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**PSYCHEDELIC SHAMANISM:
AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Metzner, Ralph. Ayahuasca Human Consciousness and the Spirits of Nature. New York: Thunders Mouth Press, 1999.

Ayahuasca is an exceptionally psychoactive tea used in rituals by South American shamans. It entered into western culture through the *Yage Letters* of Allen Ginsberg and William Bouroughs, published in 1963, and is widely recognized by anthropologists as being the most powerful and widespread shamanic hallucinogen.

Ayahuasca tea is made by combining two plants -- one containing the hallucinogenic tryptamine alkaloid DMT, and the other containing the serotonin elevating and MAO inhibiting harmala alkaloids. Serotonin is normally catabolized in the body by MAO and therefore the MAO inhibitors present in Ayahuasca lead to an increase in endogenous [produced in the body] serotonin, which might explain the fact that Ayahuasca users are often very calm in the face of such intense visions.

Serotonin in high levels can induce vomiting and diarrhea, the basis for the purging action of Ayahuasca. This purging is usually experienced by the moderate level user as healing or liberating. However, if an individual is carrying a lot of toxins or is taking an SSRI such as Prozac, the purging can become extremely intense. Hence, before a ceremony, a strict diet is recommended or required. It calls for no sugar, caffeine, or salt, and minimum levels of foods containing tryptophan, which is usually found in carbohydrates.

Similar to serotonin, the DMT molecule is usually metabolized by MAO and not psychoactive when taken orally. When the MAO inhibitors are present, the DMT molecule reaches the brain, which is the key to unlocking the mystical.

Shamans are walking encyclopedias of medicinal botanical knowledge. They may have direct personal knowledge of hundreds or even thousands of plants, all gained by direct experience. They are unanimous in their assertion that they receive their knowledge as a direct gift from the spirits of the plants, the forests or the animals. Likewise, the healing results not so much from the plant drug, but by these spirits, which are invoked by the healer and expressed in their songs.

One significant element of virtually all shamanic curing ceremonies involving Ayahuasca is the song of the shaman, which is invariably considered essential to the success of the healing. Psychically, the rhythmic chanting, like a drum pulse, supports continuous movement through the flow of visions, and minimizes the likelihood of entrapment in frightening or seductive experiences. The songs of the *Ayahuasquero* are called *icaros*.

The Ayahuasca ceremony is usually performed in a circle, with an altar or fire in the center. An experienced elder or guide is always present. The event begins with a dedication of ritual space, followed by the cultivation of a respectful, spiritual attitude. Some variation of the "talking staff" is often used. Some ceremonies have almost no interaction between the participants during the time of expanded consciousness. There is usually a sharing of intentions as well as a meditation experience. Individuals may choose to participate in solitude of nature or expressive arts, such as drawing, painting, or journaling. After the ceremony, there is usually an integration ceremony of some kind, which may involve participants sharing something of the lessons learned and how they might be applied in their lives.

The two elements of the shamanic tradition that pose the most direct and radical challenges to the accepted Western worldview are the existence of multiple worlds or realms of consciousness, and the reality of spirit beings. "The experiences in modified states of consciousness are currently excluded from our materialistic, reductionist science." [12] Catholic priests, in the 17th century, were horrified and condemnatory, as they were of the sacred mushroom cults in Mexico. Perception of and communication with the spiritual essences and intelligences inherent in nature have been regarded with suspicion, or ridiculed as misguided enthusiasm or mysticism, as follows:

“It has become clear that there is a profound discontinuity in fundamental worldview and values between the Western industrialized world and the beliefs and values of traditional shamanistic societies and practitioners.” [4]

Western culture and the shamanic tradition do, however, agree on some issues. It is widely determined in the psychology field that set and setting are the most important determinants of experiences with psychedelics. Acceptance of the importance of set and setting is obvious in the shamanic approach to psychedelics. A ritual structure is essentially the conscious arranging of the set and setting for the purposes agreed upon by the shaman and the patient or ceremony participants.

Western psychologists, doing research and psychotherapy with psychedelics, came to similar conclusions about the nature of these experiences as did the shamans in the Amazon and ancient Mexico. In both approaches, there is recognition of the possibility of healing and resolution of personal problems. Both groups recognized that the personal experience of the psychotherapist or guide, with psychedelics, is an essential element of effective psychedelic therapy.

In Brazil, there are three organized churches in which Ayahuasca is used as the main sacrament -- the Santo Daime, the Uniao do Vegetal and the Barquina. These churches have made experiences with entheogenic plant medicines accessible to a large number of people in Brazil, the U.S. and Europe. The West's growing interest in shamanism and Ayahuasca represents part of a worldwide movement toward a more direct, spiritual connection to the natural world, as indicated by the following:

“The fact that Westerners will seek out a foul tasting jungle medicine, in a faraway environment and culture, a medicine which frequently leads to violent purging and can include terrifying visions, is a remarkable paradox, and yet the overwhelming majority of people who try it find in it the deepest spiritual realizations of their life as well as profoundly healing changes.” [42]

Knipe, Ed. Culture, Society, and Drugs. Illinois: Waveland Press, 1995.

