Vegetalismo* is a popularised term for shamanic practices with sacred plants amongst Amazonian mestizo populations (cf. Luna, 1986), as distinguished from indigenous shamanic practices. A *vegetalista* refers to the same indigenous shamanic ontology, as their ontological framework is shared, but may include elements of Catholicism and other colonial influence (Ibid: 30). Ayahuasca is central to all these practices, though the term *vegetalista* does not necessarily imply the frequent use of plants, psychoactive or otherwise, but rather that their source of knowledge comes from the spirit of certain 'plant teachers' (Ibid: 14-15). The uniformity of ayahuasca practices and cosmological imagery amongst separate indigenous communities as well as *vegetalistas* is a point of great interest in the anthropological and ethnographic record of these practices.

Ayahuasca has also come to play a central role in organised religious groups, combining indigenous and mestizo ayahuasca practices with African spiritualism and elements of Catholicism, to inform syncretic religions (cf. Tupper, 2008: 299). The earliest and most notable example is the Santo Daime church founded in 1930, and later the União do Vegetal (UDV) founded in 1961 (cf. MacRae, 2004: 28). These churches and their many offshoots use ayahuasca as a sacrament, often following in the footsteps of Christian language and imagery, and exercising a hermeneutic doctrine claiming to offer the 'true' interpretation of their history and traditions (Ibid).

In all cases, traditional ayahuasca practices are fundamentally informed by their ritual context, and emphasise the essential function ritualised practice (cf. Winkelman, 2014: 2; MacRae, 2004: 8). It is difficult to reduce the form and function of ayahuasca practices' ritual context, because neither demonstrate an explicit essence of their example. Ayahuasca rituals may vary in form from practice to practice and tradition to tradition, and its explicit function may be adapted depending on a range of factors, from the intention of the ritual itself, to the individual participants and their individual intentions for the practice as a whole, as well as the particular ritual in case. Distinguishing the function of the ayahuasca ritual from its psychopharmacological function is even more problematic (cf. Talin and Sanabria, 2017: 24);

the efficacy of ayahuasca as a treatment is not informed by one or the other, they inform one another synergistically.

The prevalence of ritual form and function in ayahuasca practices, particularly therapeutic practices, indicates the essential purpose of ritualised practice as a methodology. The variety of ritualistic practice indicates an archetypal form and function of ritual, not necessarily encultured by a particular tradition of symbolic and mythological value investment, but rather the essential, transcultural function and practice of ritual; the practice and phenomenon of investing sacred values within an ontology that includes a sacred and spiritual reality, and the experience and exploration of altered states that may give access to this domain of reality. In this sense, the ritual component of ayahuasca practices indicates not a cultured practice of sacred endowment, but rather a *proto-cultural* practice of sacred value invested in and by means of a ritual methodology.

1.1.4 Therapeutic properties

Ayahuasca demonstrates significant therapeutic properties in treating addiction, abuse and trauma disorders, and treatment-resistant depression (cf. McKenna, 2004; Strassman, 1995; Mabit, 2007). The study of ayahuasca and its neurochemical pathology has played a part in research on the psychopharmacological function of tryptamines, a class of chemicals including serotonin and other neurotransmitters. The study of ayahuasca traditions and rituals has also informed research and practices of psychotherapy, catalysing an interest in a variety of aspects of the ayahuasca ritual and their therapeutic function; the psychedelic experience itself of course, but also its ontological/cosmological context, the role/function of the guide/shaman, and perhaps most of all its regular, ritual application, in sickness and in health; its presence as a *practice*.

Ayahuasca's complex psychopharmacology distinguishes it from other shamanic practices using sacred plants, with multiple pharmacological elements contributing to its effects. The MAO-inhibiting properties of harmala alkaloids have a general effect on serotonin receptors and the nervous system's ability to receive a range of tryptamine compounds (Callaway et al., 1994). Structurally, DMT is the simplest known psychedelic tryptamine, closely related to serotonin (cf. Strassman, 2001). Found in over 50 plants, DMT is one of the most common naturally occurring psychoactive compounds in nature (cf. Ott, 1994). It is the first psychedelic tryptamine known to be endogenously produced in the human body (cf. Barker, 2018), and is received by the brain's serotonin receptor sites involved in regulating mood, perception and thought (cf. Strassman, 2001). Strassman even argues that the brain

‘hungers’ for DMT, as it receives the same priority as amino acids and other neurologically essential compounds when crossing the blood-brain barrier (Ibid). The body’s abundance of MAOs ensures that DMT is broken down rapidly, however if the body receives a high enough concentration of DMT combined with an MAOI, such as in ayahuasca, it becomes highly psychoactive.

The process of brewing ayahuasca is then itself part of an ayahuasca practice. Ayahuasca may be brewed in combination with other plants with different pharmacological properties, and prepared in different strengths, to be used according to what is required by the circumstances. It is difficult to classify ayahuasca as either a natural remedy or a drug, and difficult to distinguish it at all from its practice. Ayahuasca doesn’t simply exist, it is *made* by *someone* with an intention. In turn, this intention is informed by experience, by ayahuasca practices. Hence the crucial role of the shaman: their function as a guide, a source of knowledge and technique, an explorer and a healer, is indispensable to the ayahuasca practice. Ayahuasca’s psychotherapeutic potential is not readily reducible to pharmacological or therapeutic properties, because the one is poorly understood without the other (cf. Langlitz, 2013). Ayahuasca is not a medicine in the conventional sense, rather it induces an altered state of consciousness that may facilitate a therapeutic process of transformation. Ayahuasca-assisted psychotherapy is then a process of the practice providing support and guidance to the subject as they undergo this process of transformation. This in itself is remarkably similar to the role of a therapist in conventional therapy, with the exception of a powerful psychoactive substance informing, inducing and facilitating the transformative process.

“Ayahuasca serves as a very powerful facilitator in psychotherapeutic work and the development of self-knowledge.” (Mabit, 2007: 7). These properties have been explicitly and extensively demonstrated in case studies and population surveys (cf. Apud, 2017; Andritzky, 1989; Ona et al., 2019; Talin and Sanabria, 2017; Tupper, 2008). However, it remains difficult to articulate precisely how ayahuasca facilitates these processes, because they are largely implicit processes. They are black-box phenomena evading description by the subjects hosting them. The therapeutic efficacy of ayahuasca, has allowed for more grounded articulations of the therapeutic processes involved, and these explicitly articulated examples indicate the profound implicit potential of ayahuasca. There is no ‘average’ ayahuasca experience: any exemplary experience may refer to itself as its own essence (Taussig, 1987: 406), and this is precisely its therapeutic value. Inducing an altered state of consciousness allows for novel processes of perception and conception. These altered states allow the subject to experience themselves as the object of their own perception and conception. Psychic, emotional and

spiritual elements of their world that otherwise remain invisible, may be manifested as perceivable and material, and provide a framework for understanding and responding to these elements. Perhaps most radically, these altered states provide a methodological framework of consciousness for the subject to process influences and information without verbal limitations, to see or experience their own existence pre-verbally. “Becoming conscious of their problems through the ‘seeing’ provides them direct access to their interior world.” (Mabit, 2007: 7), where they may discover novel perspectives on internal psychic conflicts and traumas, and their potential treatment. In this altered state of consciousness, consciousness itself clearly exists far beyond the confines of the body, let alone the ego, and the body itself is an interface between the external and internal world (Ibid). In this sense, ayahuasca assisted psychotherapy not only facilitates and guides the subject’s internal therapeutic work, it actively demonstrates the fundamental self-regulatory power of consciousness executed in and by the body (cf. Mabit, 2002).

In so many ways, the therapeutic properties of ayahuasca practices are embedded in their form. The individual subject’s responsibility and accountability for their own therapeutic transformation is part and parcel of the transformation itself; it is a process of empowerment wherein they become the protagonist of their own experience and transformation (Ibid). Likewise, this sense of empowerment is reinforced by the social cohesion produced by the practice as quintessentially *shared*. Collectively acknowledging and even celebrating the therapeutic value found within the individual relationship to ayahuasca, produces a strong social and spiritual bond to a community sharing the implicit nature and value of their experience. The shamanic ontology shared among indigenous cultures and their ayahuasca practices, functions much like any other spiritual cosmology, with the exception that while this ontology’s value may be implicitly internalised individually, its ontological and epistemic reality is explicitly accessible through sacred practices of altered states of consciousness induced by sacred plants, whose spirits in turn may guide the subject’s internal journey.

Ayahuasca practices are then directly and indirectly therapeutically beneficial for an individual subject, as well as the community in which the practice is situated. In both cases, the therapeutic benefits relate to a certain ontology, a somatic sense of being with a corporeal as well as spiritual relationship to the natural world. Within this ontology, the distinctions between individual and social, subject and community, corporeal and spiritual, and even natural and cultural, are dispersed by the sacred; trans-cultural, pre-verbal relationship connecting body and spirit, self and other, and nature and consciousness. This ontology is not without individuality, but it does not limit individual identity to that of the thinking and thought

subject (Ibid). On the contrary, the subject is informed by and part of a much greater material, social and spiritual cosmology which produces and conveys meaning through implicit modes of knowledge production.

1.2 Power

Psychedelics have played complex and nuanced role in recent modern social and political history. Their influence is embedded in a multitude of historical narratives and discourses, from anthropology and ethnography to political ethics of personal and religious freedom. Academically, psychedelics have a contentious history. The implicit nature of their effects made them poor objects of science, on par with the esoteric mysticism of alchemy that modern science was desperate to leave behind as a historical relic. The rapid expansion of psychopharmacology in the post-war era led to a significant interest in psychedelics as therapeutic tools. Parallel to this scientific enthusiasm, psychedelics had a significant cultural impact as the counter-cultural movement embraced psychedelics such as cannabis, LSD and psilocybin mushrooms, as their own kind of social-cultural sacrament. Inversely, psychedelics and their therapeutic potential were widely abused and dismissed, becoming a product like any other in their consumer culture context. Their use was soon perceived as a symptom of an anti-social culture determined to tear down the society citizens had fought so hard to maintain. Their subsequent widespread illegalisation and demonization made their counter-cultural symbolic value all the more powerful, more subversive and enticingly radical.

Indigenous cultures have been practicing psychedelic research with sacred plants for millennia; it took modern science some time to critically consider these practices as a potential source of information on the nature of the psychedelic experience. The initial hypotheses were grounded in the observable parallels between the psychedelic experience and religious as well as psychotic experiences – the question being whether the psychedelic state could provide any model of or insight on the known varieties of altered states of consciousness. It was chiefly through anthropological and ethnographic literature, describing sacred practices with vision-inducing plants, that lead a generation of educated, counter-cultural enthusiasts to seek out indigenous cultures that included rather than rejected these plants and their mysterious effects in their way of life. Scientific interest in psychedelics was slowly renewed, however the research proceeded with tremendous caution. Essentially all relevant psychedelic substances were classified as illegal, making research legislatively difficult as well as socially challenging. Psychedelics had been vilified for decades, as a social menace and a one-way trip to psychosis.

What makes psychedelics so unique culturally, is how their discursive power is maintained. Addictive compounds such as opiates and amphetamines possess a great deal of power, with or without any rhetorical antagonism: their destructive impact on individual and social health is apparent. Psychedelics, on the other hand, have an extensive history of being rhetorically attacked, because the threat they pose to the status quo is not directly corporeal or environmental, but ideological and ontological; even ethical. It is easy to observe how addiction destroys an individual and a community. Psychedelics generally have a very different effect on individuals and communities; they produce the opposite of addiction: connection (cf. Hari, 2015: 416). They produce a connection to implicit meaning within the psychedelic experience, creating a perceptual block that only intensifies the sense of distance between ‘them’, the initiated, and the outsiders. Psychedelics impose the threat of ideological and ontological uncertainty, because their ideological and ontological influence cannot be reduced to an explicit source, nor can it be reduced as purely implicit (cf. Langlitz, 2013: 140). It is no wonder that modern culture, in its state of disenchantment, produces a desire to seek out indigenous cultures and practices grounded in the conditions of an enchanted reality. The colonial association of indigenous spiritual practices with the wicked, feral ideology of the devil transformed to a different kind of idolatry, that of seeking out a culturally constructed sense of sacred meaning and value (Ibid).

1.2.1 Harm factors and research limitations

The ayahuasca experience is a physically and mentally demanding process. Traditional ayahuasca practices require strict dietary preparations, as the ayahuasca’s complex pharmacodynamics affect the body’s metabolism as well as its nervous system. In traditional practices, consecrating ayahuasca is considered a process of physical as well as psychological purging; within the shamanic ontology, physical and psychic conditions are inextricably related. Neglecting to follow the dietary requirements can distort and diminish the therapeutic value of the experience and its transformational potential, as well as cause harmful side-effects. More crucially, using ayahuasca without guidance or clear intentions can produce a terror-inducing experience without meaningful context or interpretation. There is an element of terror even in the therapeutic ayahuasca experience, however this terror is a necessary step of self-confrontation in the therapeutic process of transformation (cf. Winkelmann, 2004: 213). An absence of therapeutic context and guidance may then significantly diminish the therapeutic value of the experience.

The therapeutic benefit of ayahuasca, or any psychedelic applied in a psychotherapeutic context, is conditioned by multiple external factors. Mabit summarises these factors in three categories: *substance*, *consumer*, and *context* (cf. Mabit, 1997). This poses a significant challenge to psychotherapeutic and psychopharmacological research methodologies, whose ability to produce and verify quantitative data depends on explicit metrics and clinical, repeatable conditions of experimentation. In conditions where the substance may be empirically verified, the consumer and context factors are often referred to as ‘set’ and ‘setting’ (Sessa, 2016: 34); the former referring to the individual and their mental and emotional condition as well as knowledge and identity, and the latter to the context within which the substance and the consumer engage. While consistent environmental conditions may be reproduced in a research context, the real difficulty is gauging not only subjective relations to the conditions and context, but the subjective nature of the psychedelic experience. This begs the question, what good is a medication that has “...different effects on different people and even different effects with the same person from session to session?” (Sessa, 2016: 6). Even contemporary clinical research trials on psychedelics face significant legal as well as methodological challenges. Population studies on the use of psychedelics are widely available, but they rely on taking into account a wide variety of variables constituted by the subject’s set and setting, and have no means of verifying the substance beyond the subject’s own word and knowledge of its source.

Researching psychedelic experiences and their therapeutic benefit poses several challenges: the unpredictability of the psychedelic experience and its effect on the subject; the implicit, spiritual dimension that characterises so many experiences; the widely illegal status of most psychedelic compounds; the lack of proper education and abundance of misinformation on these compounds. It is clear that these challenges are cultural as well as methodological, which implies the need for both cultural and methodological change in order to address them. The history of misinformation and propaganda directed against psychedelic culture, is enough reason alone to validate proper research and education on the subject. The illegal status of their compounds doesn’t reflect a harm factor so much as a power factor: the political power of terror; the economic power of the unregulated market; the power of knowledge to produce social and cultural transformation.

The spiritual dimension of mystical psychedelic experiences, and especially of ayahuasca practices, indicates the integral therapeutic value of spiritual identity as a sacred, implicit relationship and sense of self. The unpredictable, individual, subjective nature of the experience allows it to facilitate the subject’s unique, individual therapeutic process.

Psychedelic experiences and their therapeutic benefit “...appear multifaceted but not plural. It is not simply psychotic or mystical but takes different, practically mediated forms that are partially connected and coordinated through a shared historical matrix.” (Langlitz, 2013: 33). The therapeutic efficacy of ayahuasca practices are necessarily subjective and individual: their efficacy is dependent on facilitating a transfer of spiritual power, and a transformation from spiritual poverty to empowerment; a process which can only be defined by the individual subject’s spiritual constitution and circumstances.

1.2.2 Modern attraction and global consumerism

A common, problematic foreign assumption about sacred plant practices, and ayahuasca practices especially, is that since the experience and what it teaches has a natural source, cultural context and identity are relative and irrelevant. Mabit argues that nothing could be further from the truth: indigenous cultures with traditions of sacred plant practices contain rich cosmologies and methodologies informed by precisely these practices, in order to guide, facilitate and inform these experiences, and the spiritual identity and sacred relationships they produce (cf. Mabit, 2007). These are, of course, ‘cultural’ practices, but they are also purposefully ritual practices: informed by a sacred, ‘natural’ order of knowledge and power; as opposed to the modern culture of secular reduction and commodification. Reducing the therapeutic benefit of ayahuasca practices to a commodity, even a therapeutic one, neglects the religious dimension that gives the experience such profound value to the subject (Ibid); a sacred bond with, and a natural, reverent obligation to a shared spiritual reality.

Unlike many other psychoactive substances whose therapeutic properties are currently being researched and applied (LSD; psilocybin; MDMA; ketamine), ayahuasca presents little or no recreational factor. This has not stopped ayahuasca practices from becoming a major tourist attraction, as well as a global cultural export (cf. Peluso and Alexiades, 2006). This ‘New-Age’ adventure tourism creates a hyper-traditionalism, in which its native geographic context contains spaces designed specifically to attract outsider attention with the seductive promise of ‘authentic,’ ‘genuine’ experiences totally foreign to the outsider’s experience; even if they are only provided as a response to the globalised market. There is an uncomfortable element of a colonial agency here: having drawn a full map of the world, what remains is a full account of *experience*. The past’s spontaneous encounters with native traditions and practices is now replaced by an over-saturated market, advertising a ‘native’ authenticity exclusively for the sake of foreign interest (Ibid, 74). In such a saturated market, the demand for ‘authenticity’ remains high: the initial foreign curiosity has become suspicion instead. Yet the desire and

even desperation remains for an inducible therapeutic experience of authentic spiritual guidance, sustaining a seller's market for honest healers and charlatans alike.

This high, foreign demand consists of individuals seeking to address specific issues (addiction; trauma disorders; depression), as well as general enthusiasts of consciousness exploration, spiritual or otherwise (cf. Winkelman, 2014; Mabit, 2007). Mabit argues that this modern culture of self-exploration established within 1960's counter-culture was

a reaction to the general secularization of society that has abolished the ritual forms, liturgies or symbolic experiential spaces that permit the individual to experience, in a sensitive manner, the semantic dimensions of life and to consequently give meaning to their everyday life. (Mabit, 2007: 2)

A secular society whose ideological foundations were collapsing under any pretence of ethical merit produced a mythological and ideological vacuum; providing no grounds for social cohesion and communal bonds (Ibid). This only enhanced the mythical attraction of indigenous sacred plant practices, as an opportunity to escape modern dominator/individualist culture and discover a religious sense of spiritual meaning and communal purpose.

The globalisation, exportation and commodification of ayahuasca is then driven by two suspicions. First, that therapy, healing, spiritual growth, and knowledge are available and accessible in traditional sacred plant practices and altered states of consciousness. Second, that the implicit nature of these practices and experiences makes it difficult to validate their authenticity, leaving a market vulnerable to exploitation. Since the initial Western pilgrimages to native ayahuasca ceremonies, a phenomenon catalysed by the 1960's counter-culture's popularisation of anthropological and ethnobotanical research on psychoactive plants with healing properties and traditions, local parties have taken advantage of foreigners' fascination and/or desperation, by providing ayahuasca ceremonies with little knowledge or intention beyond profit (cf. Dobkin de Rios, 1994). The consumer-suspicion is a self-fulfilling prophecy: the desire to discover authenticity among counterfeits reflects the Western dominator ontology seeking out true meaning in a world of false idols; an exercise in futility as they cannot take their own subjective experience as verification, seeking proof in the external instead of internal world without recognising these worlds' interdependence. The extraordinary popularity of ayahuasca, its dislocation and commodification, indicates "...a profound discontinuity in fundamental worldview and values between the Western industrialised world and the beliefs and values of shamanistic societies and practitioners." (Metzner, 1999: 3-4).

1.2.3 Legislation and politics of disciplinary research

Historically, ayahuasca has created complex policy issues for legislation on controlled substances (cf. Tupper, 2008). Psychedelics have had a remarkable if not subtle historical influence on these issues, intersecting and informing discourses on public health policy, medical and therapeutic research, social sciences, and culture. Ayahuasca fragments these discourses even further, problematising issues of religious, cultural and personal freedom. As syncretic religious churches practicing ayahuasca in Brazil expanded and became more urbanised throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the government banned ayahuasca in 1985 before lifting it in 1987, effectively allowing its ritual use (cf. Riba, 2003). UDV, Santo Daime and their offshoots eventually internationalised, sparking debates as well as new legislation for the religious ayahuasca practices; notably in the USA where, in 2006, the Supreme Court ruled that ceremonial ayahuasca practices are protected under the 1993 Religious Freedom Restoration Act, a piece of legislation enacted to protect the ceremonial use of peyote in native North American communities (cf. Tupper, 2008). Sacred plant practices have instigated an unprecedented legislative transformation, demonstrating the essential social persistence and political power of religious practice (cf. Sandberg, 2011).

There are several nuances to these debates. Firstly, the illegal classification of psychoactive compounds contained in sacred plants such as ayahuasca and peyote, and the legislative, if not scientific recognition of inherent value of religious freedom. Secondly, the syncretic nature of the churches sparking the debates. These ayahuasca churches and their religion insofar as it may be defined, have existed for less than a century, even if they may be informed by a pre-historical practice. Finally, ayahuasca practices as a culture in itself – indigenous, dislocated, religious, therapeutic or otherwise – where do their inherent benefit, potential harm, ontological implications and cultural phenomenon fit into these debates? Are they conceived in a context of medication and therapy or abuse; cultural and religious history or political and scientific influence? What are the political implications of an illegal substance protected by religious freedom?

DMT, the illicit, psychoactive compound in ayahuasca, introduces even more complexities. DMT is found in a variety of plants (cf. Strassman, 1995), and has been used in indigenous shamanic practices for millennia. Simultaneously, it is scheduled as a Class I illegal substance under the USA's 1970 Controlled Substances Act. Consequently, the scientific research on DMT and psychedelics has produced a unique cultural and political as well as scientific discourse. Medical science has an inherent political and cultural modality, in that it may inform public policies impacting the treatment as well as the rights of citizens.

Historically, psychedelic research has faced cultural and political challenges, as well as legislative and simply practical limitations. Many substances, such as opiates and amphetamines, exist simultaneously as illicit drugs and as research objects and medications (cf. Oram, 2014). Psychedelic compounds stand out, as their effects cannot be reduced to a specific biochemical function (anaesthetic; anti-depressant; nerve stimulant). This alone makes their research as well as their medical application ambiguous and problematic. Combined with their perennial counter-cultural, anti-establishment association, research on psychedelic compounds, and particularly one with as much cultural baggage as DMT, is a precariously radical practice. By the 1970s, the widespread, unchecked, and poorly educated use of psychedelics within the counter-cultural movement, combined with their unpredictable effects and association with psychosis, produced an anti-psychedelic sentiment in the scientific community (cf. Strassman, 2001).

Intentionally or not, psychedelic research had become ideologically charged by the counter-cultural movement, and in general by the ontological implications of the research (cf. Langlitz, 2013). As a result, the revival of psychedelic research in the 1990s reinstated its legitimacy by exercising dispassionate, depoliticised methodologies in their research, which Langlitz argues was a political manoeuvre in itself: allowing the psychedelic revolution to carry on in a reformed format (Ibid); no longer culturally and politically motivated, with clearly defined research questions and intentions. Nearly thirty years later, it would appear this manoeuvre was effective: psychedelic substances such as psilocybin, ketamine, MDMA, and of course ayahuasca, are receiving unprecedented attention in research, with legislative policies being reconsidered regularly and radically as the research yields more and more positive, even profound results on the efficacy of these substances in treating some of contemporary society's greatest mental health epidemics.

1.2.4 Research implications and ontological vulnerabilities

Traditional ayahuasca practices are characterised by their use of ritual, the presence of an experienced 'guide' i.e. a shaman/*ayahuasquero*, and an ontology which recognises a spiritual realm of existence as real and literal. Shamanic healing practices do not distinguish between physical, psychic and spiritual modalities (cf. Metzner, 1998). According to shamanic ontology, drinking ayahuasca brings the subject closer to the spirit realm, which contains potentially violent and even lethal forces when engaged incorrectly. On more secular terms, ayahuasca induces an internal psychological confrontation with the self, and particularly the shadow of the self. Unconscious psychological issues and complexes otherwise avoided by the

conscious psyche, are lifted from their subconscious position and brought to the psyche's surface, where they are represented within a somatic, ritual framework of implicit signification and knowledge production.

The therapeutic properties of ayahuasca are already ingrained in indigenous traditions of ayahuasca practice, wherein the distinction between physiological and psychological therapy is replaced by a holistic model of health, including physical, psychological, cultural, social and spiritual factors that inform an individual's condition. More crucially, these indigenous cultures recognise that the individual's health is a product of their relationship to the community (cf. Mabit, 2007). As opposed to an individualist social identity perceiving their strengths and weaknesses in terms of their position in a dominator hierarchy, the indigenous collectivist identity receives their strength, as well as their vulnerability, from their community. They recognise their relationships and responsibilities to their family, community, and heritage, as the foundation of their identities. Traditional ayahuasca practices inform and maintain this social cohesion, as a powerful facilitator of psycho-spiritual experiences, and as a religious tradition of shamanic ontology.

As a historical and social phenomenon, the therapeutic benefits of ayahuasca practices are informed by cultural, ideological and especially ontological factors. These factors present challenges to methodological research, as they are subjectively informed by an individual's identity and conditions. Broadening methodological research to discourse, there is a ubiquitous urging to consider indigenous cultures' traditional sacred practices, their rituals and methodologies as an invaluable historic source of knowledge and guidance in understanding consciousness and the therapeutic functions of altered states of consciousness (cf. Sessa, 2016; Mabit, 2007). These scientific discourses articulate the therapeutic methodology of these practices and their culture, arguing that these factors are subjective but not relative: they exist within a natural order, even if this order is not immediately reducible (cf. Mabit, 2007). Research on psychedelics and ayahuasca practices remains ideological, because it requires broadening the fields of disciplinary research to include and validate social/spiritual order/phenomenon beyond the range of methodological measure.

1.3 Discourse

The question then remains: how do validate, let alone integrate ayahuasca into modern psychotherapeutic practices? Its therapeutic effect is explicitly demonstrable, however its methodology is an implicitly coordinated practice, which does not articulate a stable

disciplinary double. Sessa summarises the methodological challenge and its political implication:

one cannot often separate the spiritual and communally cohesive uses of psychedelics from their use in medicine. Moreover, there certainly are lessons we can learn from “developing” civilizations. One hopes the future of modern medicine might acquire knowledge from such cultures. (Sessa, 2016: 34)

Modern psychedelic research may recognise the methodological form of indigenous psychedelic practices, but modelling this form is a challenge, as it is constituted by subjective experience and implicit, first-person knowledge production. Experience and knowledge may be articulated by the subject, but what it gains in objective articulation, it loses in subjective authenticity. Modelling the experience removes the subjectivity it seeks to study. This leads to a confrontation between the modern scientific paradigm, and the implicit knowledge and subjective observation it inevitably relies on (cf. Langlitz, 2013: 126-127).

Ayahuasca practices do not simply demonstrate their efficacy in facilitating therapeutic transformation, they demonstrate the essential influence of their cultural and ontological context. In other words, ayahuasca practices may for example treat addiction, insofar as the practices reveal a discontinuity in the subject’s conditions and context perpetrating the addictive pattern of behaviour, and give insight into how the subject may break these patterns and restore the natural order of their conditions. Ayahuasca does not treat addiction *per se*, it treats discontinuity of natural order, of which addiction is a symptom. This inherently political and ideological dimension of ayahuasca practices makes it difficult to articulate what research verifies. The therapeutic result is explicitly verifiable; its process is not. Any research and its discourse must then draw a line in its investigation and claims: ayahuasca effectively facilitates therapeutic transformation; implying it reveals the subject’s discontinuity with their natural order; implying there is a natural, universal, trans-cultural order, even if it cannot be methodologically verified; implying this order models the shamanic ontology and traditional knowledge of ayahuasca practices.

1.3.1 Discursive and disciplinary classification

Researching ayahuasca practices necessitates an interdisciplinary methodology, because the therapeutic properties of these practices are inseparable from the spiritual, communal and cultural traditions in which they are located (cf. Sessa, 2016). The therapeutic potential may evade psychopharmacological and psychotherapeutic quantification, but it does

not evade observation. On the contrary, the therapeutic benefits are revealed quite clearly in how the practices counter attempts at methodological and cultural colonisation. Sacred plant traditions contradict the classical, legislative definition of their compounds as ‘drugs’, as they demonstrate no addictive properties in their traditional use. Similar to the therapeutic potential, addiction is not simply a result of the substance, but its set and setting. Historically, addictive use only occurs when a psychoactive plant is commodified and exported; such as in the case of coca and tobacco leaves. Inversely, substances such as alcohol have a detrimental impact on indigenous communities receiving it as an export outside of its cultural context. Many healers treat this pattern of addiction within their own communities, by practicing and even reviving spiritual traditions with the ritualised use of sacred plants (cf. Dobkin de Rios, 1973; Mabit, 2002); including ayahuasca (cf. McKenna, 2004). The use of sacred plant practices and psychedelics to treat substance addiction challenges the classical conception of toxicity (Mabit, 2002: 26) and addiction as chemically reducible phenomena.

These practices are a part of a historical lineage of traditions, and are also evolving and adapting to new contexts and circumstances. This makes ayahuasca practices a problematic object of study even for observational sciences and their disciplines, because the circumstances of observation already limit the interpretation of what is observed. These practices evade disciplinary classification, because any disciplinary interpretation of observation, or even of first-hand reports of practice, dismisses the implicit, subjective experience informing the practice. Articulating these practices requires a discourse to take cultural factors of subjective experience into account. Engaging in these practices as a mode of knowledge production requires the discourse to consider the subjective, cultural manifestations of implicit knowledge as not simply a representation, but as indicative of an order of symbolic action. Significant attempts have been made to articulate elements of continuity in the subjective experience, in order to map internal and altered states of consciousness (cf. Vollenweider, 1998), and to develop new vocabularies capable of articulating qualitative distinctions between these altered states and their experiential characteristics (cf. Shulgin, 1991; Mabit, 2002).

As detailed and sophisticated as these distinctions have become, having successfully identified many patterns of characteristics that have served to verify the therapeutic and spiritual properties of psychedelic experiences, they remain within a reductive mode of knowledge production. This is to say they provide disciplines better resources for understanding the productive output of these black-box phenomena, but reveal very little about the box and the phenomena themselves. More fundamentally, they remain methodologically reductive, attempting to reduce the informative and educational models embedded within

ayahuasca practices to preconceived formula, critically dismissing the value of these models as methodologies in themselves.

1.3.2 Implicit and explicit modes of knowledge production

In the context of modern medical science and psychotherapy, ayahuasca is immediately problematic due to its reliance on implicit processes and transformations that may not be sufficiently articulated in a scientific discourse. Attempting to explain its phenomena on purely neuroscientific terms fails, but it also fails on purely psycho-social terms. It directly contradicts anthropocentric assumptions in anthropology, and disrupts nature-culture distinctions across disciplines. Not only is ayahuasca's therapeutic potential poorly understood within a singular methodological framework, more confusion is added by the fact that this compound and its psycho-spiritual therapeutic culture has been exported, becoming re-informed and redefined in a variety of contexts, from psychotherapy to spiritual, shamanic journeying. While fundamental elements of the indigenous practices are often preserved, the entire cultural context in which the process takes place shifts in terms of conditions, practitioners and participants.

The multiple statuses of ayahuasca in contemporary culture, present a complex and nonlinear history that corresponds poorly to the concept of cultural origin. These reductive challenges occur largely because ayahuasca cannot be reduced to an explicitly defined mode of knowledge production; rather it enacts its own implicit mode of knowledge production. Ayahuasca's origin is not quantifiable on historical terms; its methodological heritage is oral and experiential. Traditionally, learning the history and practice of *ayahuasqueros*, an ayahuasca shaman, is a life-long practice of absolute personal commitment, requiring an extensive oral and experiential education in shamanic techniques and ontology (cf. Winkelman, 2014). Already there appears to be an argument for an implicit mode of knowledge production, the implication being that such knowledge demands implicit engagement that simply cannot be disseminated meaningfully in the context of standardised, institutional education. This in itself is not an unfamiliar argument; one would be hard-pressed to find any practice or discipline that does not require experiential practice as part of its education. However, shamanic practices represent more than simply an alternative mode of knowledge production. They constitute an expanded experience of consciousness existing beyond the individual subject, wherein knowledge is informed and produced by an order of reality influenced by spiritual as well as physical energy. Simply put, shamanic practices do not so much explain or reduce spiritual encounters, they are in fact practices of engaging and

controlling this energy through altered states of consciousness. Their ritual and symbolic form may adapt to different cultural and psychological contexts, but they adhere to an essential natural order manifest in the body (Mabit, 2007: 5). Hence the body itself is the site of knowledge production: it is a consistent, individual interface between altered states of consciousness and perception, with its own natural order of preservative and evolutionary action and reaction (Ibid).

The difficulty of measuring internal experience and implicit knowledge is doubled by the somatic nature of the experience and the shamanic methodology. Ayahuasca practices are a cultural as well as a therapeutic phenomenon, its methodological order manifests itself culturally and somatically. In the shamanic paradigm, transmission of knowledge occurs through psycho-somatic experience, disciplinary practice and a rich cultural history and mythology. The disciplinary challenge of measuring this knowledge transmission is twofold: first, the irreducibility and irreplaceability of implicit knowledge. Second, the implication of validating implicit knowledge, disrupting the modern scientific paradigm of explicit knowledge production. This thesis proposes a third way: an interdisciplinary discourse that includes modern as well as indigenous ayahuasca practices and research amongst its engaged disciplines. The common discursive element between modern research and indigenous practices, is cultural. This discourse locates itself within the cultural manifestations of ayahuasca practices as a trans-cultural phenomenon, and engages these manifestations as critical, explanatory resources (cf. Winkelman, 2004) for the therapeutic practice of inducing altered states of consciousness.

1.3.3 Holisms and paradigm shifts

In spite of the foreignness of their cultural form, there are remarkable similarities, universal consistencies and shared methodologies between modern therapeutic practices and traditional shamanic ayahuasca practices. In both cases, therapeutic transformation is guided by a therapeutic authority (therapist; doctor; shaman; ayahuasquero). The purpose of this authority is not to directly heal the subject or enact their transformation, but to provide them with the necessary knowledge and guidance to enact their own transformation, by offering them new models and methods for understanding and engaging their own internal psychic state and experience. Methodologies share the common practice of facilitating the subject's acceptance of their condition, commitment to engaging and transforming this condition, and empowering their own sense and value of self. What is then unfamiliar and unverifiable to the modern scientific paradigm, is the ontological foundation of these methodologies. They are

informed by traditions of complex practices and highly developed knowledge of the human condition's biology and psychology, yet this knowledge and its production is credited to a spiritual experience, encounter, transformation, and empowerment, often involving the conscious spirits of the sacred plants consecrated in the practices, and by extension the consciousness of nature itself. This shared spiritual realm diminishes the nature-culture divide between human and the natural conditions, demonstrating their shared spiritual presence and existence.

The challenge for the modern scientific paradigm is then to consider practices of symbolic and ritual action as they are socially and culturally manifested, as a mode of knowledge production. These practices recognise multiple, expanded states of consciousness, as well as spiritual powers and beings, which poses a radical contradiction to the modern ontological paradigm (Metzner, 1999: 17) that recognises a limited human consciousness in an unconscious reality. The consciousness-expanding effects of ayahuasca and other sacred plant practices presents "a hybrid phenomenon of nature and culture" (Langlitz, 2013: 33). This blurring of the natural and cultural divide is at the heart of the reductive paradox these practices present to the modern paradigm of knowledge production. This epistemology of single-state consciousness is challenged by practices and cultures of multistate consciousness, because, as culturally entrenched as many of these practices may be, they inevitably refer to multistate consciousness as a natural order of conscious existence. This conception of consciousness has radical implications for the modern scientific conception of consciousness as it relates to body and mind, individuals and society, and nature and culture (cf. Roberts, 2016: 8-9). Even within a theoretical and methodological framework of multistate consciousness, verifying subject data is inherently difficult, because of the indefinite nature of qualifying variables of conscious states and their individual subjects. A black-box conception of consciousness retains its methodology only under the assumption of that whatever occurs within the box, follows a methodologically verifiable constant order (Ibid). Multistate consciousness eliminates the prospect of such verification.

In order to study the cultural and transcultural factors of ayahuasca-assisted psychotherapy, this thesis attempt to articulate these practices, their spiritual and ontological dimension, as neither a natural pathology nor as a social or discursive methodology, but as a cultural phenomenon. This is to say that it considers cultural patterns and manifestations of practice, as part of a natural continuity: transcultural constants that may be adapted to cultural and psychological contexts, but that are nevertheless grounded in a universal and absolute essence. Its historical and literary review does not serve to double and disenchant the body of

this work, quite the opposite: it serves to demonstrate the absolutely essential function these narratives serve to inform cultural conceptions, and how these conceptions inform the body of work as a historic and political document whose production is ongoing. The cultural discourse serves not to naturalise these practices, taking consciousness out of the equation, but rather to understand culture as naturally as possible; to consider cosmological narratives and ontological models as therapeutic resources engaging symbolic and ritual action, and consider the therapeutic implications of articulating nature and culture not as a methodological divide, but as a sacred communion.

CHAPTER 2

Modern history of ayahuasca and psychedelically assisted healing

Understanding psychedelics' influence on recent social and scientific history requires considering it as an object of science and of popular culture, in addition to its function as a psychoactive substance, because its existence as an object, historically, culturally, even ideologically and morally, contributes to the psychedelic experience it affords. Understanding how cultural factors influence the psychedelic experience and its therapeutic potential means considering this object in the context of various disciplines that may illustrate its social, cultural and historical influence and 'reputation'. This chapter introduces the variety of historical discourses that inform modern research's evolving relationship with psychedelics as a therapeutic tool, and as social, cultural, and religious phenomena. Historical accounts and critical research distance themselves from these phenomena, by making them anthropological and ethnographic objects, from which the researchers and observers are forever removed by their disenchanting, secular conditioning.

Simultaneously, modern culture is immersed in a proliferation of psychedelic practices, from indigenous sacred plant practices to individuals seeking alternative medical and psychotherapeutic treatment. The demand for alternative modes of knowledge production pertaining to individual and collective well-being has been significantly influenced by the introduction of psychedelics and their sacred indigenous historical record to modern consciousness, which in its disenchanting state has sought alternative ontologies that include the spiritual dimension of consciousness in their epistemologies. Historically, psychedelics have proven to be not simply a trend of social rebellion and cultural escapism, but rather an indicator of an implicit quality of the human condition otherwise neglected in the critical scientific endeavour to better this condition: spiritual experience.

This chapter articulates the discursive breaking points inevitably reached in critical investigations of ayahuasca, psychedelics, and implicit knowledge. As an object of study, ayahuasca practices disrupt anthropological, ethnographic, and cultural methodologies of research. Psychedelic therapy has demonstrated the significant methodological limitations of the modern definition and application of psychopharmacology, redefining concepts of toxicity, efficacy and pharmacological action. It has also contributed to a discursive platform for the critical investigation of spirituality as a universal phenomenon of consciousness, and its role in individual and communal social health. Traditional sacred plant practices as well as modern psychedelic therapy have interrogated discourses on drug policy and religious freedom, which have revealed ontological and epistemological limits of discourse beyond which the spiritual

dimension of consciousness as manifested in ayahuasca practices reveals no traceable articulation or representation beyond the figurative. This chapter elaborates on some of the key historical discourses, indicating their methodological and epistemological limits in their study of ayahuasca practices and altered states of consciousness. It also serves as an implicit commentary on the historical account of modern research interests in psychedelics, and the social, cultural and political power demonstrated by the phenomenon of the psychedelic experience as an object of study.

2.1 Ayahuasca and sacred plant practices in colonial history

Throughout human history and cultures, people have practiced a variety of physical and mental disciplines of exploring altered states of consciousness. Within these traditions of altered state investigation, a common ontological culture and practice has developed, with transcultural methodologies and tropes; most significantly the ontological commitment to the spiritual reality and the sacred nature of life within lived reality. Collectively referred to as *shamanism*, these practices have a universal, sacred relationship to nature, and especially to its sacred plants. These practices are referred to as *sacred plant practices*, as they are sacred and symbolically inscribed practices acknowledging the spirits of the plants themselves, facilitating explorations of inner and outer consciousness, as well as teaching and guiding encounters with spiritual states of consciousness.

These practices of altering and exploring states of consciousness facilitated by the psychoactive effects of these plants, calls into question disciplinary as well as cultural definitions of toxicity and intoxication (cf. Mabit, 2002: 26). They present a complex issue to drug policy, by challenging the dominant moral and material reductions of drug use; in which it is defined as a threat to the free will of moral consciousness and to the public health (cf. Marlatt, 1996: 785). These definitions of drugs provide little understanding of the complex metabolic, pharmacological and cultural functions of sacred plants, particularly because in both these dominant reductions of drug use, drugs are largely considered as a consumer product, not as a naturally occurring flora and fauna with their own metabolic mechanisms for moderating consumption (cf. Mabit, 2002: 27). Some of the most potent and addictive drugs as they are known in modern consumer culture, have no addictive component whatsoever in their native context and natural form, but on the contrary are used medicinally and therapeutically in healing practices (Ibid).

In this context, drug use is arguably not even reducible to just human behaviour, as the animal kingdom demonstrates plenty of drug use habits. Animals are naturally inclined to seek

out varieties of intoxication and altered states of consciousness; many indigenous histories even accredit their discovery of certain psychoactive plants through observing their animals' consumption and its effects (cf. Siegel, 1990: 26). The same evolutionary order of variation and mutation appears to apply to psychology as well as biology. As tempting as these broader categorisations of substance and behaviour are, sacred plant practices present complex issues of definition in their very variety. For example, the coca leaf and its use amongst native populations, is easily understood in nutritional, utilitarian and cultural terms; its consumption is effectively explained on social as well as biological evolutionary terms. Ayahuasca practices on the other hand, although they arguably belong within the same categorisation of sacred plant practices, and may arguably have social and even biological evolutionary merit, present a far more complex case, as they manifest and are best understood under the irreducible terms of culture. This manifests itself first and foremost in the brewing of ayahuasca, which presents a historical singularity: a technique harnessing a complex biochemical interaction in order to produce a specific compound with specific intentions. This technique appears to have been developed through practices with sacred plants containing a variety of harmala alkaloids and tryptamines, over the course of thousands of years going by some contested archaeological finds (cf. Naranjo, 1979: 121-123).