In this book, Ed Knipe applies social science theories to help us understand drug use cross-culturally. He states that there has never been a culture, past or present, which did not alter consciousness in some way. He also details the many ways drugs have been used in diverse cultures and the various meanings drug experiences can have within the context of culture, including the way culture plays a role in managing a drug.

Knipe explains the political and economic reasons why drugs became illegal in the U.S., finishing with an analysis of prevention theory and specifically giving merit to the Hawkins and Catalano prevention theory. Hawkins and Catalano are two Utah professors whose system has been implemented by many city task forces. Their system is called the *Communities that Care Program* and it emphasizes risk and protective factors within four domains; individual/peer, family, school, and community. The theory states that 80% of the time, communities focus on risk instead of protective factors. Specifically, family bonding is not a priority.

Edward B. Taylor, 1832-1917, was a nineteenth century anthropologist who realized that belief in spiritual beings was a cultural universal. He called this spiritualist perspective Animism and proposed that all religions are attempts to explain the unexplainable.

The first evidence for shamanism in the old world is found in the appearance of masked figures on the walls of caves dated 20,000+ years ago.

“ Modern religions, while all staffed with bureaucratic priests, all make reference to raising the dead, curing the sick, and hearing and seeing things that others cannot, precisely the kind of activities that are attributed to shamans in those cultures which still have this form of religion.” [236]

Shamans use several techniques for achieving an altered state of consciousness, including hyperventilation, rhythmic drumming, dancing, fasting, and the consumption of drugs. The use of hallucinogens by the shaman is one method of seeing the supernatural cause of the condition the client wants to correct.

These next quotes show how well this book will fit into my research. Some cultures have the traditions and guidance to make use of drugs, like Ayahuasca and Peyote, and take meaning from the experience, whereas other cultures condemn them because the effects of the substance don't correlate with cultural norms, as described in the following:

“Where passivity is a dominant cultural theme, alcohol will be rejected and Marijuana will be accepted. In other words, the believed effect of the drug must be consistent with the norms for behavior in general or the drug will be rejected and those who use them will be defined as deviant, crazy or criminal.” [117]

“In a non-state society, the shaman deals directly with the supernatural. In state-level societies, a citizen's interaction with the supernatural, like all other power relationships, is through an established formal hierarchy. To the shaman, knowledge about the supernatural is revealed through direct consultation with the supernatural, with or without the aid of drugs. Confessions of such direct revelations in state-level societies are likely to be treated as mental illness or blasphemy [treason or sedition] because it violates the established hierarchical order.” [241]

Rabben, Linda. Brazil's Indians and the Onslaught of Civilization. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004.

When its dictatorship ended, Brazil struggled to pay interest on its foreign debt with aggressive mining, logging and ranching. All had massively destructive effects on the indigenous people. Both the Kayapo and Yanomami tribes have had confrontations with gold miners who invade their territory. As many as 300,000 gold miners are said to be wandering the Amazon region. These miners blast out riverbanks with high pressure hoses and separate out the gold with highly toxic mercury. Forest burning has contributed to air pollution, making Brazil one of the top ten polluters in the world. Satellite image of the fires burning in the Amazon show the perimeter of the indigenous areas. Where Indian land starts is where the fires stop.

According to a 1995 study, Brazil has the most unequal distribution of wealth of any country in the world. The richest part of the population held 45% of the country's income, while the poorest 50% held less than 2 percent. [14]

Of the 200 indigenous groups in Brazil, the most recognizable are the Yanomami. A widely shown film about the Yanomami, *Warriors of the Amazon*, stirred feelings of shame and sympathy, alternating between depicting them as beautiful and fragile, or unpredictable and menacing. They were the ultimate “others” -- frightening, mysterious and remote.

The Yanomami were also depicted in the films and books of anthropologist Napoleon Chagnon. Students and some of their instructors still cringe at one of his films about Yanomami drug usage. The film shows green mucus pouring out the nostrils of Yanomami warriors who are dancing and chanting under the influence of a hallucinogenic powder. “All the scholarly explanations [and the sight of Chagnon himself, befeathered and painted, prancing about in a drug induced trance] cannot eclipse that image.” [121]

In *Warriors of the Amazon*, when the Yanomami talk to the camera, they seem like normal people with typical motives and rationales. Yet, when they visit an enemy village, they appear “so startlingly strange as to be incomprehensible.” [122] In an early scene, a visiting shaman undertakes a cure, finding the sickness he once sent to torment his enemy in that enemy's knee. He proceeds to suck it out with gusto. He jumps up and spits out a silvery thread of mucus into his hand and holds up the trophy.