2.1.1 Ayahuasca in modern history and consciousness

It is difficult to precisely date the historical extent of psychedelics and their use, in any context. Besides the universal patterns of shamanic journeying and healing practices, sacred plants containing psychedelic compounds are found in a wide range of indigenous mythologies, particularly creation myths. Some myths and even modern theories accredit these sacred plants with the evolution of human consciousness (cf. Harner, 1973). These practices' historical trace is perhaps most easily noted in their mythologies, because the practices themselves are taught through direct experience within their own cultural context, and leave their trace in the communal presence of the practice itself, and particularly the presence of the shaman as the practice's authority, guide and healer. As these practices have been displaced and adapted, it is difficult to trace origins not only in terms of mere verification of historical record, but in also in terms of defining what, precisely, the historical record would be of; an indigenous, millennial practice or a modern global phenomenon?

For these reasons and many others, it is difficult to date the origins of a practice even as specific as ayahuasca. Archaeological evidence of ayahuasca and other sacred plant practices present several critical challenges to the historical record, methodological as well as

logistical and even political. The environmental conditions of the Amazon jungle provide poor preservation of artefacts, and archaeological fieldwork presents logistical and ecological issues (cf. Homan, 2011). Studies of artefacts and their cultural heritage rely on technical as well as aesthetic cross-referencing of materials, as the aesthetic patterns of artefacts reveal continuities otherwise lost in missing archaeological links. Ayahuasca practices reveal no distinct fossil record, in large part because these practices are taught by direct experience, with the knowledge and wisdom of brewing ayahuasca itself being accredited to the sacred plant spirits themselves (cf. Narby, 1999: 11). Simultaneously, these practices interact with every aspect of their indigenous culture (cf. Homan, 2011: 35); a living influence informing and informed by its present context.

Another difficulty in dating ayahuasca practices, is within their greater context of sacred plant practices and shamanism. There is a global, trans-cultural prevalence of shamanic practices, some evidenced to date back thousands of years. Healing practices using plants as a natural pharmacopeia are also a common feature of shamanic practices, emphasising a sacred relationship to these plants as healers and teachers. Within this context, many arguments have been made for the longevity of ayahuasca practices, some claiming them to be over five thousand years old (cf. Narby, 1999; Llamazares and Sarasola, 2004). These authors point to the evidence of ancient use of snuffs containing varieties of harmala alkaloids and tryptamines, and to the technical, ritual and cosmological complexity of these practices as well as their prevalent cultural influence on pre-colonial societies in and around the Amazon. Other authors have pointed out certain inconsistencies in these historical presumptions, largely grounded in the colonial fallacy of presuming pre-colonial history as frozen in time, wherein centurial traditions and millennial myths are gathered under the same blank category of unknown, uncharted, indefinite history.

Studies of colonial literature on sacred plant practices in the Amazon Basin reveal further inconsistencies. Military and missionary crusades actively sought out indigenous sacred plant practices as a critical target that must be destroyed in order to truly colonise the native population. Described and politicised as immoral idolatry, many sacred plant practices were observed, but none bear any descriptive resemblance to ayahuasca practices (cf. Beyer, 2012). Some argue that these practices, by their nature as cultural enforcers, were kept protected from colonial interests, and only revealed themselves once 'benign' foreigners took academic interest in the native traditions all but lost to the colonial project. Yet this argument remains inconsistent with the discovery of similarly sacred practices, not to mention the

utilitarian nature of these practices as *healing* practices, which, on the contrary, appear to extend an open invitation to any individual, native, urban or foreign, seeking healing.

The ubiquity of indigenous ayahuasca practices in the Amazon Basin also makes for a tempting argument that this practice has developed in many independent sites through generations of practicing combinations of sacred plants, yet certain uniformities in these practices indicate that it is also possible that they have a singular origin (Ibid). There is also an ethnobotanical argument for the specific native, geographic origin of *B. caapi*, as well as an etymological argument for the origin of the ayahuasca practice itself in its Quechuan name and vocabulary. The most common theory of ayahuasca's origin is supported by anthropological field research indicating that ayahuasca practices were introduced to the greater Amazonian society by indigenous communities northwest of Iquitos, Peru, and only spread throughout the late 17th and 18th century in the process of colonisation and urbanisation of territories (cf. Brabec de Mori, 2011: 31). Ethnographic research on the ritual form of ayahuasca practices suggests that these practices, as they are known today, evolved and were disseminated under influence of colonialism and Catholicism, likely beginning in the Jesuit missionary camps where indigenous peoples from separate communities were forced to live in close proximity under oppressive conditions. These conditions catalysed the exchange of indigenous knowledge on *vegetalismo* practices, including ayahuasca practices (cf. Homan, 2017: 166-167). It was under these conditions that the first known historical reference to ayahuasca was made by Jesuit missionaries in the mid-18th century (cf. Brabec de Mori, 2011: 32).

In their attempts to oppress and convert sacred indigenous practices, colonial and missionary powers ensured the sedimentation and proliferation of sacred plant practices in the Amazon. During the rubber boom (1879-1914), these practices became a common social phenomenon in Amazonian indigenous and mestizo communities, “owing to the constant feedback between the rural and urban, the practice of patronazgo, as well as the later arrival of Catholic and Evangelical missionaries” (Homan, 2017: 168). In the wake of the rubber boom, displaced indigenous and mestizo communities migrated to cities, presenting a difficult process of integration into urban society. Many turned to ayahuasca healers and practices, forging urban, spiritual communities organised around the healers. In northern Brazil, a territory characterised for centuries by a syncretic culture and ethnic identity, an ayahuasca healer known as Mestre Irineu founded the first known ayahuasca church, Santo Daime, in 1930 (cf. MacRae, 2004: 4-5). Supported by a significant following and the patronage of local politicians who relied on his practices, Irineu founded a syncretic religion centred around the indigenous practice of consecrating ayahuasca, structured by elements of Catholic symbolism and social

order, as well as elements of Afro-Brazilian spiritual cosmology (cf. Labate and Pacheco, 2011: 72-73). Other churches followed, with similar syncretic structures of interchangeable symbolism; most notably the religious group known as Barquinha founded in 1945, and later União do Vegetal (UDV) in 1961. The latter is characterised by its comparatively rigid institutional structure, having become a prosperous international religious organisation advocating for the freedom of their religious practice, and collaborating with research institutions studying the long-term social and biological effects of ayahuasca practices (cf. MacRae, 2004: 17-18). Both UDV and Santo Daime are formally recognised religious orders, with chapters spread globally.

In many ways, ayahuasca presents a historical singularity. It is part of a millennial culture of sacred plant practices, operating within a transcultural phenomenon of shamanism, yet with little evidence of the practice itself existing for more than a few hundred years, with some compelling circumstantial evidence pointing to a singular historic origin, while it remains entirely possible that it evolved from a millennial tradition of sacred plant practices; yet also unlikely, considering the apparent colonial influence on its ritual forms. The first literary mention of ayahuasca did not appear until the mid 18th century, and there remains academic contention concerning its distribution amongst indigenous Amazonian communities (cf. Brabec de Mori, 2011: 26). Tracing this distribution even within colonial history proves difficult, for a variety of reasons: the previously mentioned colonial traits of the ayahuasca rituals and terminology; the cultural and geographical hybridisation of spaces and identities; the lack of observed ayahuasca practices prior to the mid-18th century; the oral, spiritual, trans-historical nature of the practices themselves; and most of all, simply the complex and poorly documented ethno-history of the Amazon (Ibid: 29).

Moreover, all these difficulties of tracing reflect a greater historical problematising, namely the presumption of absolute historical consistency; of history existing in a stagnated stasis outside of its measure of progress. This is one of the greatest challenges to any critical, methodological study of pre-colonial history. History is constituted by a linear representation social, political and technological evolution, largely manifested in narratives of semi-constructed causality. History defends its project on the assumption that its function echoes its form, that its definition of progress constitutes an empirical continuity of social evolution. The problem is then that history excludes any evolution that does not manifest itself in the form of archival documentation and representation, in the form of an observable, reproducible trace. Yet history's own projection of form onto function, implies a progressive order of social evolution, even if it cannot recognise and verify these forms as they exist outside of its own

historical body. History represents perhaps the greatest known exercise in storytelling as a mode of knowledge production and dissemination; the inherent human need for narrative, to characterise and invest moral meaning and significance in an otherwise causal and disenchanting existence. History's effort to extract a continuity of meaning from a reality void of meaning beyond what is consciously invested in it, reflects an inherent human trait of not only knowledge production, but also of the constitution of identity and power. This is observed in the example of indigenous ayahuasca practices claiming that the tradition is pre-colonial, in order to establish a stronger claim to authenticity (cf. Homan, 2017). It makes no difference whether or not this really is the case: at this point, 'authenticity' is a simulacrum economy defining value by the probability of narrative and the longevity of myth. Ayahuasca practices require neither probability or longevity, as their value in the economy of authenticity is already pre-defined by ayahuasca itself, which manifests its own ontological subscriptions repeatedly and reliably within the practice itself; in a constant state of becoming.

Ayahuasca practices exist within the historical context of sacred and medicinal plant practices, shamanic practices, and shamanic ontology. Whatever archaeological or ethnographic conclusions may be drawn, these practices are part of a greater, trans-cultural phenomenon of psycho-spiritual practices of altered states of consciousness. The social, cultural, and therapeutic significance of ayahuasca practices are not demonstrated so much as a causal history, but as a research and healing practice; so much as it appears as a tangible example of how these practices spontaneously manifest and evolve, with historical precedence as well as unprecedentedly novel social and cultural evolution and hybridisation. Not only does ayahuasca not reveal a causal origin story, it refuses to be a homogenous cultural phenomenon, as its practices are significantly informed by historical and contemporary circumstances. It refuses to be a pure anthropological or ethnographic object, as it reveals no empirical historical trace. Ayahuasca presents a challenge to history as a mode of knowledge production by way of its own historical mystery, but moreover by way of its trans-historical character. Its mythology is located as much in the present as in the past, and demonstrates a profound quality of authenticity; with or without the privilege of historical precedence and validation.

2.1.2 Religious and spiritual states of consciousness

The effects, let alone therapeutic benefits of psychedelic substances, are a relatively recent addition to modern consciousness. For centuries, the European religious paradigm, coupled with its colonial, missionary agency, sought to eradicate shamanic practices and indeed any indigenous spiritual practice and cosmology, because these are practices of spiritual

empowerment, which radically opposed the church's institutional, political and ontological power structure, wherein spiritual commitment implied submission of all power to the service of God, as manifested by the church and state. This ontological dominator culture of spiritual submission was enforced by colonial encounters with indigenous shamanic practices, which were demonised as unholy sacrilege that must be purified by the church and their missionary agenda. These practices did not simply present a project of conversion to the church, but also a far more dangerous ontological threat: a source of individual empowerment. If the indigenous were not spiritually and ontologically converted, they could and would convert the converters themselves, by offering an ontology of spiritual empowerment and liberation from the moral commitments of being born into sin.

Many indigenous practices were eradicated and lost, some remained, and eventually entered Western consciousness by merit of not only their radical ontological contradiction to the church, but also by the healing powers of their practices. By the time nation states were established in the Americas, the complex hybrid cultural and social structures, the spiritual ontological predicate established by the church was now driven by the modernist industrial project, informed by the Enlightenment's progress in scientific materialism and positivism. As industrial projects expanded into the Amazon Basin, sacred plant practices and their healing potential became a culturally if not ontologically sanctioned resource by way of foreigners' peripheral contact with indigenous populations, and later in urban spaces of hybridised mestizo culture. Established as an institutional power, the modern scientific project only found an interest in the healing potential of shamanic sacred plant practices in the late 19th century (cf. Sessa, 2016: 35), by way of anthropology; in part an effort to reverse the effects of colonialism in order to understand that which could not be colonised. In this case, these practices evoked a great deal of curiosity, in their resistance to cultural and ontological submission, and their ability to evolve and adapt, dislocate and relocate; geographically, culturally, and socially. This anthropological curiosity was coupled with the budding fields of psychiatry and psychopharmacology, wherein the mystical and therapeutic quality of altered states of consciousness finally had a disciplinary framework for methodological research.

Altered states of consciousness have long been a subject of interest in modern science and thought, as they are commonly associated with divine religious experiences, representing an opportunity to study and demystify one of the most glaring and opaque mysticisms in its canon of research and knowledge: the spiritual, religious experience. This experience represents at once a challenge and an opportunity to the scientific project: to account for the form and function this universally acknowledged experience at the heart of human existence,

that at once validates and transcends every other empirical, ontological order. Mythologically, understanding the divine state of altered consciousness was the key to understanding the nature of human experience in its natural, divine, God-given order.

In this case, sacred plant practices inducing altered states of consciousness presented an opportunity to simultaneously destroy and reaffirm ontological order, by presenting a solution to the paradox of the modernist project: understanding the very human experience that produced its project; which, by the fact that this question remained implicitly raised, was not satisfactorily answered by neither scientific materialism nor religious idealism. Sacred plant practices then presented an unprecedented opportunity of participant-observation: the indigenous cultures appear as living example of religious sincerity, the sacred plants provide a material foundation for study. Clearly, the spiritual culture of ayahuasca practices are not so easily categorised in terms of binary secular-religious ontological order. Similarly, these practices disrupt conventional nature-culture distinctions, in that these cultures are in themselves a part of a 'natural' order, as is consciousness in its many states.

Western culture has, of course, its own history of spiritual dimensions and altered states of consciousness, largely sanctioned within religious institutions. Critical reductions of the social-spiritual phenomenon result in what Latour describes as 'the Crisis of the Critical Stance' (cf. Latour, 1993: 5): naturalising the phenomenon fails to account for its social function, socialising it fails to explain its natural presence, and deconstructing it in terms of truth and power reveals an invisible landscape of meaning and signification, whose origins cannot be reduced to discourse. Psychology of religion is limited to studying the appearance and personal account of the black-box phenomenon of spiritual consciousness, hence any discourse must pick its reductive camp, and remain separate from the others in order to validate the critical relevance of its data. Nothing can be assumed about appearances and accounts, unless it may also be quantitatively and discursively reduced (cf. Fadiman, 2016: 208-209). The critical relevance of religion and religious experience may only be articulated in very limited terms; at the same time its virtue is self-evidenced by its practices. Religion may not be empirically reduced, nevertheless it demonstrates its genuine power empirically: "The *roots* of a man's virtue are inaccessible to us. No appearances whatever are infallible proofs of grace. Our practice is our only sure evidence, even to ourselves..." (James, 1982: 21).

It is then remarkable to observe how indigenous ayahuasca practices have evolved and spread in their encounters with colonialism and modernity. Having overcome extraordinary cultural and religious persecution, these practices have circumvented the colonial dominator model of ontological virtue and spontaneously produced hybrid models of spiritual practice,

exercising a powerful social and cultural influence. Syncretic ayahuasca churches, most prominently the UDV, appear to solve the crisis of the critical stance by cohesively demonstrating the codependent order of the natural and social of their practices, united by a spiritual truth too ineffable for deconstruction but clearly present in their works. The syncretic and hybrid nature of these churches reveal a trans-cultural religious superstructure. Their practices provide an institutional, guided process to transcendental spiritual experiences as part of a natural order, and a comprehensive spiritual and religious framework to integrate the experience and its significance into daily life and practices; as part of a social order (cf. MacRae, 2004: 24-25). The truth and power of the practice is not deconstructed, but demonstrated by the implicit sacred quality attached to ayahuasca itself and the experience it affords, and its effective treatment of societal ills such as addiction and anti-social behaviour, within its institutional context. In this way, ayahuasca practices have seamlessly integrated with Judeo-Christian religious order and hierarchical structure, while maintaining a sacred relationship to where the power of this order and structure emanates from: ayahuasca itself. In this sense, ayahuasca practices do, in fact, quite literally give access to the 'roots of man's virtue', in the form of a sacred, implicit, noetic experience of consciousness itself, induced and invoked by the ritual use of sacred teaching plants.

2.1.3 Western introduction to and popularisation of ayahuasca

Like many psychotropic substances undergoing botanical study and categorisation at the time, ayahuasca remained a significant mystery in botanical and anthropological literature up until the early twentieth century. This is partly because, unlike other sacred plants with psychoactive properties such as peyote or psilocybin mushrooms, ayahuasca is produced by combining and preparing two or more specific plants, with specific techniques. Moreover, ayahuasca can be produced with a variety of plant species containing DMT and MAOIs, and different brewers would often add their own particular choices of psychopharmacological plants in its preparation. With a variety of different communities throughout the Amazon referring to a similar brew by different names, and using different plants to prepare it, early reports were often incomplete and contradictory. The ingrained 'witchcraft' mysticism was further catalysed by the fact that native practices often refused to reveal the exact ingredients of their brew to foreign researchers, neither would they reveal where these plants grew in the wild (cf. Schultes 1957: 10, 17).

The modern identification of the key botanical constituents of ayahuasca is credited to the English botanist Richard Spruce, who encountered its use in the Brazilian Amazonia in

1851 and collected samples of *B. caapi* for analysis (Ibid: 4). Over the course of the second half of the twentieth century, more ethnographic reports on the use of a sacred medicinal brew by indigenous Amazonian communities cropped up in academic literature (cf. McKenna, 1999: 44-45). Ayahuasca's unique quality as a technically produced amalgam of natural compounds, distinguished it from other sacred plants as a botanical and cultural curiosity; its constituent identification required botanical as well as ethnographic analysis. Like so many sacred practices using healing and teaching plants, ayahuasca appeared as much as an ethnic, cultural phenomenon, as a botanical one. In addition, ayahuasca presented a pharmacological mystery: the poorly understood chemistry of different brews given different names and using different combinations of plants led to decades of taxonomic and chemical misidentification, which was eventually clarified by diligent ethnobotanical research, most notably by pioneering American ethnobotanist Richard Evans Schultes (Ibid: 46).

Schultes appreciated the cultural significance of hallucinogenic substances, noting that "Few areas of the globe lack at least one hallucinogen of significance in the culture of its inhabitants." (Schultes et al., 1992: 26). Yet ayahuasca was nevertheless presented as a cultural component or attribute of a culture, a tool for enhancing certain properties of social health and cohesiveness, and not, in fact, a psychopharmacological influence whose afforded experience directly informs the ontological and epistemological foundation of its culture. Furthermore, while the medicinal properties were of great anthropological as well as ethnobotanical interest, the shamanic methodology implied in these practices remained relatively unarticulated in the academic literature. When Schultes later in his career sent his students on investigative ethnobotanical expeditions, their stories of spiritual journeying, coupled with the psychedelic counterculture of the times, led more and more students of all disciplines and faculties to book passage to Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, or Brazil – wherever there was a hot tip on a 'genuine' shaman and a potent ayahuasca brew.

While the work of Schultes and his students provided an anthropological and ethnographic framework for the study of ayahuasca and other indigenous sacred plant practices, the rise of popular public interest in ayahuasca practices is largely accredited to popular literature, in particular the publication of *The Yagé Letters* in 1963 (Burroughs and Ginsberg, 1963). Burroughs and Ginsberg's accounts of their respective encounters with ayahuasca in the Amazon, along with numerous other popular publications concerning sacred plant practices, shamanism and spiritual traditions, set a precedence for the burgeoning ayahuasca tourism economy (cf. Homan, 2017: 168-169). In the psychedelic counter-culture's quest for social and cultural liberation from a disenchanting modern society, these sacred

indigenous practices appeared as a definitive validation of a divine spiritual reality largely forgotten and lost in modern culture. Ayahuasca's reputation as the 'ultimate trip' spread slowly in the psychedelic counter-cultural social network. The lack of accessibility outside of the Amazon, as well as its powerful effects characterised as anything but recreational, gave ayahuasca a uniquely coveted status; its authenticity equally deterring and enticing foreign curiosity. The proliferation, commercialisation and globalisation of ayahuasca practices was further aided by the advent of the public internet, which provided unprecedented resources for research and exchanging knowledge on these practices and where to find them. Eventually, ayahuasca would receive a great deal of mainstream media attention as well; occupying a curious intersection of scientific discovery, spiritual mystery, drug culture and cultural exoticism.

Ayahuasca's most significant appeal was ultimately its status as a *healing* practice, validated the sacred spiritual traditions surrounding it. These practices appeared to validate the therapeutic potential of the mystical psychedelic experience, in a quite violent manner: stripping away the recreational reputation of the psychedelic experience and replacing it with a spiritual discipline of challenging and demanding therapeutic transformation. Ironically, this appeal and popularity of sacred authenticity is precisely what catalysed the market of commercial ayahuasca practices. Foreigners willing to hand over substantial sums in order to participate in 'authentic' practices created a golden opportunity for a commercially driven market and the prevalence of charlatan practices. This contemporary, spiritual ethno-tourism is catalysed by the continued mainstreaming of psychedelic culture and practices, as well as the growing precedence of psychedelically assisted psychotherapy.

2.2 Ayahuasca and psychedelics in modern culture and therapy

In spite of its historical novelty as an object of study, the case of ayahuasca and its psychotherapeutic application exists in a wider historical context of modern research on altered states of consciousness, pharmacologically induced or otherwise. The disenchanting character of modernity is not without its own spiritual dimension of consciousness. However, centuries of institutionalising, materialising and effectively secularising modern culture's psychospirituality as a phenomenon external and separate from human consciousness and experience, effectively rendered the internal experience of spiritual consciousness a myth.

The modern study of cultures ritually and religiously structured around the spiritual and mystical experience of altered states of consciousness, as well the study of the psychedelic substances involved in these practices, both de- and re-mythologised the individual experience

of a spiritual dimension of consciousness. The experience now appeared in something as tangible as naturally occurring molecules, and at the same time manifesting itself in spiritual practices that appeared unfamiliar and archaic to modern culture, yet inherently recognisable. The myth of spiritual consciousness was a splinter in the modern, disenchanted mind; a constant reminder of its own epistemological negligence. Whether spirituality was reduced pathologically or anthropologically, these reductions could not account for the inherent suspicion that the irreducibility of spiritual consciousness reflected a critical blind spot in the modern conception of consciousness. This suspicion was driven by the observable and documented healing powers of traditional sacred plant practices, as well as the growing social and cultural desire for mystical spiritual practices and identity in the increasingly secularised post-war society. Psychedelics were a promising research opportunity for the 1950s' rapidly growing fields of psychotherapy and psychopharmacology; and even neurochemistry by extension. There were a multitude of exciting prospects: modelling a schizophrenic pathology, developing long-acting antidepressants, not to mention the developing field of transpersonal psychology, and an entirely new treatment methodology for psychiatric disorders; one that would actually reveal unconscious trauma and agitation, instead of merely subduing it.

2.2.1 Introduction of psychedelics to modern medicine and therapy

In the wake of World War II, substances such as LSD, mescaline and chlorpromazine provided the foundation of neurophysiological research on the function of neurotransmitters, particularly serotonin. LSD closely resembles serotonin's molecular structure, and observing its interactions with the brain's serotonin receptors provided researchers with the opportunity of controlled neurochemical observation of the brain-body-mind relationship. The study of LSD and other substances effecting serotonin and other neurotransmitters, would allow researchers to understand the neurochemical mechanics of the mind and its perturbations (cf. Strassman, 2001). Initial methodological forays into psychoactive substances such as LSD and mescaline were concerned with their properties as *psychotomimetics*; whose effects might mimic the conditions and experience of psychosis. The hypothesis was firstly that these substances might reveal a biochemical pathology of psychosis and particularly schizophrenia (cf. Gillin et al, 1976), and secondly that researchers and psychotherapists might develop a more empathetic understanding of psychosis by experiencing the supposedly mimetic effects of LSD. This initial hypothesis did not hold up to experimentation, in part because the experience failed to truly mimic psychosis. Subjects under the influence of LSD could attribute their experience, however delusional, to the substance they consumed and its influence on their

consciousness, whereas psychosis is defined by the subject's conviction that their experience, however delusional, is real. Furthermore, LSD didn't appear to induce psychotic experiences or behaviour, rather it enhanced the experience of reality and opened the mind to conscious observation and investigation of otherwise subconscious mental activity. Hence the term *psychedelic*, meaning literally 'mind-manifesting'.

These transformative qualities of the psychedelic experience indicated a significant potential to enhance and facilitate psychotherapeutic work and transformation. Psychedelics appeared to effectively induce what Maslow referred to as *peak experiences*: life-altering moments of profound significance, often associated with religious experiences and their inherently internal quality (cf. Maslow, 1994: 30). This led to a rapid proliferation of research throughout the 1950s, as psychedelic therapy was applied to a variety of conditions and showed significant success rates in the psychotherapeutic treatment of obsessive-compulsive disorders, trauma, addiction, depression and anxiety (cf. Strassman, 2001; Mogar, 1965). The role of the transcendent, mystical experience facilitated by psychedelics gained increasing attention, particularly its benefit for terminally ill patients suffering from the severe depression of facing their own mortality. The transcendent experience's shared phenomenological territory with that of divine religious experience and transcendental meditation practices, posed the essential question of how exactly psychedelics relate to the mystical experience?

In 1962, Walter Pahnke, a graduate theology student at Harvard University, attempted to experimentally answer this question with what became colloquially known as the Good Friday Experiment, and his follow-up dissertation (cf. Pahnke, 1963). Pahnke wanted to know if psychedelics, specifically psilocybin, could reliably induce spiritual experiences in religiously predisposed subjects. To find out, he designed a double-blind trial with a group of theology students, giving one group psilocybin and the other a placebo in the basement of the Boston University Marsh Chapel on Good Friday. The results clearly demonstrated a propensity for mystical, spiritual experience in the experimental group receiving psilocybin, whose persistent efficacy was notable nearly thirty years later, when MAPS founder Rick Doblin conducted a follow-up survey and reported that the participants' experiences had significantly influenced their spiritual life and work as ministers (cf. Doblin, 1991). Pahnke's study was ground-breaking, first and foremost because of its elegant, double-blind design, but also because of his efforts to quantify universal aspects of mystical experiences with a questionnaire measuring articulate and recognisable parameters within the individual participant's experience (cf. Harris, 2017).

During the 1950s and early 1960s, hundreds of studies were conducted and papers published on the use of LSD and other psychedelics for the therapeutic treatment of addiction and other psychosocial disorders. At the same time, psychedelics had become a staple of the growing counter-cultural phenomenon. Institutional research overlapped with this social phenomenon, creating a complex social and political domain of power interests. Psychedelics were no longer merely a mysterious class of pharmacological research chemicals; they were politically and ideologically charged objects of popular culture. The psycho-spiritual effects of psychedelics informed a counter-cultural ideology responding to the social, political and environmental crisis of the modern capitalist paradigm. This ideology manifested itself in a variety of research and practices; institutional, private and public; some disciplinary, some political, some spiritual and philosophical. Commonly referred to as 'New Age', this phenomenon of social, political and cultural efforts to establish a new world-view and ontology, all had common ground in their emphasis on the transcendence of personal, ego-driven individualism, by embracing a transpersonal model of consciousness that is as much formed by individual conditions and circumstances, as by its place within a social and environmental ecology. Institutionally, the personal therapeutic potential of psychedelics appeared promising, yet posed significant methodological challenges. Publically, the therapeutic potential of psychedelics expanded to the transpersonal, social and ideological sphere. This blurring of discursive boundaries, of the critical institutional and the public social, lent even the most rigid institutional work a connotation of political and social antagonism.

There remains a measure of scholarly contention concerning the exact reasons behind the eventual demise of this first generation of psychedelic research. Popular culture tends to indicate the inherent ideological threat these substances and their culture of use posed to the political and economic power structure, and it is tempting to add a post-colonial dimension of interpretation to this argument; psychedelics' perennial association with the sacred plant practices of indigenous, shamanic societies, echoes the colonial urge to purge and evangelise any social and cultural manifestations of ontological and ideological alternatives to its own dominator hierarchy. However, these social and political diagnoses fail to fully explain the demise of psychedelic research in the 1960s. The essential difficulty of integrating and institutionalising psychedelic research therapy, was its inability to correspond to a scientific methodology and yield consistent quantitative data. A range of common illicit substances used for recreational purposes have retained their relevance as medical and therapeutic tools, such as morphine and amphetamines (cf. Oram, 2014: 223). While pharmacological action of these substances were well-known, documented and applied, psychedelics presented a complex case

of psychopharmacological action extending far beyond observable biochemical interactions (Ibid). Psychedelic therapy simply expanded the methodological challenge. Psychedelics appeared as a pharmacological agent, yet its therapeutic relevance was not a result of its pharmacological activity, but rather the psychological process of transformation facilitated by its effects. This presented a disciplinary divide, in which neither naturalised or socialised disciplines could fully account for, let alone demonstrate and validate the therapeutic significance of psychedelics.

In 1962, the United States' Food and Drug Administration passed what became known as the 'Drug Efficacy Amendment', a piece of legislation ensuring that any pharmacological product introduced to the market had to demonstrate its efficacy within specific methodological confines. This amendment was in itself an essential step forward in public policy ensuring the safety and efficacy of medical products provided for public consumption. This put psychedelic therapy research in the unique position of having to provide proof of efficacy without any available framework or methodology to do so (Ibid). Psychotherapy research had no formal requirements of proof of efficacy, but the use of a pharmacological agent meant that psychedelic therapy had to demonstrate its psychotherapeutic relevance on psychopharmacological terms. Unsurprisingly, attempts to demonstrate psychopharmacological efficacy outside of a psychotherapeutic context yielded largely negative results.

This methodological and therapeutic failure had the inadvertent effect of demonstrating the extrapharmacological factors of psychedelic therapy, as well as indicating the transpersonal factors of psychotherapeutic work. At the time, this simply led to the further dismissal of psychedelics' therapeutic potential. Sandoz Pharmaceuticals, a key producer of research chemicals under which Albert Hoffman first synthesised LSD, eventually discontinued their production of LSD due to its limited research applications and increasingly poor public reputation. It became increasingly difficult to obtain laboratory grade psychedelic substances for studies, leading to a continued disinterest in psychedelic research. Nevertheless, this initial modern foray into psychedelic research left Pandora's box open: psychedelics demonstrated the remarkable properties of consciousness as not simply an object of study but as a method of investigation and study in itself, capable of invoking multiple states of consciousness and dimensions of reality, and implicitly producing knowledge significant to ordinary consciousness and consensus reality. In the absence of LSD for research, Stanislav Grof, a pioneer of psychedelic therapy studies, developed a standardised breathing technique known as *holotropic breathwork*, in order to induce altered states of consciousness and experience of

the transpersonal reality. The term ‘holotropic’ (Greek: *holos* – ‘whole’, *trophein* – ‘moving towards’) refers to the personal evolution towards transpersonal states of consciousness (cf. Read, 2008: 9). Holotropic breathwork provided a substance-free methodology for investigating the therapeutic properties of altered states of consciousness and transpersonal evolution, allowing for continued research of the therapeutic potential of these states initially discovered in the psychedelic experience.

2.2.2 Initial psychedelic research: psychotherapy and transpersonal psychology

Psychedelics allowed researchers to conduct controlled studies of altered states of consciousness, but their influence did not end as an experimental tool; they went on to influence the methodological foundations of the scientific investigation of consciousness. The growing popularity and therapeutic application of altered states of consciousness and their mystical, transcendental properties, provided the material foundation for developing a *transpersonal* psychology, which would investigate the psychotherapeutic role and relevance of developmental stages of consciousness beyond the individual ego (cf. Kasprov and Scotton, 1999: 13). Higher states of consciousness were modelled within a natural order of the evolution of consciousness; a conceptual framework informed by Jungian theory of consciousness and archetypes, which corresponded methodologically with Oriental practices of consciousness exploration as well as Maslow’s theory of psychological growth and transpersonal evolution. Transpersonal psychology attempted to reconcile the impenetrable prevalence of practices and cultures of consciousness exploration, applying it to a framework of psycho-spiritual development of consciousness, of which the adult ego was only a default modality that may be transcended in higher states of consciousness.

The critical presence and resistance of transpersonal theory in psychiatric practices, reflects an ontological shift in world-views and belief systems of modern consciousness. Transpersonal theory implies the rejection of Newtonian and Freudian causality, replacing a materialist view of reality as observed, with a consciousness of reality extending beyond the confines of the body-mind experience, to higher dimensions of consciousness and reality. Transpersonal theory is in part a psychological articulation of Plato’s theory of Forms: “...the world that we see around us is but a superficial translation of fewer dimensions of a deeper reality, which we cannot see directly.” (Read, 2008: 2). The modern, Aristotelian, scientific methodology strives to understand reality through measure and observation, while the Platonic methodology seeks a transcendent, transpersonal reality in the very experience and contemplation of reality as it is observed (cf. Fadiman, 2016: 209). The key difference between

these world-views is not their methodologies in themselves, but their assumption about the inherent nature of reality as either causal or divine. Aristotelian methodology assumes that reality is as unconscious as the units of measure used to interpret its forms. Platonic methodology assumes that all forms reflect an eternal ideal, which is temporarily manifested and interpreted in observed reality. Essentially, Aristotelian methodology studies an unconscious reality, while Platonic methodology studies an inherently divine reality, in all its imperfect forms.

Transpersonal psychology established itself as a field of critical research, yet it presented ontological and ideological characteristics that set it aside from conventional models of psychology and psychotherapy. Transpersonal psychology pursued Maslow's efforts to study the entirety of the human psychic experience, rather than limit the field of study to its perturbations. Psychology's psychoanalytic origins informed an image of a pathological human psyche, which continued to have a powerful hold the collective psychological image of thought; even as psychology and psychotherapy eventually rejected this methodology, its paradigmatic Freudian mythos lingered. Transpersonal psychology studies human psychology in its entirety, particularly the transformative qualities of altered and transpersonal states of consciousness. Consciousness is not limited to a disenchanting, inherently selfish corporeality, but in fact contains unlimited potential for growth and transformation. Consciousness exists in multiple states, including transpersonal states, and is subsequently informed by transpersonal factors and influences. Transpersonal psychology's methodology is then the practice of becoming aware of and expanding the boundaries of consciousness: "Ultimately the goal is not merely to remove psychopathology, but to foster higher human development." (Kaspro and Scotton, 1999: 13).

Transpersonal psychology did not disregard the pathological nature of psychiatric disorders, but offered an alternative methodology for understanding psychiatric crises otherwise resistant to conventional, medical psychotherapeutic treatment. Described as 'spiritual emergency' in the pioneering transpersonal psychiatric research of Christina and Stanislav Grof, the double intention of 'emergency' indicated a state of personal crisis whose resolution contains the potential for transpersonal transformation and growth (cf. Grof and Grof, 2017: 30-31). The key to this resolution is in the experience of states of transpersonal consciousness, and the therapeutic integration of this experience. Transpersonal psychotherapy uses altered states of consciousness as "...a powerful tool promoting patterns of thought, feeling and behaviour." (Kaspro and Scotton, 1999: 18). Healing practices using techniques of altered states of consciousness are a widespread trans-historical phenomenon, perhaps most

prevalently recognised in the universal presence of shamanic practices and archetypes. Transpersonal theory and psychotherapeutic practice provided an institutional and methodological framework for the critical investigation and application of altered states of consciousness in therapeutic practice; indirectly including a variety of traditional altered state of consciousness practices; including sacred plant practices and ayahuasca.

Transpersonal psychology and non-ordinary state psychotherapy may have established institutional and methodological grounds for research and practice, yet remained at arm's length from mainstream psychology and psychotherapeutic practices. However, their influence on culture was monumental, facilitating a greater paradigm shift in the popular image of psychology and psychological practices from personal to transpersonal (cf. Fadiman, 2016: 205-206). Transpersonal psychology provided a critical precedence and a conceptual reference point for the burgeoning modern culture and market of spiritual disciplines and psychosomatic practices. The transpersonal, spiritual conception of consciousness did not replace the modern paradigm of individualism, but rather integrated a transpersonal methodology of development that coincided neatly with the modern culture of personal effort and gain. The disciplinary nature of practices such as yoga, meditation, holotropic breathwork, and neo-shamanism were in fact entirely complimentary to the dominant modern epistemology of knowledge as something attained through critical education and experimentation. In fact, these practices arguably reinforced the modern image of consciousness as ignorant and naïve, until having received sufficient education and practice in understanding itself, perpetuating the conception of modern consciousness as perpetually disenchanting from the divinity and wisdom of its own nature.

The growing body of literature and culture concerning non-Western disciplines and traditions of spiritual and transpersonal consciousness, further solidified the image of modern culture as a disenchanting one. Indigenous sacred practices using healing and teaching plants presented the modern, disenchanting mind with an alternative: a culture living true to its inherently enchanting nature. In the absence of institutional research exploring the therapeutic properties of psychedelics, modern psychedelic culture sought out new methodological frameworks embedded in traditional as well as modern theories and practices of transpersonal evolution of consciousness. The therapeutic efficacy of these practices, psychedelic or otherwise, along with the transpersonal model of consciousness providing a theoretical counterpart, established a modern social and cultural precedence for the conception of therapeutic transformation as not simply an individual, internal process, but a reflection of the greater social and environmental conditions the transformation is situated within. The

therapeutic potential of psychedelics and transpersonal states of consciousness gained theoretical and historical precedence and experimental data through living practices and culture, sustaining suspicions of its therapeutic nature making it impossible to be entirely ignored by institutional and personal research alike (cf. Fadiman, 2016).

2.2.3 Political consequences and interventions

The agency of power behind the criminalisation of psychedelic substances may appear obvious enough to bear no further examination, yet unpacking this agency requires a nuanced and intersectional discourse concerning the political, ideological and ontological power represented by psychedelics and their culture of use, both within indigenous sacred plant practices as well as the global, commodified culture of substance use and abuse. The cultural popularisation of substances such as LSD, psilocybin and cannabis constituted a hybrid economy driven by equal parts chemical and psychological addiction, consumer fetishism, and cultural ideology. Central arguments for the prohibition of these substances included the obvious harm potential, which was difficult to measure quantitatively but remained discursively present in political and media portrayals of psychedelic consumer habits. Moreover, these substances had become commodified cornerstones of the counter-culture, ideologically representing as well as experientially facilitating an alternative to the modern social order of disenchanting dominance. Psychedelics integrated seamlessly with the counter-cultural civil rights agency to resist the ideological oppression of the diversity of the human condition and experience.

Psychedelics were introduced to modern popular culture on the foundation of the mystical, religious quality of experience they afford. The works of authors like Huxley and Leary portrayed the psychedelic experience as a spiritually revolutionary opportunity with political consequences (cf. Langlitz, 2013: 51). Modern culture was characterised by an ascetic religious ontology informing its capitalist agency. The perennial philosophy popularised by Huxley advocated a mystical religious ontology (cf. Huxley, 1947), which contradicted the Protestant ethical demand for good works of production and reinvestment. The emerging mystical religious ontology saw capital pursuits of material production as the cause of a disenchanting society and religious ontology (cf. Weber, 1946), rejecting it in pursuit of the spiritual enlightenment found within mystical experiences and practices. The psychedelic counter-culture's politics of ontology "was not just a subculture opposing the Establishment, but a culture against culture per se." (Langlitz, 2013: 50). The mystical experience was advocated as a liberation from the cultural conditions of social order; as not just another

political revolt in the continuity of historical revolutions, but a spiritual revolution with trans-historical implications.

The psychedelic counter-culture's 'politics of ecstasy' (cf. Leary, 1968) located spiritual enlightenment within the individual and communal mystical experience, as an inherent divine quality of consciousness. Divine experience could be directly and democratically achieved, not as a state beyond human consciousness, but as a natural state of consciousness itself. The dominating ascetic religious ontology described a depraved humanity which could only be saved by good works, effectively driving the political-industrial machine of capitalism. The popularisation of a mystical religious ontology then challenged not only the moral foundations of a society defined by its disenchantment, but also the social and political systems in which modern society sought its salvation. The religious fervour of psychedelic substance use and abuse in the 1960's counter-culture, along with its methodologically irreconcilable psychopharmacology, accounts for the evanescent popularity of psychedelic research, culturally as well as institutionally. In the 1950s, psychedelics were heralded as the next great breakthrough in psychopharmacology and psychotherapy. A decade of research and over two thousand studies on psychedelics later (cf. Sessa, 2012: 70), psychedelic research appeared to already be in its twilight, having yielded few quantitative results in the face of disciplinary methodologies unequipped to study the mystical psychopharmacological action of psychedelics in consciousness.

The precedence for research was never entirely erased, and psychedelic research did continue within many institutions even in the wake of these substances' criminalisation and persecution in the late 1960s and 1970s. The legal classification of these substances as Class I Schedule drugs, "demonstrating no medical significance and high addiction and harm factors", may appear as a heavy-handed legislative, political decision, but it was a necessary step in the context of USA's efforts to establish critical legislation for consumer protection. Its commercial pharmaceutical market had a historical reputation of introducing poorly researched products to consumers. In a time of rapidly evolving industries and technologies, it was globally imperative for government authorities to protect their consumer citizens. This meant strictly regulating the products of profit-driven industries, particularly the pharmaceutical industry that was largely responsible for the safety for the substances it introduced to the market (cf. Langlitz, 2013: 46-47).

Psychedelics' social and cultural influence was never strictly revolutionary, but evolutionary: akin to any other technical or technological development that has provided liberation from limitations; material, social, ontological or otherwise (cf. Chinen, 1996: 14).

Like any powerful technology, it posed significant regulatory challenges, particularly in a culture with little if any traditional and disciplinary precedence for exploring altered and transpersonal states of consciousness. The scientific failure to methodologically validate the therapeutic action of psychedelics, as well as the cultural failure of collective self-initiation, is arguably a result of the same absence of formal social and cultural sanctions for practices relying on implicit experience and knowledge. In the absence of any such cultural precedence, the ecstasy of the mystical psychedelic experience integrated seamlessly with its consumer culture context, effectively commodified as a tool for psychological and social escapism. These failures were humbling, institutionally and culturally, forcefully indicating that modern psychedelic research and culture has a great deal to learn from cultures with millennial traditions of precisely such practices.

2.2.4 Interpolation of social and scientific discourses

While psychedelic research struggled to reclaim its critical relevance and legitimacy as an institutional field, it continued as a productive underground field of research holding the attention of popular culture, and producing a range of social and cultural discourses engaging with institutional disciplines in their social and cultural margins. With the prohibition of most psychedelic substances, research as well as popular interest turned towards other practices and disciplines of altering and evolving consciousness for purposes of personal, transpersonal and spiritual growth. Ideologies and practices imported from Eastern belief systems, particularly Hinduism and Buddhism, manifested themselves as consumer products and services for purposes of self-improvement and self-actualisation.

A growing culture of semi- and non-institutional research continued investigating the properties of psychedelic substances. This work took place in underground therapeutic practices, private laboratories, and personal research practices; spreading through college campuses, alternative living communities, and other counter-cultural social networks. The institutional and methodological rejection of psychedelics' therapeutic potential gave way to a tremendous popular interest in speculation and experimentation with not only their therapeutic potential, but also their social and even anthropological, evolutionary significance. The spiritual quality of the psychedelic experience led many researchers to investigate their potential role in the creation of many religions and belief systems (cf. Sessa, 2012: 82-87), while others suggested that the cognitive and transpersonal effects of the experience were key to the development of complex language, abstract thinking and social order (cf. McKenna, 1993).