Davi Kopenawa is a shaman and leader of the Yanomami. He is an ambassador from the indigenous Fourth World to the First. It is because of his ability to make the issues of Brazil's Indians real to an international audience that he won the “United Nations Global 500 Award” in 1989. The following quotes are from Davi:

“What you whites call the environment is what remains of what you destroyed.”

“The creator has already left this world and gone far away and will not create anymore.” [128]
At the United Nations in December, 1992, Davi told the following to the General Assembly:

“The leaders of the rich, industrialized world think that they are the owners of the world. But shamans are the ones who have true knowledge. They are the real first world. And if their knowledge is destroyed, then the white people will die too. It will be the end of the world.” [129]

Like a true prophet, Davi has no hesitation about speaking truth to power.

Davi believes that whites are deaf and blind to the spiritual meaning of his words. “Whites think they are so intelligent because they mistake words for reality.” [128] For Davi, it is imperative to protect not only the forest, but also the shamans and their traditional knowledge. They are the ones who mobilize the guardian spirits that keep the heavens from falling down.

This book is from an academic press and I think it is a reliable source. The interesting comments taken from ethnographic films of the Yanomami using psychoactive snuff are very much in conversation with the piece I am developing.

Dr. Strassman, Rick. DMT the Spirit Molecule. Rochester, Vermont: Park Street Press, 2001.

DMT exists in all of our bodies and occurs throughout the plant and animal kingdom. It is part of the normal makeup of humans and other mammals, marine animals, grasses, peas, toads and frogs, mushrooms and molds, barks, flowers and roots. “Indeed it is getting to the point where one should report where DMT is not found, rather than where it is.” [42] The next quote is a good introduction to the DMT experience:

“While chemically simple, this spirit molecule provides our consciousness access to the most amazing and unexpected visions, thoughts, and feelings. It throws open the door to worlds beyond our imagination.” [42]

There are two main chemical families of psychedelic drugs: the phenethylamines and the tryptamines. Mescaline and MDMA are phenethylamines. Serotonin, DMT, LSD, Psilocybin [mushrooms], Ibogaine [an African psychedelic with highly publicized anti-addictive properties,] and 5 MeO DMT, are all tryptamines. In 1970, Congress passed a law placing it and other psychedelics into a highly restricted legal category.

DMT is the simplest of the tryptamine psychedelics. DMT and 5 MeO DMT are remarkably rapid in onset and brief in duration. They are described by the Doctor in the following quote:

“They produce a kaleidoscope display of visual hallucinations, a separation of consciousness from the physical body. And most remarkably a feeling of “the other” somewhere within the hallucinatory world to which this remarkable molecule allows the user entrance.” [2]

Hallucinogen is the most common medical term for psychedelic drugs. However, while perceptual effects of psychedelics are usual, they are not the only effects, nor are they necessarily the most valued. The visions may actually be distractions from the more sought-after properties of the experience, such as intense euphoria, profound intellectual or spiritual insights, and the *dissolving of the body’s physical boundaries* -- a phenomenon that is very interesting to me as a researcher.

Psychedelics exert their effects by a complex blending of three factors: set, setting, and drug, as follows:

Set is our own makeup, both long term and immediate. It is our past, our present and our potential future; our preferences, ideas, habits, and feelings. Set also includes our body and brain.

Setting is who or what is or isn’t in our immediate surroundings; the environment we’re in, whether natural or urban, indoor or outdoor; the quality of air and ambient sound around us, and so on. Setting also includes who is with us while we take the drug, whether they are a friend or a stranger, relaxed or tense, a supportive guide or a probing scientist.

“A spirit molecule is not spiritual in and of itself. It is a tool, or a vehicle. Think of it as a tugboat, a chariot, a scout on horseback. Something to which we can hitch our

consciousness. It pulls us into worlds known only to itself. We need to hold on tight, and we must be prepared, for spiritual realms include both heaven and hell, both fantasy and nightmare. While the spirit molecule's role may seem angelic, there is no guarantee it will not take us to the demonic." [55]

DMT is closely related to serotonin. Thirty years ago, Japanese scientists discovered that the brain actively transports DMT across the blood-brain barrier into its tissues. The Doctor states:

"I know of no other drug that the brain treats with such eagerness. If DMT were only an insignificant, irrelevant by-product of our metabolism, why does the brain go out of its way to draw it into its confines? Although the brain denies access to most drugs and chemicals, it takes a particular and remarkable fancy to DMT. It is not stretching the truth to say that the brain hungers for it." [52]

This book is written by an MD and it is the culmination of a ten-year clinical research project. I feel that it is a valid text though it is not published by an academic press. It gets at the science of the mystical experience. The book states that DMT is most abundant in plants of Latin America and that humans there have known of its amazing properties for some tens of thousands of years.