These speculative proposals may appear radical and largely unsubstantiated by anything but their authors' own intuitions, yet these theories resonated widely with psychedelic users and enthusiasts; the theories were validated by their own psychedelic experiences. The liberated states of consciousness explored in the psychedelic experience appeared to simultaneously validate the inherent divine nature of existence, and in doing so oppose an oppressive, disenchanted social order. To live by this order was to commit an act of spiritual self-betrayal. In the growing modern, Western spiritual culture of mysticism, psychedelics represented a kind of radical yet limited validation of this ontological position; a reliable and indiscriminate method of spiritual enlightenment and ecstasy.

In spite of its convivial spirit of 'oneness', psychedelic culture exercised significant social privilege, consisting largely of a white, middle-class demographic. The revolutionary spirit of the psychedelic counter-culture was largely upheld by the educated privilege to intellectualise and spiritually validate a largely hedonist and recreational practice; the demographic privilege to largely avoid civil persecution for consumer illegal substances; the privilege of social security, of mobility and economic and environmental security; the naïve privilege to romanticise non-Western spiritual cultures and ontologies. This is reflected in the psychedelic counter-cultures peripheral encounters with its contemporary civil rights movement. The psychedelic community were quick to dismiss the violent urgency of civil rights for a more subversive, introspective political 'action'. Environmentalism faced a similar issue: the sacred relationship to all living things fostered by the psychedelic culture, was just as likely to produce a lacklustre attitude of limited environmental responsibility or worse, isolation from cultural and social responsibility; the root cause of the environmental crisis. Psychedelic counter-culture's 'peace and love' ethos required little if any affirmative action on the part of its constituents, and was arguably an example of a collective spiritual bypass: the collective vision of social and spiritual peace and harmony on earth disregarded the culture and class divides at the heart of the world's divided state of tension and conflict.

Despite its benign civil nature, the psychedelic counter-culture established a popular market and social network for research and literature on psychedelic culture and practices. The remarkable presence and nature of ayahuasca's psychedelic component, DMT, provided the grounding rhetoric for empirical scientific investigation. Much like ayahuasca, DMT presented a molecular mystery with mythological properties in popular psychedelic culture (cf. Metzner, 1990). This 'molecular mythology' was informed by many aspects of its history: the speculation on the potential endogenous production of DMT in the pineal gland; the pineal gland's history of spiritual mysticism, particularly in the works of Descartes; the ancient and

transcultural use of sacred teaching plants containing DMT in indigenous shamanic practices; the uniquely powerful and potent effects of DMT itself, separating it from its molecular, categorical company of other psychedelic tryptamines such as LSD and psilocybin.

A key proponent of DMT and ayahuasca in modern popular culture was Terence McKenna; a self-styled ethnobotanical researcher, psychonaut and revered public figure in modern psychedelic culture. McKenna investigated the psychopharmacological as well as anthropological and ethnographic properties of DMT, combining methodological research with his own implicit knowledge from his extensive experience and self-experimentation with psychedelics and sacred plant practices. McKenna provided a discursive and interdisciplinary framework that served to popularise an interrogative discourse on the interrelated nature of culture, society, nature, and consciousness. His theories of consciousness, language, culture and the remarkable effects of psychedelics on them, embedded psychedelics in a popular scientific discourse disrupting social and anthropological assumptions about the nature and evolution of modern consciousness and society. This served to contextualise contemporary as well as traditional knowledge on psychedelics and consciousness within the rapidly expanding framework of modern scientific investigations of consciousness.

By creating a common discourse for scientific as well as social agencies, McKenna exemplified the transition of modern psychedelic culture from oppositional to integrative. His methodologically founded and exceptionally well-articulated descriptions of the transformative effects of psychedelics and altered states of consciousness, provided a new generation of psychedelic researchers and practitioners with theoretical and methodological models for research; suspicions borne out of a public discourse that may eventually be investigated and validated institutionally. In essence, McKenna's work manifested the possibility of psychedelic research as a radical method of destabilising ethnocentric, Occidental, and colonial bases and biases of critical history and research. He presented psychedelics as a reliable method of boundary dissolution, whether it be personal boundaries of consciousness, or transpersonal, social, and cultural boundaries of society and its history. He portrayed the mystical psychedelic experience as not a problem but an opportunity for the scientific understanding of human consciousness, and advocated for shamanic practices, particularly the rich culture of sacred plant practices in the New World as a crucial source of knowledge already in the process of being lost to cultural and environmental homogenisation and industrialisation; contributing to a political and ideological position for the agency of psychedelic research beyond the psychedelic experience itself.

As popular culture and literature spurred on the public enthusiasm for psychedelic experience and research, clinical research on psychedelic substances and their therapeutic benefits continued quietly in underground communities. Alexander Shulgin, a pioneering organic chemistry and psychopharmacology researcher, synthesised and tested hundreds of new psychedelic compounds over a decades-long career. Perhaps his most significant contribution to modern psychedelic therapy, was his discovery of an effective synthesis of MDMA, a substance which showed significant psychotherapeutic potential. His collaborative research with underground psychedelic psychotherapy practices provided a foundation for a critical and educated argument for more institutional research on the therapeutic properties of psychedelics (cf. Metzner, 1998: 3). Not unlike how indigenous sacred plant practises accredit their knowledge to the plants themselves and their experiential as well as conscious teachings, the therapeutic research on psychedelics continues to be driven as much by scientific interest as it is by an ideological, spiritual, humanitarian and even environmental agency.

2.2.5 Integration and institutionalisation – the 1990’s psychedelic renaissance

A variety of cultural, social and political factors contributed to the resurgence of psychedelic research and therapy. Langlitz argues that the disciplinary and methodological rigidity of psychedelic research, is a conscious effort on the part of the researchers, in order to not repeat the mistakes of the past, and to demonstrate the critical validity and potential of this research; to restore its reputation. This is exemplified by the related yet distinctive mission statements of two pioneering non-profit psychedelic research organisations; The Heffter Research Institute and the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Science (MAPS). The former’s rationalist research agency advocated the scientific study of psychedelics and the experiences they afford. The latter presented a more humanitarian case, similarly advocating institutional, clinical research but with the more explicit agency of psychedelics’ therapeutic potential. While the Heffter Research Institute helped establish psychedelic research as a critical scientific pursuit, MAPS saw psychedelic research and particularly psychedelic therapy as an opportunity to introduce the therapeutic potential of these practices to traditionally conservative power structures and mainstream culture (cf. Langlitz, 2013: 62-65).

The growing research possibilities and popularity of neurosciences significantly contributed to the resurgence of psychedelic research in the 1990s. In the wake of new brain scanning technologies providing novel insight into the neurochemical composition of consciousness, psychedelic research was presented as a unique method of studying consciousness through its altered states (cf. Langlitz, 2013: 63). Rather than oppose political

and institutional establishments, the new generation of psychedelic research attempted to evoke change from within, by inserting itself within a rigid institutional framework, and demonstrating its critical disciplinary relevance in strict methodological terms. The new wave of psychedelic research did not aim for revolution, but evolution; the psychedelic experience was no longer an act of rebellion, but an opportunity to study and transform consciousness. Anthropology had demonstrated the social and cultural cohesive function of psychedelics in indigenous cultures (cf. Andritzky, 1989), the rationale followed that they could do the same for modern society; “to transform Western culture with its own means” (Langlitz, 2013: 63).

The confluence of scientific, psychotherapeutic and anthropological agency set a precedence for a landmark study on ayahuasca and its psychosocial effects on long-term users. In collaboration with the UDV, an international network of research institutions as well as MAPS and the Heffter Research Institute conducted the first ayahuasca study of its kind. The Hoasca Project (cf. Grob et al., 1996) presented an unprecedented amalgam of data reflecting the psycho-social and therapeutic properties of ayahuasca practices and their ritual, spiritual context. The collaboration with the UDV provided a structured and repeatable framework for studying ayahuasca practices: the UDV’s strict regulations guaranteed ayahuasca of a consistent chemical makeup and potency (distinguished as ‘hoasca’), an institutional and ceremonial setting, and abiding study participants.

Conducted on a sample of fifteen long-term members of the UDV who regularly participated in ayahuasca ceremonies, and fifteen counterpart control subjects, the study measured a range of psychological and sociological dynamics in the participants’ conditions, with a particular emphasis on how these practices had supported their recovery from depression, mood disorders and alcoholism, and how the spiritual practice informed their sense of social cohesion and responsibility (Ibid). As might be expected, the conclusions of the study raised more questions than they answered. While the results of the study overwhelmingly supported the conclusion that long-term membership in the UDV had a significant therapeutic effect on the participants, it was impossible to determine what measure of therapeutic efficacy could be credited to the ayahuasca practice itself, as opposed to the general psycho-social benefits of belonging to an organised religious community. This observation serves to further demonstrate the inseparability of ayahuasca practices from their spiritual and religious context, especially in terms of therapeutic efficacy. Politically, the study served to further solidify the UDV’s position as a recognised religious organisation, having received sanctions from the Brazilian government for their ceremonial use of ayahuasca in 1987. The UDV’s ayahuasca practices were clearly “...distinct from the conventional notion of ‘drug abuse’.” (Ibid), on the

contrary these practices demonstrated a clear therapeutic efficacy in participants' recovery from abusive drug and alcohol habits. The study concluded:

There is clearly a need to pursue rigorous and comprehensive follow-up studies to the preliminary explorations reported here, not only to further elucidate the unique phenomenon of hoasca use within a highly structured ceremonial setting but also because of growing interest and use of hoasca in North America and Europe. It will be imperative to carefully delineate the potential for adverse effects as well as to establish the optimal safety parameters within which hoasca might be taken. In this light, careful study of the ceremonial structure and safeguards of such groups could facilitate future research development. It is our hope that subsequent endeavours to investigate the hoasca phenomenon will explore these matters, and determine whether our preliminary findings can be replicated. Regardless of whether these results will ultimately be corroborated, we believe we have demonstrated that this fascinating, albeit neglected, phenomenon can be rigorously studied using state of the art tools of research investigation. (Ibid: 93)

Human Psychopharmacology of Hoasca set an institutional precedence for further research on the psycho-social, therapeutic properties of ayahuasca practices, and particularly their implications for the role a spiritual dimension of consciousness in psychological well-being. The following proliferation of research as well as popular and commercial use of ayahuasca, has embedded it in a range of critical discourses: philosophical, therapeutic, religious, social-political and anthropological (cf. Luna, 2018). While these discourses are regularly articulated and distinguished in research and literature on ayahuasca, the popular culture of its modern use and practice overlaps these discourses frequently, providing social, moral and environmental agency for its proponents. Manifestations of this agency often reflect the counter-cultural attitude of the initial psychedelic revolution, however the sober institutional, legal and political recognition of the potential and urgency of psychedelics' therapeutic properties shows fewer characteristics of revolution, than the procedural and inevitable evolution of medical and therapeutic knowledge and technology.

2.2.6 Contemporary psychedelic research, practices, and culture

In the current scientific and academic climate, research on psychedelics can be distinguished by three interrelated research motives: neurochemical, psychotherapeutic, and social-environmental. These motives share a political agency, engaging with legislative discourse on the use of psychedelics in modern health care, as well as a greater social and political discourse on civil and cultural rights of indigenous peoples and the global market's detrimental effects on their environment as well as their culture. The exponential resurgence in the popularity of psychedelic research has been described as the 'psychedelic renaissance'

(cf. Sessa, 2012), yet this research has demonstrated its historical continuity in spite of the political, cultural, and ideological resistance of its institutional context. The institutional, disciplinary diligence of psychedelic research, along with the perennial social and cultural influence of psychedelic culture, has created an unprecedented trend of interest in the scientific study and therapeutic application of psychedelics. This has been reflected in the significant legislative progress made in the last two decades, particularly in the USA, as well as a growing number of NGOs lobbying and funding psychedelic research.

A significant political and legislative milestone was achieved in 2019, when Denver city council passed a ballot to decriminalise personal use of psilocybin mushrooms, following significant campaigning efforts advocating the right to legally practice psychedelic therapy; particularly for treating PTSD. A similar ballot was passed in Oakland shortly after, decriminalising the use of psilocybin, as well as cannabis, ayahuasca, peyote and other naturally occurring psychedelic compounds. Veterans seeking treatment for PTSD has become a key argument in the public discourse on psychedelic therapy, particularly in the USA. The plight of war veterans occupies a heralded place of sympathy in the USA's social consciousness; the fact that an increasing number of veterans suffering from PTSD are turning to psychedelic therapy and sacred plant practices, makes a compelling argument for their therapeutic potential to even the most conservative demographics (cf. Langlitz, 2013). In September 2019, Johns Hopkins announced plans for the Center for Psychedelic and Consciousness Research, the first research facility of its kind in the United States, and one of the largest of its kind in the world (cf. Jones, 2019). A growing number of research institutions are following suit, investing significant resources in the study of psychedelics, with a number of countries offering a variety of legally sanctioned, psychedelically assisted psychotherapy programmes.

The mainstreaming of psychedelic research and culture is further reflected in the prevalence of popular media and literature on the therapeutic and transformative effects of the psychedelic experience, two recent examples being Michael Pollan's popular book *How to Change Your Mind: What the New Science of Psychedelics Teaches Us About Consciousness, Dying, Addiction, Depression and Transcendence* (Pollan, 2018) and MAPS founder Rick Doblin's recent TED talk entitled *The Future of Psychedelic-Assisted Psychotherapy* (TED, 2019). Global ayahuasca culture has achieved a kind of mainstream popularity as well, extending itself not only into popular discourses on psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy, but also social discourses on the cultural and environmental significance of traditional sacred plant practices. The contemporary discourse on ayahuasca has not simply conflated cultural and

environmental causes, but also expanded their respective discourses and articulated their inevitably overlapping concerns. This is reflected in the increasing efforts to represent indigenous Amazonian cultures and their sacred plant practices as contemporary agents in social and political discourses on culture and environment (cf. Belem and Jacoski, 2019). The common rhetorical quote, that the vast majority of the world's environmental biodiversity is protected by a small percentage of indigenous peoples in the Amazon, reflects the intersectional nature of discourses on ayahuasca, sacred plant practices, culture and environment. The peripheral discourse on the epistemological distinctions between modern society and these indigenous cultures silently permeates and interpolates discourses on culture, health and environment.

Contemporary research on ayahuasca is conducted with significant institutional resources, with the UDV as well as therapy and rehabilitation centres using ayahuasca and other sacred plant practices (cf. Mabit, 2007) supplying crucial data sets as well as controlled environments for scientific research. The widespread phenomenon of commercial as well as psychotherapeutic and neo-shamanic ayahuasca practices has also provided a significant source of social and environmental data, but it also presents the greatest risk factor for poorly facilitated and even exploitative and abusive practices. Grassroots networks as well as NGOs work to create resources and global networks educating and protecting individuals practicing or seeking to practice ayahuasca in a safe and therapeutic capacity. As the public interest and popularity of ayahuasca practices continues to grow, reports of harmful and abusive practices have increased significantly, particularly reports of sexual abuse (cf. Sinclair and Labate, 2019). Ayahuasca practices require the participants to invest an enormous amount of trust and power in the practitioners, putting participants in an extremely vulnerable position. In the absence of established traditions of hierarchical authority and responsibility, naïve participants have no available social guarantees of intention. The romanticised image of shamanic practices as benign and benevolent healing practices, sanitised of any harmful or malevolent potential (cf. Böschemeier and Carew, 2017: 147-148), feeds the even more problematic, common disbelief that such abusive malpractices could be so prevalent (cf. Sinclair and Labate, 2019).

There is also a growing social discourse on the inherent demographic and methodological biases in many of these practices. Contemporary ayahuasca practices are largely sought out and researched by a white, educated, middle-class demographic. The mainstreaming and political neutralising of psychedelic research has illustrated that legitimising the scientific and therapeutic significance of these substances and practices, requires an inherently privileged position (cf. Herzberg and Butler, 2019). These efforts to de-

colonise psychedelic research and practices also address contemporary therapeutic ayahuasca practices' diagnostic biases inherited from the mental health field (cf. Hartman, 2019), establishing a discourse on gender and identity politics in psychedelic research as well as practices. While aligning itself with contemporary academic trends, this discourse pertains to a greater and more critical effort to de-colonise history and knowledge of these practices, particularly with regards to the indigenous knowledge and traditions. The institutionalisation and commodification of ayahuasca practices is of great concern to many indigenous communities from whom the practices originate from, who have called out the research community for dismissing their knowledge and traditions as peripheral and not scientific, and responded by organising unprecedented networks of native ayahuasca traditions to better represent and leverage their position and authority in the common discourse (cf. Tukano, 2019).

Ayahuasca-assisted psychotherapy has existed as a kind of enigmatic anomaly within the context of contemporary scientific and medical research on psychedelics; always peripheral, sometimes central; disintegrating the divide between centre and limit in discourse as well as analysis. Whether conceived of as a crusader or a victim of modernity, institutional research on psychedelic therapy is forever distinguishing itself from traditional and popular psychedelic and transpersonal practices, assuming it must distinguish its results from the imponderable cultural, social, and spiritual factors surrounding these practices as they exist 'spontaneously'. Yet modern psychedelic research is equally spontaneous, insofar that the origins of its suspicion does not leave a singular, causal trace. The critical suspicion arose from studying traditional and spontaneous practices, but also from a therapeutic intuition: a direct and implicit experience of expanded consciousness, with the recognition of the therapeutic potential of higher states of consciousness. The suspicion was also rooted in the prevailing sacred reverence for the mystical, religious experience; a persistent ontological anomaly in an otherwise entirely disenchanted world-view.

Modern science and society then have a rich, integrated, multifaceted relationship to altered states of consciousness and their therapeutic potential. The origin of the suspicion is never singular; it appears as a natural evolutionary instinct of consciousness. It manifests in clinical research on consciousness as an isolated phenomenon, as well as sociological and anthropological research on the social, cultural, and political context of the phenomenon. Yet the phenomenon of exploring altered states of consciousness and their therapeutic benefit is neither entirely anti-modern nor non-Western. Traditional practices of altered states of consciousness have significantly fuelled, influenced and validated the modern suspicion's

research, but the suspicion itself is trans-historical and trans-cultural. It arises from the experience of the altered state itself; a higher state of consciousness, and the radical empiricism it implies.

CHAPTER 3

Cultural factors and influences

Ayahuasca currently occupies so many global disciplinary and political discursive contexts, it is hard to believe that it was a relatively unknown phenomenon in the modern world until just a few decades ago. In its institutional presence alone, the global ayahuasca phenomenon has presented risks and regulatory challenges, as well as research opportunities within medical and psychotherapeutic policy, religious freedom policy, politics of cultural heritage, and of course drug policy. While the institutional position on ayahuasca remains ontologically and epistemologically tentative, global ayahuasca culture appears as a powerful force of ontological disruption, which exponentially increases the vulnerability of an ontologically and epistemically naïve market. The hermeneutic nature of ayahuasca practices poses potential for the violent abuse of power, wherein authority and compliance may be blindly entrusted to whomever claims such authority. Ayahuasca practices inherently rely on trusting an authority figure; a shaman, an ayahuasquero or curandero; even a therapist. In the absence of a regulatory framework, institutional or cultural, to ensure the safety and integrity of ayahuasca practices as a global phenomenon, the unregulated market of commercial ayahuasca practices are put at a severe risk of abuse.

The widespread phenomenon of ayahuasca practices and culture outside of scientific, therapeutic and religious institutions, poses the most significant risk factor and regulatory challenges. The improper facilitation and malpractice of ayahuasca presents a high risk of harm as well as abuse of power. Simultaneously, ayahuasca practices not only continue to demonstrate radical therapeutic properties, they have also perpetrated wider social discourses concerning social, political and cultural factors of psychological health and psychotherapeutic growth, de-colonising histories and methodologies of knowledge production, and integrating agencies of social and environmental transformation. Efforts to delineate ayahuasca practices follow a familiar pattern of disciplinary reduction, compartmentalising the variety of discourses and circumstances evoked by the global phenomenon of these practices. While this does provide an effective discursive framework, it also limits the discursive solutions to risk factors and regulatory challenges, to the confines of individual disciplinary action. This chapter attempts to reconcile these reductions by way of an interdisciplinary review and investigation of the cultural factors and influences informing the contemporary states of global ayahuasca research, practices, and culture.

3.1 Language; politics; images of thought; sets and settings

Psychedelics are a particularly effective example of the influential power of language and vocabulary in the institutional as well as social conception of knowledge production, as these substances have entered scientific and psychotherapeutic discourse on the merit of observational and investigative data, as well as implicit experience. However, the ambiguity of these methodological foundations creates a significant vulnerability; the public discourse and common practices of psychedelics and psychedelic therapy presents a hybrid space of confluent social and institutional discourses and practices.

Particularly in the case of ayahuasca, the continued growth, hybridisation and evolution of psychedelic practices presents new regulatory challenges for institutional research and policy. Methodologically, it is impossible to keep up with the increasing popular demand for, and necessity of critical scientific investigation of ayahuasca. Even with the exponential increase in such methodological knowledge production in recent years, such quantitative data is easily dismissed by enthusiastic practitioners in favour of cultural and personal narratives of spiritual growth and evolution. The primary challenge for the proper research and facilitation of ayahuasca-assisted psychotherapy is then not simply a lack of accessible information, education, and services, but more crucially to find a competitive narrative that is resonant with critical research methodologies as well as implicit, experiential knowledge production.

3.1.1 A poverty of description

One of the challenges of discussing psychedelics' therapeutic potential, is their legislative and by extension cultural status as a 'drug'. A 'drug' may commonly refer to either a legally sanctioned pharmacological substance, or refer to a class of substances, largely illicit, associated with addiction and detachment from common social and cultural norms. Semantically, a 'drug' simply refers to a produced pharmacological agent, while its cultural connotations lean on the implication of abuse: to 'do drugs', 'take drugs', be 'on drugs' – these terms enforce a cultural conception of drugs as explicitly harmful, or at least having significant harm potential.

Proponents of psychedelics have a long history of objecting to describing psychedelics as drugs, precisely because of these cultural associations that are in part product of their illicit status, which misrepresents the pharmacological and toxicological nature of psychedelic substances by indiscriminately classifying them amongst substances with entirely different modes of pharmacological action, such as opiates and amphetamines. Furthermore, the rhetoric claims a fundamental cognitive dissonance in describing naturally occurring psychoactive

substances (e.g. cannabis; peyote; ibogaine) as ‘drugs’, since ‘drugs’ refer to a substance *produced*, and not simply occurring naturally. This has popularised the term *entheogen* (Greek: *entheo* – ‘God within’, *-gen* – ‘becoming’) (cf. Ruck et al., 1979), which highlights the sacred status of these plants and their spiritual practices above their psychoactive effects in themselves.

Classifying psychedelics with neologisms according to their psychoactive properties has been a popular method of distancing them semantically from other substances sharing their legal status. The term *psychedelic* (mind-manifesting) was popularised by Aldous Huxley (cf. Metzner, 1998) whose work, in particular *The Doors of Perception* (1954), is credited for the surge of modern popular interest psychedelic experiences and exploration. The challenge of meaningfully conceptualising a psychedelically induced altered state, is that the psychedelic substance alone cannot be credited for the experience – it does not induce the experience itself, it provides an altered state of consciousness in which the experience takes place. Hence, early analogies of the effects of psychedelics referred to other ‘tools’ able to alter perception, such as the telescope and microscope. Just as a telescopes and microscopes expand the subject’s perception of whatever object the instrument is aimed at, psychedelics enhance and amplify the subject’s perception and experience of their reality (cf. Metzner, 2017). Yet this utilitarian conception of psychedelics dismissed their historical and trans-historical precedence as not simply a tool or method of consciousness expansion, but as a sacred, living relationship to a transpersonal order of consciousness.

Contemporary discourses are more reflective of these nuances: the 2019 Global Ayahuasca Conference’s slogan, “an inner search for a better world”, reflects a modern, humanist paradigm echoing Jung’s observation that all reality is psychic reality (cf. Jung, 2001); that all changes and transformations, be they individual, social or environmental, come from within consciousness itself. This paradigm is conveniently compatible with popular humanitarian thought and philosophy, suggesting that all change and transformation begins within the individual as a conscious choice of action. In turn, this compliments the shamanic ontology, in which the deepest and most profound realms of knowledge are found inwardly. Simultaneously, these realms of inner consciousness are also indicative of a greater, exterior order of consciousness. In this sense, to journey inwards is a process of outward expansion: a seemingly inane and paradoxical profundity, that nevertheless accurately describes known processes of psychotherapeutic transformation, as well as a common modern spiritual paradigm.

At this point, even the term ‘medicine’ becomes a problematic descriptor for ayahuasca. ‘Medicine’ is charged with a preconceived ontological framework that can only respond explicitly in its treatment, even when its subject transforms implicitly. Ayahuasca is not a ‘medicine’, in the sense that it serves to treat an illness, relieve a symptom, or heal a wound. Ayahuasca facilitates a certain modality of experience, a mode of knowledge production, and informs a spiritual ontology that may adapt and replicate itself within a number of cultural contexts, so long as it is in concordance with a certain ontological premise prescribed by the ayahuasca experience. The epistemic conception of nature as a teacher, and specific plants as spiritual guides, further complicates the use of ‘medicine’ as a descriptive term. Plants are not conceived as simply a material resource for treatment, they are also a source of direct healing and teaching, a sacrament; a source of power and transformation. Most significantly, they constitute a *relationship* with the subject that extends beyond the immediate experience of their ayahuasca consecration.

The naturalistic methodology of psychopharmacology and neurochemistry has produced limited but meaningful results in their study of altered states of consciousness. Psychotherapeutic methodology may produce either naturalised or socialised research, however as a practice, a hybrid natural as well as social discursive model emerges. Psychotherapeutic models of consciousness are informed by the experimental data of psychotherapeutic practice, wherein the genuine and verifiable presence of therapeutic transformation may validate or invalidate the model by way of its efficacy. This allows psychotherapeutic practices to experimentally investigate the therapeutic potential of psychedelic experiences and altered states of consciousness. While pharmacological treatment is a common component of psychotherapeutic practices, psychedelics present a unique methodological challenge, as their efficacy is not measured by their psychopharmacological action, but by their experiential effects on consciousness and power of therapeutic transformation. While psychedelics may reliably induce altered states of consciousness and spiritual experiences, their therapeutic potential relies on the integration of the individual’s implicit knowledge of their experience, in their ordinary consciousness and consensus reality. The psychotherapeutic application of psychedelics then distinguishes itself from the use of psychedelics as tools for escapism by way of spiritual bypass, by using them to expand the subject’s personal insight, reveal problematic issues, and ultimately to confront their psychic reality outside of the comfort zone of consensus reality (cf. Frecska, 2019).

Ayahuasca practices are then of significant relevance to the psychotherapeutic study of psychedelics, precisely because of their nature as practices. Ayahuasca does not treat and cure

the subject, so much as forge a relationship with them which permeates and informs every aspect of their life; not unlike the relationship to a therapist (cf. Harris, 2017). Like any psychotherapeutic model, lasting transformation is conditional to the therapeutic relationship, wherein medicine may be helpful in short and intermittent terms. This methodology is reflected in ayahuasca practices as well, wherein consecrating ayahuasca acts as a teaching experience facilitating implicit modes knowledge production, that may eventually be applied without the guidance of the ayahuasca experience itself, but with the therapeutic relationship to the practice.

This leaves ‘ayahuasca’ operating discursively under a variety of ontological definitions and conditions; a drug; a religious sacrament; a medicine; a neurochemical facilitator of implicit modes of knowledge production and insight; a psycho-spiritual tool for therapeutic transformation and social cohesion. This confusion of social and natural status is resolved by the shamanic ontology of ayahuasca practices, which describe ayahuasca, particularly *B. caapi*, the vine from which its name is derived, as a teaching entity; a master plant (cf. Luna, 1984). What evades its description as an object, becomes apparent in its effects on consciousness which dissolve distinctions of natural and social; conscious and unconscious.

3.1.2 ‘Nature’ and ‘culture’: transpersonal and therapeutic properties of peak experiences and liminal states

Transpersonal psychology provides a methodological framework for understanding and interpreting the transformative effects of peak experiences and liminal states; the ethnographic and anthropological discourses articulate these experiences’ function as facilitators of personal psychological growth and social cohesion. Liminal-state rites and experiences, such as those found in traditional ayahuasca practices, have a methodologically established social-evolutionary function as catalysts of personal growth and transformation (cf. Turner, 1969: 95); ayahuasca practices then appear as a complex technical and cultural method for the applied practice of liminal states and personal as well as social transformation. Individually, this disrupts the psyche’s cultured patterns of thought, perception, and behaviour, allowing for an unconditioned grasp of their natural state, which may then be reconstituted. The liminal methodology of ritual structure corresponds to ayahuasca practices’ disciplinary use of ritual and ceremonial instruction, facilitating the process of separation, liminal state, and aggregation (Ibid: 94). Turner further remarks on the social significance of culturally institutionalised *rites de passage* and liminal-state experiences: by separating from social and cultural conditions and observing the individual’s natural, ‘default state’, the social and

political hierarchies organising the individual's conception of society are stripped away, revealing an implicit natural order of social bonds and relations. This form of social cohesion and reinforcement is distinguished as *communitas*, as opposed to the more general terms of community and communality, because it refers to an individually and universally implicit social character of human nature; the very social foundation on which every social contract is silently constituted (Ibid: 96-97).

The interdependency of natural and cultural conditions exhibited in culturally sanctioned traditions of limit-state experiences problematises what Geertz refers to as an ontological misconception of culture, creating a methodological divide in its anthropological and ethnographic investigation (cf. Geertz, 1973: 10-11). The nature of culture is not revealed through either subjective or objective reduction of it as a natural object or a symbolic action, since the symbolic action is inevitably dependent on the recipient's measure of interpretation, 'thin' or 'thick description', which refers back to the recipient's own conditions, natural as well as cultural. Culture is not an object of implicit knowledge or passion to be explicitly decoded, it is a method in itself of making implicit knowledge socially explicit:

It is not the least extraordinary accomplishment of *yagé* nights to make this implicit social knowledge explicit, in both its discursive and nondiscursive or imagistic dimensions. *Yagé* nights can be thought of as epic theatre addressing and redressing the discourse of envy, the outstanding feature of which is the failure to reciprocate and treason in friendship. (Taussig, 1987: 394)

The ritual and symbolic ceremonial framework of traditional ayahuasca practices facilitates the radical disintegration and transformation of consciousness' existential boundaries, while retaining a secure, reintegrating structure of personal and transpersonal consciousness. These practices then demonstrate complex techniques of social and psychological integration of peak experiences and liminal states induced by ayahuasca. Simultaneously, these practices have historically demonstrated the ability to evolve as hybrid and syncretic structures of practice, adapting to and integrating disparate social, cultural, and religious contexts (cf. Feeney and Labate, 2014: 119).

The critical scientific investigation of these practices has produced anthropological and ethnographic models of a social phenomenon, as well as neurochemical and psychopharmacological models of a natural phenomenon. Yet ayahuasca is neither a natural nor a social object; it is not determinable as a singular product of natural or cultural conditions. It is a critical practice of investigating the implicit conditions of consciousness and nature, and making them socially and culturally explicit. Traditional ayahuasca practices are in themselves

living research projects and investigations; isolating them historically or materially is already a fatal reduction. It is then necessary to articulate a continuity in these practices' multifaceted and dislocated historical narrative. This continuity is manifested culturally: patterns of social organisation and ontological commitment expressed both in ritual and ceremonial practice and cosmology, whose symbolic action is then embedded in the natural and cultural everyday living behaviour.

3.1.3 Problem areas: power, abuse, globalisation, gentrification

The popular conception of shamanic traditions as strictly benevolent healing practices, is a product of foreign romanticism. While these traditions are often applied as healing practices, shamanism is an engagement with a spiritual dimension of consciousness and the power therein, which may be used with malevolent as well as benevolent intent. By definition, shamanic practices invoke a radical power structure informed by the division between the experientially naïve and the initiated practitioner. The authority of the initiated exposes the vulnerability of abusive power that may be used for manipulation. In the case of ayahuasca practices, this vulnerability is doubled by not only the naïve individual's surrender to the initiated authority, but also by their consent to consuming a psychoactive substance with intoxicating effects. The abuse of this trust and power presents a critical risk factor in the continued globalisation and commodification of ayahuasca practices. Reports of abusive practices, especially cases of sexual assault, have become increasingly prevalent in the unregulated market of commercial ayahuasca practices. These reports demonstrate the urgent need for an integrative social and cultural framework for the unregulated, public market of ayahuasca practices, in order to educate and safeguard individuals from abusive practices, as well as critically address these abusive practices in their wider cultural and social context (cf. Sinclair and Labate, 2019).

In addition, ayahuasca poses a significant health risk factor to individuals with mental health disorders, particularly schizophrenia and psychosis. Traditional and modern ayahuasca practices alike largely prohibit participation from individuals suffering from severe mental disorders with significant symptoms of cognitive distortion. Ayahuasca has also demonstrated a harmful neurochemical reaction to antidepressants with selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRI), whose use are also regularly and strictly prohibited for at least a month prior to drinking ayahuasca. These harm factors are relatively easy for practitioners to screen; the *dieta* of ayahuasca practices serves to prepare participants physically as well as psychologically for their encounter with ayahuasca. Yet in the absence of regulation,

commercial, exploitative, or simply poorly educated practices may fail to sufficiently screen its participants. Even for healthy participants, there remains a significant risk factor as well in the absence of an integrative framework after their experience. The ontological shock of a spiritual experience not simply constituted by spiritual consciousness, but a spiritual *reality* within which consciousness exists, can be difficult to integrate within a modern culture which interprets such experiences as potentially pathological rather than therapeutic (cf. Harris, 2017: 248-249). The severity of all these risks, of sexual abuse, physical harm due to neglecting the *dieta*, triggering a psychotic episode, are doubled by the fact that ayahuasca practices are commonly sought out precisely to therapeutically address sexual abuse and trauma, severe depression and anxiety. Vulnerable participants are then at risk of further traumatisation, which may destabilise their entire framework of therapeutic healing and growth.

In addition to the risks of harm and abuse, the commodification and globalisation of ayahuasca practices have raised a range of complex social, cultural and political issues. Commercial ayahuasca practices have become an integral part of the ethno-tourism industry in many parts of the Amazon, producing complex cases of financial inequality and cultural appropriation. Ayahuasca tourism is a critical source of income for local communities, yet a significant number of tourist-oriented ayahuasca retreat centres are run by practicing foreigners who are better equipped to accommodate a naïve tourist demographic (cf. Homan, 2017: 172-173). This Occidental-oriented trend has significantly influenced the publicly advertised perception of ayahuasca practices as a benign healing practice sanitised from any aspects outside of the romanticised image of the benevolent shaman and their healing practice. This commercial conception of benevolent psycho-spiritual practices stands in stark contrast to the traditional conception of shamanic practices, which bear no guarantees of benevolence.

Within the contemporary culture of commercial ayahuasca practices, a complex economy of authenticity has emerged along with a competitive market to match it, wherein ethnicity and identity provide the social and cultural currency in the claim of authentic practices. This market of simulacra signifiers has constituted significant social and economic divides within commercial as well as institutional ayahuasca practices. Ayahuasca tourism remains largely reserved for a white, middle-class, educated demographic. This gentrification of historically indigenous practices presents a problematic case of cultural appropriation, not simply in terms of protecting ethnic cultural heritage, but more crucially in terms of the loss of critical traditional knowledge of ayahuasca practices. The absence of appropriate

knowledge of practice and cultural context then poses one of the most significant risk factors in the contemporary use of ayahuasca.

3.2 Critical contexts and implications of ayahuasca practices in psychotherapeutic research and practice

The legal recognition and protection of traditional sacred plant practices and their social, cultural, and therapeutic value, has created a legislative and cultural precedence presenting ethical as well as epistemological challenges. Ethically, as an institution with social and political commitments to its society, modern science must validate and protect traditional sacred plant practices on the merit of their social and cultural significance. At the same time, it must respond to the rapid globalisation of practices removed from their traditional context, and the significant regulatory challenges and harm factors therein.

Traditional sacred plant practices present a sophisticated mode of knowledge production, as well as a powerful technique for expanding states of consciousness. The ethical crisis resulting from these practices' reckless commercial displacement and gentrification, reveals the integral functionality of a contextual culture and practice native to the epistemic modality of traditional sacred plant practices. Modern science is then faced with the task of ontologically reconciling opposing epistemologies of implicit and explicit knowledge production, in order to effectively respond to the globalisation of these practices. Authors of psychedelic research often argue that this reconciliation requires redefining the epistemological commitments of scientific research to include and incorporate the indigenous knowledge, techniques and histories that have been practiced for millennia (cf. Rush et al., 2014, Sessa, 2016; Mabit; 2007).

3.2.1 Politics and ethics of institutional research

Like any social and political institution, modern science is subject to its own cultural and political history. The inherent ideology of science as a pursuit of knowledge and truth for collective betterment, is reflected in its Western historical origins as an institutional practice of methodological, philosophical investigation of the material world; a mode of knowledge production. Modern epistemological critiques of science argue that its institutional culture has dogmatic tendencies, defining science as the only valuable mode of knowledge production and authoritatively rejecting any other mode or method (cf. Sorrell 1991: 1-13). Historically, the shift from science as a free pursuit of knowledge opposing dogmatism, to a dogmatic social and political institution, was arguably a result of the increasing economic, industrial, political

and military dependency on the productive output of scientific institutions (cf. Tupper and Labate, 2014: 72), which were integral to sustaining and reproducing social, industrial, and political power structures. At the same time, this institutional dependency implies an institutional responsibility. Scientific research has an inherent responsibility to its social and political institutions, to advance and protect public interests and welfare. The epistemological authoritarianism of scientific method is not simply a product of political history, but also a necessary methodological commitment in order to fulfil its institutional responsibility to society.

Psychedelics then present a complex regulatory challenge because the context and conditions in which they are used are as critical, if not more, as the psychedelic compounds themselves. Moreover, their effects on consciousness may only be rudimentarily modelled and quantified by external scientific observation, while traditional shamanic practices offer sophisticated, but largely externally unverifiable models of consciousness and research methods. While it is tempting to simply appeal to the historical indigenous authorities of these practices, such an appeal does not satisfy institutional responsibility. The unregulated, global market of commercial ayahuasca practices is largely absent of reliable methods of validating their authenticity, authority, and intention. Defining a critical standard of ayahuasca practices is also made difficult by ayahuasca's multitude of ontological statuses, "...an amalgam of multiple competing social constructions that variously impinge on what theoretical questions or empirical approaches are used to generate knowledge about it and its effects." (Tupper and Labate, 2014: 73).

The mainstreaming of contemporary psychedelic research has been made possible by learning from methodological and institutional mistakes of the past, as well by a shift in popular psychedelic culture from culturally oppositional to socially integrated; engaging and interpolating multiple levels of social, political and environmental discourses. Nevertheless, contemporary research practices are characterised by an ontological divide manifested in methodology. While neurochemical, psychopharmacological and psychotherapeutic research continue to develop a critical, methodological foundation for the reducible properties of psychedelic compounds, experiences, and practices, they are still presented as objects requiring scientific, methodological decoding. While some contemporary research practices hypothetically entertain the case of acknowledging and investigating the universally historical presence of sacred plant practices and traditions as not simply another encoded anthropological object, but as a mode of knowledge production with its own recognisable and methodologically

applicable process of encoding, these discussions remain largely reserved for social sciences and discourses (cf. Tupper and Labate, 2014, 75-76).

Research on the therapeutic efficacy of ayahuasca practices continues to demonstrate how the effects of ayahuasca are critically informed by subjectively determined internal and external cultural contexts. This transforms the research question of how ayahuasca practices are therapeutically beneficial to health, to an epistemic critique of how health is institutionally determined, and of how research on subjectively determined psychotherapeutic practices is epistemically conducted (Ibid: 75). The significance of subjectively determined context and circumstances is readily recognised in the shamanic methodology of ayahuasca traditions, where complex practices of ritual, symbolic, and ceremonial action constitute a transpersonal framework in which subjective determinants can be safely and therapeutically navigated with the guidance of an experiential authority within a socially recognised hierarchy of knowledge. While hard sciences continue to attempt to reduce the therapeutic action of ayahuasca practices from its subjective, social context, to its objective, natural essence, the corroboration of natural and social data indicating the critical epistemic value of sacred plant practices, constitutes a political case for the necessity of an epistemic and ontological paradigm shift in institutional modes of knowledge production.

In the absence of critical consensus, the social, cultural, and political status of ayahuasca practices remain extremely vulnerable to manipulation. This is perhaps best exemplified by the controversy surrounding the Ethnobotanical Stewardship Council (ESC); an NGO which proclaims to work for ensuring the safety and sustainability of sacred plant practices, but has been met with severe academic, social, and political criticism. A statement signed by over sixty academic and scientific experts, critiques ESC for its transparent commercial interests, sensationalist propaganda-driven marketing tactics, lack of indigenous representation, and for generally serving as an investment tool for the further commodification, gentrification, and misappropriation of sacred plant practices (cf. Rush et al., 2014). This criticism has not prevented ESC from successfully raising funds and sponsorships, including sponsorship by MAPS (cf. MAPS, 2015); a historical authority on modern psychedelic research. NGOs advocating and funding psychedelic research are capable of effecting significant change in the cultural status of psychedelics, by providing them with a narrative alternative to their modern reputation of abusive and destructive use. This tactic of repositioning the history and reputation of psychedelics has worked well for psychedelic substances with counter-cultural baggage such as LSD and MDMA, yet ayahuasca already has a socially and culturally established, and to some extent legally sanctioned position. Even

giving ESC the full benefit of doubt with regards to their intentions, the question remains whether the modern social-scientific agenda has any meaningful rapport with these practices in terms of universally shared values, let alone any contribution to make to the globalised culture of these practices (cf. Van Dyck, 2015); or whether this foreign interest to ‘save’ these traditions simply perpetuates their gentrification.

The critique of ESC is a microcosm of the greater political and ideological discourse permeating modern psychedelic research. It is clear that modern science continues to play an indispensable educational and regulatory role in the global proliferation of ayahuasca practices. However, as a socially and politically committed institution, it also poses a permanent risk of appropriation and commodification. Psychedelic research then has a politicised status and social responsibility by default: the methodological and institutional investigation of ayahuasca practices directly engages and informs their greater academic and public perception, and by extension their social and cultural status under the conditions of globalisation.

3.2.2 Ayahuasca and psychotherapy

Any practice of therapeutic growth and transformation is dependent on a series of contextual and subjective factors; the therapeutic properties of ayahuasca practices are no different. Ayahuasca expands consciousness to include implicit modes of knowledge production, transcending dimensions of individual consciousness of presence and existence as it manifests in consensus reality, and becoming conscious of collective social and ecological presence and existence as it manifests in invisible realms of energy, which can nevertheless be consciously perceived in altered states of consciousness; what may be referred to as the spiritual reality.