Owinsky, Bobby. The Recording Engineers Handbook. Boston, MA: Thomson Course Technology, 2005

I value this text for advice on how to record Conga and Djembe drums.

For Congas, a hard floor in a fairly large room is essential to getting a good "natural" sound. A hardwood floor is best but linoleum or tile will do. A small room is a bad idea for any hand drum except perhaps a talking drum, which doesn't rely so much on room tone. Congas often sound better directly on the floor than they do on a stand. Place a small diaphragm condenser or dynamic microphone about 1 to 2 inches in from the outer rim and about 12 inches above the drum. An alternative way to mic congas is with the mics below the rim and angled up and aiming at the player's eyes. Another option is to place two room mics 2 to 4 feet apart about six feet from the drums and 6 feet high.

For the Djembe, there really isn't a spot close to the drum where the mic can hear what the Djembe actually sounds like, so some distance is required. Some sound comes off of the bottom of the Djembe. The drum should be miked from 6 to 10 feet away. For close miking, a single mic placed 4 to 6 inches above the rim and angled across the drum head works well. To capture the extra low frequencies, place a mic underneath the drum aimed at the opening.

Online Sources

Drug War chronicle. Ayahuasca: Supreme Court Okays Use of Psychedelic Tea in Church Rituals. Date of access 3/11/06 Stopthedrugwar.org/chronicle/424/unanimousruling.shtml

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled unanimously that a U.S. branch of a Brazilian church may use Ayahuasca for its religious rituals. Ayahuasca contains DMT, a drug currently banned as a Schedule 1 drug under the Controlled Substances Act of 1970.

The ruling is a good indication that the court will keep the government from interfering in a church's religious practices. The ruling came in *Gonzales v. O Centro Espirita Beneficentes Uniao do Vegetal*. The church in New Mexico sued the federal government after customs officials seized a shipment of the tea. This article is very new and it appears that Ayahuasca has the green light in this country -- a somewhat surprising turn of events, in my opinion.

Instituto Socioambiental. Indian cultures from around the World. Indian-cultures.com/cultures/yanomamo.html Date of access 3/19/06

The Yanomamo have a population of 11,700 in Brazil and 15,193 in Venezuela, 1992. The Yanomami language has four subgroups; Yanoma, Sannuma, Ninam, Yanam. There is a continuous active genocide of these people. 62% of Yanomami tested positive for Malaria, which is introduced by gold miners. They have brought many other diseases including HIV. The Yanomami are believed to be the most primitive culturally intact people in the world -- literally a Stone Age tribe. They have been catalogued by anthropologists as neo-Indians with cultural characteristics dating back 8,000 years. Their numbering system is one, two, and more than two. They cremate the dead then crush and drink their bones in a final ceremony. They are one of the most successful groups in the Amazon at creating a balance and harmony with the environment. Their first known contact with white men came in 1929. The members of the tribe ideally marry a 'cross' cousin -- the son or daughter of a maternal uncle or paternal aunt.

The Yanomami smoke a hallucinogenic drug called Yopo. Yopo is made by grinding several natural roots and vines that are gathered in the rainforest. Smoking the drug is very uncomfortable, causing blinding head pain and nausea. After they have achieved a trance state, they communicate with the spirit world and relate what they are seeing with chanting and dancing. The Yopo is also taken in by being forcibly blown into the nasal cavities by another person through a long pipe-like object.

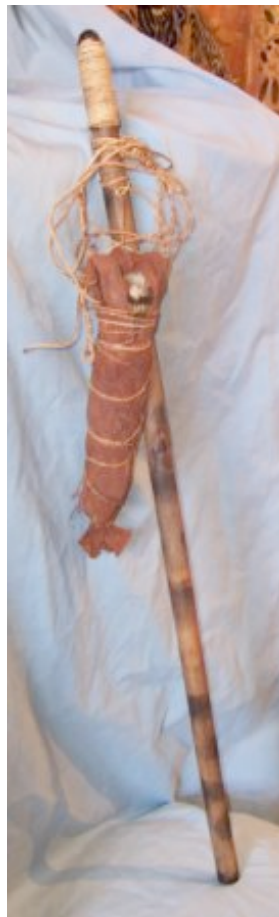
This article clarified some facts and figures that were missing from my research. It provided a lot of pictures and also mentioned Davi as one of the Amazon's most respected medicine men. It also provided additional information about the methods they use to ingest psychedelic snuff and provided some pictures of the Yopo pipes.



Yopo pipe 24" long



Yopo pipe
25 1/2" long



Yopo pipe 32" long



Jurema rootbark, a component of Ayahuasca tea.



Ayahuasca being prepared.



All of the necessary ingredients