The therapeutic properties of ayahuasca are multifaceted: as a practice, it is a mode of knowledge production, as well as a personal relationship informing personal identity and ontological commitments. These properties are remarkably similar to conventional psychotherapeutic methods, in which therapeutic transformation and growth is a result of committed personal work of addressing internal and external factors of self, which may be developed within the unconditionally secure bond of trust defining the therapeutic relationship between therapist and patient. The therapeutic properties of ayahuasca practices lie in their ability to transform not only individual consciousness, but also the individual’s conscious relationship to their sense of self, community, environment, and even humanity. Ayahuasca practices facilitate radical encounters and transformations of the psyche; in doing so they may

alter the individual psyche's ontological constitution. Nevertheless, the therapeutic potential of ayahuasca practices is most significantly dependent on the long-term integration of the experience. The knowledge produced, the relationship forged, may have little therapeutic impact on the individual without the conscious effort to integrate them. Psychotherapeutic healing and transformation is a process of self-actualisation: its intention is not to simply suppress symptoms or even heal a singular psychic wound, but to provide the subject with the necessary psychological and cognitive strategies to actively engage and transform their relationship to their sense of self and their existential conditions. The possibility of therapeutic transformation ultimately lies in the subject's own effort to apply personal, implicit observations and knowledge to their therapeutic practice.

Therapeutically, cultivating a sacred and spiritual relationship to existence and sense of self, can be an effective method of encouraging self-compassion and self-assurance, yet it also introduces the risk of spiritually bypassing and neglecting the very psychological issues that instigated the need for therapeutic treatment in the first place. This can be described as an escape from reality, whereas proper psychotherapeutic practice should facilitate confrontation and integration of reality, cultivating a conscious and compassionate relationship to one's conception of self and reality. Effective psychotherapeutic transformation may begin with a psychedelic experience, but relies on a sustained practice of therapeutic integration. In the absence of such integration, the subject is vulnerable to a host of counter-therapeutic psychological offshoots; the common psychedelic effect of ego-dissolution may, ironically, produce ego-inflation in the form of messianic and sectarian complexes, identity diffusion and depersonalisation (cf. Frecska, 2019).

Ayahuasca appears as a uniquely effective psychedelic agent for psychotherapy, as its traditional as well as syncretic practices demonstrate the essential function of internal as well as external integration of the experience it affords. Therapeutically, the shamanic world-view provides a sophisticated social, cultural and ontological framework for this integrative process. Through the interdisciplinary research made possible by advancements in cognitive science, psychology and neurohumanities, the modern scientific paradigm has refined its conception of consciousness and its transformative processes as naturally as well as socially conditioned.

Neuroscientific research has produced sophisticated models of the neurochemical and cognitive structure of consciousness, providing a structural confirmation of the implicit, transpersonal 're-programming' facilitated by psychedelic experiences (cf. Harris: 2017; cf. Carhart-Harris: 2014). Ordinary states of consciousness are described as a "default mode network" of cognitive and neurochemical patterns and relations. Psychologically, these

patterns are produced and reinforced by internal and external patterns of thought and behaviour, hence cognitive patterns are self-reinforcing. The psychedelic experience may enhance the brain's neuroplasticity in order to restructure cognitive and behavioural patterns, yet in the absence of integration, these patterns may simply serve to re-inforce similar disruptive and destructive habits; often manifesting as a spiritual bypass (cf. Carhart-Harris: 2013). The use of psychedelics in psychotherapy has demonstrated the essential importance of context and integration even within neurochemical and pharmaceutical parameters, reflecting a paradigm shift in the contemporary scientific methodologies of investigating consciousness (cf. Carhart-Harris, 2018: 727).

Contemporary practices of ayahuasca-assisted psychotherapy are popular sources of treatment for PTSD, addiction, and treatment-resistant depression and anxiety. Neuroscientific research provides increasingly nuanced models of the neurochemical, psychopharmacological and psycho-social action behind these experiences and their practices. Simultaneously, an unprecedented amount of experiential data is coming from below; in popular practices (cf. Harris, 2017: 224). It is apparent that the psychotherapeutic potential of ayahuasca practices is dependent on a series of interrelated factors: substance, consumer, and context; physiological, psychological, and psycho-spiritual constitution; the ritual, psycho-dramatic execution of transformative, integrative, and aggregative phases of the ayahuasca experience itself. In turn, the contextual, psychosomatic and psycho-dramatic nature of these therapeutic practices reflect a holistic model of human consciousness and the interrelated nature of its physical, psychological, and social conditions. Neuroscientific research confirms the somatic, neurological foundation of consciousness, indicating that emotional and psychological conditions are informed by "...multi-tiered and evolutionarily developed neural mechanisms that control the body's state." (Craig, 2002: 663). In ayahuasca practices, *interoception*, the otherwise unconscious sense regulating the body's internal homeostasis of respiration, digestion, heart rate, etc., is raised to an explicit, somatic level of consciousness by way of ayahuasca's physiological effects (cf. Harris, 2017: 225-226). Ayahuasca demonstrates an acute neurobiological effect on the interrelated regulation of interoception and emotional processing (cf. Riba et al, 2006: 97). These methodological findings coincide with the shamanic ontology of consciousness as an interdependent, psychosomatic condition.

The popular use of ayahuasca-assisted psychotherapy in treating PTSD is a particularly revealing case for the psychosomatic action of ayahuasca. Trauma is by definition a psychosomatic phenomenon; an involuntary physical and emotional re-experiencing of past traumatic events or conditions (cf. Harris, 2017: 225). Recovering from trauma and PTSD is

then a physiological as well as psychological therapeutic process, of which ayahuasca's psychosomatic effects can be an exceptionally effective facilitator. Ayahuasca is popularly characterised by its effects of altered states of consciousness transcending the body's physical conditions, but this transcendence does not imply a total departure of consciousness from the body. On the contrary, the body is the integral interface of physical and psychic reality, through which consciousness may evolve. Therapeutically, the body is the living stage on which the psychodrama of consciousness plays out its narrative resolution, in which ayahuasca facilitates the disintegration and reintegration of self-conception in order to rewrite personal narrative with transpersonal resolve. The facilitation of physical as well as psychological transformation is an interdependent action: a process wherein the body is neither symbol nor object, but the very foundation of meaningful symbolic and ritual action, as a coded relationship between sense and sensibility; consciousness and self-consciousness.

Ayahuasca practices are not a one-time treatment, they consist of regular, or at least intermittent, consecration of ayahuasca, and a perpetual conscious relationship to the ayahuasca spirit. This may, and often does, present an ontological shock to the modern consciousness encountering ayahuasca (cf. Harris, 2017: 174). The explicit experience of spiritual consciousness, including conscious entities external to individual perception, is more commonly associated with psychosis in modern culture, rather than spiritual enlightenment. The shamanic, spiritual ontology of traditional ayahuasca practices is not simply as a conceptual framework, but a powerful disciplinary context imperative to the integration of the ayahuasca experience and the psychological, social, and spiritual relationship produced within the individual consciousness' self-conception. It is not uncommon for subjects identifying as atheists and monotheists, to report a personal spiritual and ontological conversion (cf. Shanon, 2002: 260; Harris, 2017: 173-175), demonstrating the radical power of ayahuasca as an explicit and universal source of spiritual consciousness. However, shamanic ontology emphasises that spiritual consciousness is not divine consciousness (cf. Onanya Joni, 2018): spiritual consciousness is a radical act of vulnerability as well as self-empowerment, acknowledging and exposing individual consciousness to explicit, external spiritual forces directly influencing physical reality (cf. Harris, 2017: 175).

Research on the effects and psychotherapeutic properties of ayahuasca have revealed the imperative function of a culturally and socially integrated spiritual ontology; an imperative recognised and practiced for generations in indigenous ayahuasca traditions. The absence of such integrative frameworks increases susceptibility to therapeutically counterproductive outcomes, such as ego inflation, depersonalisation, social isolation, and spiritual bypass (cf.

Frecska, 2019). The radical de-individualisation of consciousness requires a spiritually integrated cultural and social order to provide a social and symbolic framework, in which a methodological practice with the institutional authority of tradition guides the radical departure from individual consciousness, and its subsequent re-integration within the individual's personal, social, and cultural context.

3.2.3 Translating implicit experience

Contemporary ayahuasca research has produced a variety of academic discourses attempting to make sense of the ayahuasca experience and its practices. Roberts delineates five general categories of discourses, which may overlap (cf. Roberts, 2017: 5-7). There is the primary, scientific discourse, pertaining to the neurochemical and psychopharmacological effects of ayahuasca; the secondary, psychotherapeutic discourse pertaining to its therapeutic properties; the New Age discourse pertaining to ayahuasca's contextual place in a global market of imported spiritual practices and disciplines; the social-political discourse pertaining to the socially and culturally disruptive effects of ayahuasca practices which erode the secular, neoliberal conditions of modern society; and the ecological discourse, which pertains to the experience of transpersonal consciousness of interdependent social and environmental systems. While all of these discourses contribute crucial knowledge to the study of contemporary ayahuasca practices, they remain largely confined to conventional, modern analytic dualities of nature and culture, subject and object, personal and social, which are poorly equipped to describe an experiential phenomenon fundamentally characterised by its effects of dissolving conceptual boundaries and binary oppositions (Ibid: 7).

These discourses are all prone to the same reductive fallacy: of approaching ayahuasca practices as an object which may reveal a natural or social order of their apparent sacred order; as it is implicitly determined and explicitly practiced. They result in a variety of attempts to reduce sacred order from symbolic form, to an individually perceivable and immediately representable model of social or natural order. They inevitably neglect to epistemically consider that "...the symbolic forms are universal and represent indispensable mechanisms for contention and integration of such experiences of the 'beyond' that reach trans-cultural, archetypal realms." (Mabit, 2007: 2). Epistemically, evidence-based science accepts all forms of observation verified by a subjective consensus (cf. Fadiman, 2016: 210), and universally conscious symbolic forms are institutionally recognised and methodologically applied in psychological research and psychotherapeutic practice (cf. Roberts, 2017: 7-8). A universal order of consciousness beyond the natural or social conception of it, is readily apparent and

accepted. Recognising this universal order of consciousness as a sacred order, however, proves difficult for the modern consciousness, because it threatens the identity of subject as well as species as the individual and singular authority of consciousness (cf. Mabit, 2007: 6). A sacred order of consciousness implies that consciousness is neither a social concept, nor an unconscious causality of nature. Sacred order implies that consciousness is a part of an implicit, ‘natural’ order, which is manifested in the social order of human consciousness.

Traditional shamanic practices do not exercise a total submission to empirically natural order of form, because the practices recognise that the individual consciousness, including its individual agency, is a part of this natural order. Culture is then not a by-product of predetermined natural order; it is the social manifestation of the order itself. The division of nature and culture, of nature as a cultural concept and culture as a natural product, is ontologically restored by the spiritual reality in which individual consciousness may recognise itself as a part of a greater order of consciousness. In the simplest terms, consciousness is a *part* of nature, not a *product* of it, apart from it. Nature does not simply constitute interpretative forms, it produces interpretation and signification within a variety of forms, including cultural ones. Perhaps the most radical demonstration of this action is the regular accounts of individuals seeking and receiving explicit, externally verifiable knowledge specific to their subjective conditions and requirements, from ayahuasca itself (cf. Harris, 2007; Narby, 1999).

Like any mode of knowledge production, traditional shamanic ayahuasca practices’ implicit modes of knowledge production exist within and are informed by social, cultural, and institutional context. Ayahuasca practices demonstrate properties of therapeutic transformation, personal and transpersonal growth, and social cohesion, in a variety of contexts; in syncretic churches, institutional, neo-shamanic, and even commercial practices. Nevertheless, regulatory challenges remain significant in the absence of cultural and social organs facilitating safe practices and individual integration. Traditions of shamanic, sacred plant practices present a trans-cultural, trans-historical methodology for these implicit modes of knowledge production, yet to appeal exclusively to these practices is to limit them as a historical object; a singularity with no correspondence to other modes of knowledge production, implicit or explicit. Implicit modes of knowledge production are not oppositional, but complimentary to explicit modes. Contemporary scientific and academic research on psychedelics and their traditional as well as modern practices, have and continue to produce verifiable models of neurochemical and pharmacological action and social and cultural structures, creating stable, external, representative doubles of the knowledge produced and exercised in sacred plant practices for millennia. The complimentary nature of these modes of

knowledge production is most evident in the psychotherapeutic application of ayahuasca, where research continues to be informed from above as well as below; where it constitutes a shared space of theory and action, implicit and explicit modes of perception and conception.

Sacred plant practices and their shamanic traditions present at once a challenge and an opportunity to contemporary psychedelic research. These traditional practices constitute a methodological challenge to the modern scientific paradigm, because they refuse to reveal their causality in either naturalised or socialised methodological reduction. Simultaneously, they present a radical research opportunity, not as an object but as a methodological research paradigm for implicit modes of knowledge production. These practices are arguably critical research practices in and for themselves, investigating the interpolated conditions of physical, psychological, and spiritual consciousness. In their ritual and ceremonial forms, their ontological precedence, their cultural and mythological codex, these practices present a sophisticated method of implicit knowledge production within consciousness itself and its many states.

The critical precedence for such methods of implicit knowledge production is regularly indicated anthropological, ethnographic, and even sociological and philosophical discourses, but implicit knowledge production is also arguably the precondition of every explicit mode of knowledge production. Consciousness, and consciousness of itself, is the implicit mode of knowledge production on which every discourse, naturalised, socialised, or deconstructed is founded. It is also the ultimate method of verifying every explicit mode of knowledge production, as regardless of how consciousness may be explicitly reduced, it cannot escape its own implicit conditions, whether those conditions be modelled as inescapable, unconscious causality, or consciously impenetrable freedom. This apparent paradox of the interdependent implicit and explicit conditions of consciousness is the condition as well as the agency of discourse. The ritual and symbolic forms of shamanic traditions of implicit knowledge production in altered states of consciousness, are not simply convenient metaphors for implicit knowledge production, but an active practice of making implicit social knowledge explicit by staging a transpersonal, cosmic theatre responding to “...one’s spurning of the social bond itself, in a violent enhancement of the mythology of the self-nourishing asocial individual who thereby motivates society’s counterblow of sorcery.” (Taussig, 1987: 394).

Knowledge production is a process of decoding and encoding information in a transferrable, stabilised state, and every good researcher knows that the transferrable efficacy of information is dependent on its narrative context. The shamanic world-view, its practices of transpersonal states of consciousness, and its ritual, disciplinary methodology, present a

remarkably effective method of producing and transmitting implicit knowledge in recognisable social and cultural forms. In fact, modern Western society is one of very few cultures that do not have an institutional, if not cultural relationship to altered states of consciousness and implicit modes of knowledge production (cf. Bourguignon, 1973: 11). These practices function as a framework for the individual integration of implicit knowledge, as well as a critical social and cultural oversight and regulation of how individual, implicit experiences are made explicit in social and cultural forms. The traditional precedence of implicit knowledge production provides a kind of social and historical method of ‘peer-review’, ensuring a governing order of social, cultural, and sacred signification. Mabit argues that this does not reflect a cultural order submitting individual experience as secondary to a primary social order:

The cultural horizon of these ethnic forms is found in the *perpetual reestablishment of equilibrium and reciprocity among individuals*, between the tribes, among the group or the individual and nature, and finally among these and the invisible world of the spirits. (Mabit, 2007: 2, emphasis added).

Modern psychedelic research is largely defined by the precursor of its regulatory challenges; the social, cultural, spiritual forms of shamanic sacred plant practices present a remarkably effective regulatory body that precisely addresses these challenges. The individual, social, and spiritual organs of the body of the practice, provide complimentary oversight, regulation, and integration of their respective functions. The sacred relationship to nature and the reality of its spiritual consciousness manifested in its sacred plants, prevents the corruption of its order by individual motives by holding it accountable to a transpersonal, trans-cultural authority external to individual and social consciousness; the sacred order of nature itself.

3.2.4 The critical urgency of evolving cultural contexts

Even in the event of a global, systematic regulation of the safety and integrity of ayahuasca practices, this form of institutionalisation presents a dilemma for the therapeutic efficacy of such practices. The therapeutic, transformative potential of any psychotherapeutic model, and particularly models of non-ordinary state psychotherapy, relies on an interrelated process of preparation, transformation, and integration. In the case of psychedelically assisted psychotherapy, the subject’s set and setting play an imperative role in the transformative potential of their therapeutic process. Particularly in the case of ayahuasca, the rigid dietary and ritual protocols of traditional practices reflect their critical function as not simply a singular

treatment or methodology, but in fact a social-medical codex informing every aspect of the practice's conditions. In the absence of traditional and cultural context, implicit knowledge production produces a vulnerability of reckless application, substituting all knowledge production for individual modes of implicit experience. It also leads to the erroneous, disenchanting assumption that these implicit modes of knowledge production are equivalent to personal intuition.

The efficacy of such practices is then informed by the social and cultural context of their application. While the mainstreaming of psychedelic research and therapy has provided a critical methodological and institutional framework for such practices, it has also exposed them to a disruptive secular reduction, in addition to the already devastating impacts of commercialisation and commodification of their integrity. Advancements in the neurochemical and psychopharmacological methods of research have provided radical new perspectives and approaches to investigating consciousness and its implicit modes of knowledge production, yet their conception of consciousness remains as an individual, subjective object of study. Psychedelics have then presented a remarkable method for studying consciousness and observing its altered states and neurochemical correlates, yet research remains bound by a causal methodology of explicit material action; a naturalised reduction dismissing the critical interaction and impact of social and cultural correlates on the naturalised, materialised conception of consciousness.

The problem with this methodology is that it attempts to delineate complex psychosocial and cultural contexts to naturalised or socialised causalities, when in fact these contexts are not cultural derivatives but are in themselves part of a methodological practice. Their continued reduction makes it increasingly difficult to meaningfully contextualise a globalised market of syncretic and modern practices within a social and cultural framework, particularly because of the common foreign assumption of spiritual relativism, mistaking spiritual consciousness for divine consciousness (cf. Mabit, 2007; Onanya Joni, 2018). The implicitly sacred status of ayahuasca and other sacred plant practices is

not merely a bit of anthropological esoterica. It is clear that we are dealing with a psychobiological capacity available to all societies, and that, indeed, a vast majority have used (...) primarily in a sacred context. (Bourguignon, 1973: 11).

Psychedelics are then a problematic object of study and cultural import, because they exist in materially reducible and recognisable form, giving them the appearance of an ideal object of isolated study and commodification. This makes psychedelic substances prone to being

scientifically and commercially institutionalised as a therapeutic commodity, as they can be quite literally extracted from their natural environment and cultural context. In the absence of social and cultural context, the implicit nature of the psychedelic experience may, and often does, pander to the naïve subject's culturally determined psychological self-conception of individualism, providing the temporary therapeutic relief of a spiritual bypass inevitably followed by a relapse, creating a misguided sense of dependency on the psychedelic experience itself for therapeutic transformation.

The problematic occurrence of counter-therapeutic psychological offshoots in psychedelic therapy research is also reflected in the modern cultural history of psychedelics, echoing the same conclusion: in the absence of grounding social, cultural, and spiritual traditions and practices serving as a methodological framework, psychedelic substances and the experience they afford are only as therapeutically efficient as the subject's own self-conception allows them to be. Psychedelics may, and often do, have profoundly transformative and therapeutic effects on subjects naïve to any cultural context of altered states of consciousness; the lack of preconceived expectation can in many ways be an ideal ontological point of departure for the psychedelic experience and its transformative potential. In the shamanic world-view, this is simply a process of the subject learning from the source: the sacred, plants themselves and their spirits teaching the interdependency of physical, psychological and spiritual realities. However, administering psychedelics in an institutionalised, secularised and commercialised context reduces the experience to a commodity; a method of escaping one's own psychic reality instead of integrating with it. In this case, psychedelics simply become another coping mechanism, along with commercial mindfulness workshops and meditation apps (cf. Purser, 2019), subduing the psychological symptoms of a more fundamental psycho-social emergency.

While shamanic ayahuasca traditions constitute social, cultural and disciplinary frameworks for their practices, the commercial market of authentic appeal continues to enforce the assumption of spiritual relativism; that these complex social and cultural practices can be extracted and exported as a therapeutic essence corresponding with the foreign subject's cultural and ontological self-conception. The documented therapeutic productivity of syncretic, institutional, and neo-shamanic ayahuasca practices, explicitly demonstrates that these practices may be subjectively adaptable outside of their traditional indigenous context, but in the absence of a grounding tradition of social, cultural and spiritual integration, the commercial popularity of ayahuasca as a source of therapy and personal insight remains largely defined as a highly individualised intentions and desire. The cultural, social and

mythological frameworks of traditional ayahuasca practices facilitate not only individual integration, but also a communal structure in which the individual's integration serves a social purpose and benefit (cf. Mabit, 2007: 2). The challenge for modern ayahuasca practices and their psychotherapeutic application is then that the market is driven by largely individualistic interests of personal therapeutic healing and growth, and naïve consumers approach traditional practices as simply a service for their own individual benefit. These interests disregard the critical importance of integrating the individual experience into a greater social and communal order, of which their experience is not simply a subject, but an integral part of its constitution.

The compulsive individualisation and internalisation of significance that characterises modern commercial and neo-shamanic ayahuasca practices, is arguably a product of both the highly individual-oriented constitution of modern consciousness, as well as the re-enforcing effects the psychedelic experience may have on this compulsive individualism. In the absence of appropriate social and cultural context, these radical states of altered consciousness can lead to de-socialisation and depersonalisation (cf. Frecska, 2019), dismissing external conditions in the assumption that all conditions are a product of individual internal conditions, and can only be addressed therein. These psychological offshoots of the psychedelic experience reflect a modern culture of individualism attempting to reduce the critical efficacy of complex practices to an individual convenience; a product. By stripping away tradition and discipline, only an empty husk of a practice remains with none of the social and cultural tenets that ensure its efficacy and integration.

Even as a therapeutic tool, ayahuasca and other psychedelics are prone to commodification and commercialisation, becoming defined and used as a consumer product; a symptom-suppressive crutch perpetuating the spiritual bypass of issues that remain unaddressed in the absence of integration. This indicates, once again, that the absence of social and cultural integrative practices, the empty self of modern individualism (cf. Cushman, 1990) cannot not enrich its spiritual poverty internally; on its own individual, self-referential terms and conditions (cf. Mabit, 2007). Consciousness of self, and self-conception, are not determined by individual consciousness alone, but by social, cultural, and environmental conditions, and more fundamentally by the conscious, cultured relationship to these conditions. This ontological position has been theoretically explored in a variety of ethical, political, philosophical and environmental discourses, perhaps most notably in the term 'deep ecology' coined by philosopher Arne Næss, who proposed the

Rejection of the man-in-environment image in favour of *the relational, total-field*

image. Organisms as knots in the biospherical net or field of intrinsic relations. An intrinsic relation between two things *A* and *B* is such that the relation belongs to the definitions or basic constitutions of *A* and *B*, so that without the relation, *A* and *B* are no longer the same things. The total-field model dissolves not only the man-in-environment concept, but every compact thing-in-milieu concept (Næss, 1973: 95).

Similar to the shamanic ontology, this proposal attempts to understand reality and consciousness of it in a holistic order, including transpersonal and transcultural perception and consciousness (cf. von Stuckard, 2004: 783). Discourses on deep ecology are met with critiques of assuming a purely theoretical paradigm without substantial, measurable evidence, making them prone to the fallacy of assumed social and cultural relativism in scientific research (cf. Wilber, 1998: 27-28). Traditional shamanic practices of implicit knowledge production provide an evidentiary precedence for methodologically investigating consciousness as a holistic constitution of subjective relationships to social, cultural and environmental conditions. Decades of sustained therapeutic research and practices have demonstrated that ayahuasca is therapeutically efficient when its practices utilise social, cultural, and environmental frameworks in the diagnosis as well as the treatment of illnesses and disorders. These practices serve to diagnose imbalances in the ecology individual consciousness, and provide the tools, guidance, and support necessary for the individual to restore balance by way of their own consciousness and their conscious relationships to individual, social, and environmental conditions.

Ayahuasca practices are effective sources for therapeutic treatment of PTSD, addiction, depression and anxiety, because they address the social and cultural causes of these conditions, as well as the individual relationship to said conditions. For all its efforts to mainstream, psychedelic research and therapy remains latent with a political agency in their identification of social, cultural, and political conditions as the underlying cause of social and mental health crises, and their implicitly proposed course of action: adapt social, political, and cultural conditions driven by compassion, not competition; integration, not domination; interpolation, not opposition. Such conditions are readily modelled and available in traditional as well as modern histories; adapting to them is an individual choice, which can be made in the context of research as well as practice. The contemporary culture of institutional psychedelic research reflects this, as the popularity as well as critical significance of this research has illustrated the need for a modern conception of consciousness which is both scientifically and methodologically investigated, and simultaneously informed by a social and institutional culture of the investigation and exploration of consciousness in its many states. Metzinger has

introduced the concept of *Bewusstseinskultur*, a ‘consciousness culture’, as a not merely academic but also practical approach to evaluating conscious experience intersubjectively, socially as an available technique or technology, and anthropologically as an expansion of our own naturalised and socialised definitions of self and society (cf. Fink, 2018: 2). Hopefully, this will be one step of many towards a truly critical modern culture of research; recognising and integrating other traditions of knowledge production and research on consciousness.

CONCLUSIONS

In spite of the broad range of this thesis' discourse, its singular intention is to articulate the current ontological and epistemological evolution of our social as well as institutional culture, as it manifests in the case of ayahuasca practices and psychedelic, non-ordinary state psychotherapy. One is not the case of the other; they are not examples or essences of one another. Both are irreducible as disciplinary cases, they are contemporary phenomena disrupting and expanding known assumptions of social and natural reality. Clinical research on psychedelic experiences and altered states of consciousness continue to profoundly inform the scientific conception and study of consciousness in its neurochemical composition. Clinical research methodologies including interdisciplinary datasets allow for unprecedented correlative analysis of substance, consumer, and context, and the interdependency of their therapeutic efficacy. Yet the implications of this research are only as relevant as the narrative with which they are told. The default narrative of this research remains institutional, while its results demonstrate the critical social and environmental agency and urgency beyond its institutional narrative. Research needs to be more than interdisciplinary: it needs to acknowledge its own agency, and the urgency of its circumstances. More importantly, it must be capable of recognising the nature of its own effort, of knowledge production, wherever it may appear; explicitly or implicitly.

Scientific research methodologies are in a process of inward as well as outward expansion. Our ability to critically and methodologically investigate the external world, as well as our internal consciousness of it, has grown exponentially in recent history. Old disciplinary patterns of specialisation are evolving into new, interdisciplinary research methods revealing the interdependency of internal and external reality in our representations of it as well as the production of our knowledge of it. The globalisation and disciplinary homogenisation of knowledge production has reached its inevitable limit, constituting its crisis of knowledge (cf. Latour, 1993).

The effects of this crisis are particularly arresting in the case of sacred plant practices, which demonstrate the critical, indispensable value of these traditions as modes of knowledge production, in the severe vulnerabilities exposed by their absence. Risk factors and regulatory challenges of ayahuasca practices are largely produced by the absence of educated and culturally informed ayahuasca practices, and the cultural conditions of ayahuasca practices are not easily determined within conventional conceptual boundaries.

The spread and flow of culture in a world that is decreasingly defined by locality and geographic boundaries presents a clear need to re-conceptualize, or 're-imagine' if you will, established notions of culture, tradition, civic rights, and citizenship. (...) Culture is dynamic and intangible, with cultural forms and practices having spread historically both through conquest and peaceful contact, and occurring through economic as well as other systems of exchange. (Feeney and Labate, 2014: 119).

By refusing to be historicised or naturalised, ayahuasca practices manifest their ontological status as living cultures and practices of research. When these practices are examined as models of knowledge production as opposed to objects, and their cultures are understood by way of their active modalities of adaptation and integration as opposed to their social archaeology, the divides between traditional and modern, indigenous and global, is bridged by their shared disciplinary agencies and responsibilities. The cultural urge and social instinct to evolve the epistemic parameters of knowledge production is reflected in the modern research on and proliferation of ayahuasca practices, and the critical implications this has for the field of psychotherapeutic research and practice.

Implications for the field – globalisation and homogenisation of knowledge

The highly politicised nature of psychedelic research poses a unique challenge to its modern researchers. Scientific and academic research on psychedelics and sacred plant practices have profoundly informed our knowledge of consciousness, its transpersonal evolution and therapeutic growth. The research is essential for understanding and maximising the therapeutic value of these practices, and safely regulating the proliferation of modern practices while critically recognising the profound value of traditional practices. The research recognises that its most indispensable knowledge resource is the traditional practices with generations of experience, and an integrated culture of altered states of consciousness. Yet even this effort to adapt and integrate traditional knowledge can and has been co-opted by commercial interests (cf. Van Dyck, 2015), whose vision of regulation consists of a commodified and gentrified market of practices.

The need for regulation is critical and urgent, but research appealing exclusively to reductive empiricism plays directly into such commercial interests. Psychedelic research must then be conscientious of the epistemic and political presentation of its findings, which is to say it must choose to position itself as politically active or passive. Passive research runs a high

risk of misrepresentation and co-option; politically active research must study the reality of modern ayahuasca practices, and transparently acknowledge the influential authority of traditional practices whose methodological incompatibility run the risk of discrediting the objective merit of the research. The research must then establish its credibility on the merits of the collective recognition of its therapeutic and social value, and of the ideological integrity of its intent of therapeutic growth and transformation; of healing. It is harder to misrepresent and commercially or politically co-opt research that is presented by an organised body of independent researchers, coherently and methodologically demonstrating the critical efficacy of traditional and integrated practices as modes of knowledge production, as well as methods of regulation. On the other hand, appealing to the preconceived authority of traditional practices, simply perpetuates the anthropological objectification and cultural fetishisation of these practices. To recognise them as living research practices within an epistemic and ontological tradition, requires integrating modern and traditional modes of knowledge production.

It appears that modern psychedelic research is tasked with the impossible balancing act of appealing to scientific empiricism and simultaneously validating the living history of sacred plant practices and their shamanic ontology. This constructed polarity between modern and traditional, wherein the modern sanctions are granted for otherwise illicit substances on the grounds of their scientifically proven merits, carries the problematic implication that only a modern, pharmaceutical regulation of these sacred plants and their practices can provide the necessary regulatory framework;

a belief that not only ignores different cultural understandings of health, wellness, and illness, but which also ignores the realities of global wealth disparities, and the impact that an attack on various ethnomedicines will have on impoverished and developing communities. (Feeney and Labate, 2014: 122)

This false dichotomy between modern and traditional is resolved by repositioning the discursive coordinates of the research within the common ground of modern and traditional research practices, namely their social and therapeutic agency. This universally shared condition of research's social and cultural commitments, reconciles the modern-traditional divide, presenting a singular field of research and practice: healing.

The therapeutic properties of ayahuasca practices reveal the shared historical and cultural grounds of modern and traditional modes of knowledge production, as well as by the

adaptive and syncretic patterns of these practices' cultural evolution and global proliferation. Ayahuasca's psychotherapeutic properties demonstrably pertain to a trans-cultural order of shamanic healing practices with a trans-historical precedence of traditions. These traditions have and continue to evolve in their increasingly globalised context, demonstrating the contextual adaptability of their efficacy. Nevertheless, indigenous ayahuasca practices and sacred plant traditions remain a critical authority on practices of implicit knowledge production in altered states of consciousness. As historical and experiential authorities of altered states, their indispensable lesson to the modern globalisation of practices is first and foremost the sacred status of their practice, and of nature itself. Even the most scientifically informed and educated mind will, upon encountering ayahuasca, quickly if not instantly run out of reductive terms to describe and explain what they are experiencing. Like all therapeutic work, psychedelic therapy requires integration; contextualisation; a complimentary and inclusive culture of such states and practices. Ayahuasca's sacred status is not symbolic in the conventional, referential sense; or rather, its point of reference is not external, but internal and implicit. It is an essential and unconditional condition of ayahuasca itself, manifested in ritual and symbolic action. Without sacred symbols, or symbols whose sacred value are presumed to be relative, the authority of a 'sacred' symbol can be easily co-opted. In spite of the transformative effects ayahuasca has on consciousness, "These experiences clearly don't resolve a fairly predictable range of human frailties – mostly those relating to money, power and sex." (Harris, 2017: 265). The modern proliferation of ayahuasca research and practices will never resolve the damage done by globalisation, appropriation, and commodification, on the terms which created these conditions. The resolution of this narrative requires cultural evolution: adapting and integrating all resources of knowledge production, implicit and explicit, within a culture which recognises the value of living traditions as well as its own entrenchment in historical conditions, and the trans-historical, trans-cultural agency of knowledge production. Most of all, it requires the cultural recognition of the sacred as an empirical condition of consciousness, indispensable to its healing, growth, and transformation.

Implications for culture – globalisation and homogenisation of culture

Ontological commitments are informed by cultural context as well as subjective experience. Institutionalised, these commitments have larger political and epistemic consequences for the productivity of research. The divide between shamanic and modern ontologies is often characterised as a binary opposition of enchanted and disenchanted conceptions of reality, reflected in opposing methodologies of knowledge production. This

divide is largely a product of colonial and modernist world-views, characterising indigenous ontologies and practices of knowledge production as 'primitive', lacking the modern rationality and technology providing a 'sophisticated', disenchanted ontology and explicitly empirical mode of knowledge production.

In spite of remarkable shifts in modern society and spiritual culture, this image of religion and spirituality as a primitive, pre-scientific method of explaining the world, has persisted, not necessarily as an empirical fact but as a haunting doubt in the modern, disenchanted consciousness; that religion is a necessary spiritual illusion for the sake of social and cultural order. Yet the disenchanted consciousness retains a suspicion stronger than this doubt: that there is a natural, sacred order of which it is unconsciously a part of, that it may become a conscious participant of by way of a spiritual awakening. In its efforts to reduce and dispel any trace of potentially enchanted reality, the modern scientific pursuit of knowledge has in fact revealed consciousness' resilience to disenchantment. Consciousness may never be fully disenchanted, because by acknowledging its own disenchantment it must also continue to perpetually acknowledge the possibility of enchantment; the irreducible and implicit validation of conscious experience.

The divide between modern and shamanic conceptions of reality is then ontological as well as epistemic and cultural. Modern scientific methods of knowledge production do not reject implicit experience, but require explicitly corroborative data in order to validate it. This explicit process of verification and validation is due to the social responsibility of modern scientific research as part of a state institution. Yet this process is nevertheless a conceptual placeholder for the implicit process of conscious, experiential verification and validation. An enchanted world-view reveals itself within its culture, whether it be driven by the suspicion of enchantment within disenchanted reduction, or embraced as an integral ontological foundation of its culture.

This inherent quality of consciousness as enchanted, if only by proximity to its suspicion of its own enchantment, has manifested itself under the post-modern conditions of globalised and commodified spiritual cultures and belief systems. The growing demand for cultural alternatives to the modernist mythology of secular divinity, separating sacred and social from profane and political (cf. Thomas, 2005: 26-27), has settled in an ambiguous market of religious pluralism and holistic spiritualism that serves as a mythological and cosmological representation substituting social discontent for spiritual self-actualisation. Shamanic traditions and sacred plant practices in particular, such as ayahuasca, are then

uniquely revealing because they demonstrably retain their aura of authenticity (cf. Benjamin, 1972) even in the process of syncretic adaptation and evolution of modern practices.

Traditional and modern ayahuasca practices may have distinguished cultural characteristics, but share a common ontology: a sacred, natural order of consciousness, of which human consciousness is a part, which may be accessed and engaged through transpersonal dimensions of spiritual consciousness. The modern disenchanted desire for enchantment is the desire to be consciously engaged in a sacred relationship with a natural order of consciousness (cf. Metzner, 1999: 36-37), a practice largely absent and unknown to the modern consciousness and its secularised social order of abolished ritual and symbolic action (cf. Mabit, 2007: 1-2). It may appear that the modern consciousness cannot conceive of itself as anything but disenchanted, so long as it conceives and defines enchantment by its own assumed state of disenchantment.

Ayahuasca practices may allow modern consciousness to affirm its own sacred value as a personal manifestation of transpersonal consciousness, but without available social and cultural resources to aid the integration of this affirmation, they may also reinforce its compulsive individualism. A cultural context that acknowledges the transformative power of these practices with humility and respect, can in turn nourish the individual consciousness' transpersonal growth, becoming consciously aware of its own presence beyond the limited conditions of ordinary-state consciousness, and recognising itself within a natural order of consciousness that precedes any binary reductions of nature and culture; conscious and unconscious; mind and matter.

Redefining consciousness from something uniquely human, to a quality of nature itself, appears to be a drastic ontological leap for modern consciousness; yet ayahuasca practices demonstrate precisely this ontological reality. They are practices informed by consciousness within nature itself, presenting a universal, trans-cultural order of consciousness which, more often than not, expands critical conceptions of natural and social orders attempting to define it. Hence critical discourses reach their limits of external representation of implicit experience, because their social, institutional responsibility does not allow them to appeal to any authority of knowledge other than their own representation, as a self-referential system. In turn, popular discourses are prone to relativistic fallacies, conveniently assuming that if there is a transpersonal, universal order of consciousness, then its particular social and cultural manifestations are simply interchangeable forms that are meant to be transcended, leaving aside "the thousands of years of experience and material recommendations for exploring the invisible world, internal or external, acquired by primordial peoples." (Mabit, 2007: 2). The

social and cultural order of traditional shamanic practices are not interchangeable forms, but a practice of informing implicit knowledge and of becoming explicit in social and cultural forms; a practice of the becoming of forms.

Ayahuasca practices are research practices, their methodology is constituted by their form: the disciplinary commitment, the physical purging linking somatic and psychic conditions, the shamanic, hero's journey of separation and integration, the continuous becoming of sacred forms, and the perpetual integration of transpersonal states of consciousness. They do not constitute a historical monomyth so much as a trans-historical and trans-cultural 'protomyth', that continuously re-establishes conscious relationships between otherwise disparate forms; self and other; nature and culture; physical, psychic, and spiritual reality (cf. Mabit, 2007: 2). Therein lies the therapeutic, transformative power of ayahuasca practices: the power to facilitate the implicit encounter with the sacred within, by relating the sacred power to the individual consciousness and its transpersonal stake in visible and invisible reality. Ultimately, it is the individual *relationship* to ayahuasca, and its measure of integration within personal, social, and cultural conditions, that defines the therapeutic properties of its practices.

Future research requires interdisciplinary methods of investigation, and intersubjective discourses which, rather than delineate political, social, cultural, and environmental discourses from their psychological and neuroscientific counterparts, articulates their co-dependency, and further informs a legislative framework for public as well as institutional practices that applies the full potential of interdisciplinary perspectives in order to not only secure safe, therapeutic and informed practices, but also discover the remarkable productive potential of interdisciplinary research and practice as well as implicit modes of knowledge production. As research becomes increasingly interdisciplinary, shamanism and traditional sacred practices of implicit knowledge production become increasingly relevant to post-colonial academia and the de-colonisation of modern research practices' historical biases. Once an institutional concern as a method of social and civil betterment, scientific practices are now a critical existential concern for survival. The responsibility of science to provide a nuanced, reflective discourse on reality and its conditions, must then include responses to the continued dematerialisation of our conditions, as the interdependency of physical, psychological and spiritual consciousness becomes critically apparent in the scientific investigation of consciousness.

Investigating psychedelic culture and therapy in the context of cultural studies, reveals the trans-cultural disciplinary core of the modern and traditional research practices concerned: healing and transformation. Therapy is the core; the discipline concerned. The ability to heal critical traumas, addictions, social disorders, depression and anxiety – this is how modern consciousness may become familiar with the traditions and methods of sacred plant practices and healing. But these therapeutic practices are inseparable from their wider social and cultural conditions, which present an even more significant responsibility than simply regulating therapeutic practice. How do we prohibit malpractice, how do we avoid exportation without context, how do we avoid commodification and perpetuation of the very destructive patterns of thought and behaviour that make us seek help from a higher power? How do we transfer the effective therapeutic use to a greater social and cultural context?

By respecting the core, therapy, and its source, consciousness itself, and by recognising the therapeutic, transformative healing power of these practices; the inherently nurturing spirit of nature; the process of self-empowerment. Ultimately, the critical divides between modern and traditional, enchanted and disenchanted, are historical *products* of the essential shared experience of trauma and growth:

It is not difficult to conceive of the notion that we have all been hurt and, perhaps unconsciously, martyred by the world in the process of our childhood, and in this way we have become a link in the transmission of what Wilhelm Reich used to call an ‘emotional plague’ infecting society as a whole. This is not only a modern psychoanalytic vision: a curse visiting generation after generation is something that has been known since antiquity. The notion of a sick society is the essence of the old Indian and Greek conceptions of our time as that of a ‘dark age,’ a ‘Kaliyuga’ - an age of great fallenness from our original spiritual condition. (Naranjo, 1994: 4)

The perpetual human quest of healing, growth, and transformation is neither a natural product of social conditions, nor a social consequence of natural forces. It is the psychic manifestation of consciousness continuously recognising its own nature, perpetually re-establishing its identity through relationships simultaneously separating and unifying consciousness with its implicit and explicit conditions.

The globalisation of knowledge and culture has driven modern consciousness’ inherent desire for sacred order amidst the spiritual poverty of its conditions, forcing traditional cultures of sacred practice to actively redefine and reinstate their relationship to the social and cultural

conditions of their globalisation (cf. Thomas, 2005: 26). “The evolving spiritual practices whose nexus is the ayahuasca tea exemplify well these trends and tensions of globalization.” (Tupper, 2008: 300). In the case of ayahuasca, these tensions are doubled by the practices’ ontological resistance to reigning social paradigms and power structures. At the same time, they verify what has been historically observed of power structures, implicit knowledge, and their inevitable potential for exploitation, commodification, and abuse. Therapy requires both the practice as well as the subject to take responsibility for the work of healing, growth, and transformation. This interdependent condition radically manifests in ayahuasca practices, wherein power is recognised in the ability to take responsibility for making implicit knowledge socially explicit; whether it be in sacred forms or simply in the intersubjective recognition of sacred experience.

Ayahuasca’s many ontological statuses constitute a network of social, natural, and discursive relationships, in which “criticism itself has to face a crisis because of these networks it cannot swallow.” (Latour, 1993: 6). Facing this crisis of reduction, criticism is left with no choice but to create new models and methods for understanding the rapidly expanding phenomenon of consciousness; its known and unknown states and properties. It remains to be seen what lasting forms emerge from this critical emergency: whether methods and paradigms of knowledge production will revert to their dangerous history of homogenisation, or whether modern consciousness will recognise itself and its own effort to grow in nature’s continuous process of forms becoming and departing, interrupting every illusion of order besides nature itself (cf. Taussig, 1987: 441); sacred and apparently silent except for its master plants, which reveal just how rich nature’s voice is if we only listen.

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