Etnografia. Praktyki, Teorie, Doświadczenia 2024, 10: 213–233
https://doi.org/10.26881/etno.2024.10.11

Anna Zadrożna https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3762-7512
University of Gdańsk

Shamans, plants, and spirits: Health and disease in the Plantocene

This is my planetary mission. To become one powerful tool
in service to all Humanity to reach its divine destiny[1]

Encounters

I met Agata through an internet forum dedicated to the use of psychoactive plants (hereafter referred to as "the Plants"). She was one of the most active members describing her experience of using the Plants to cure chronic sleeping disorders, anxiety, and depression. After we exchanged a few messages, she agreed to meet me on a video call. We spoke for almost two hours. Her first encounter with the Plants was in Colombia, where she went on a guided tour organized by a Polish man who acted as a guide and a translator. In retrospection, her experience was far from ideal. Over the course of several days she participated in eight ceremonies with various Plants facilitated by two different "providers" (*podawacze*). Already during the first ceremony both the indigenous "provider" and the Polish leader would disappear, leaving over sixty people lying in hammocks in the forest unattended. Not knowing what to do and what to expect, Agata wandered around the forest. She encountered a person clearly going through an intense experience: shedding her clothes, shouting, running around. She moved down the hill, where she started seeing various creatures. Not being sure whether they were animals or ghosts,

[1] For the source of the quotation, see: (AM 2011: 45).

she got scared and returned to her hammock, but the sense of discomfort and fear remained. In our conversation she described her journey to Colombia as difficult and challenging: she felt insufficiently prepared, informed, and taken care of. Her sleeping problems and depression did not completely go away. At the same time, however, she experienced something astonishing and magical, so she decided to continue her quest for healing in Poland.

Within the following year Agata attended various ceremonies with ayahuasca, so-called "Polish ayahuasca", psilocybin, and *Amanita muscaria*. In Poland she felt safer: the ceremonies were smaller, cosier, better organized, more ritualized, and structured. In each situation there were people responsible for what Agata and my interlocutors called "holding the space" (*trzymanie przestrzeni*), which included a wide range of skills, from responding to psychologically and socially challenging situations to communicating with spirits and various creatures during the ceremony. What distinguished a real "shaman" (*szaman/ka*) or a "healer" (*uzdrowiciel/ka*) from a "Plant provider" was, among other things, the ability to "hold a space," but whereas the "healer" was knowledgeable about social and psychological issues, a "real shaman" would take care of a person on a spiritual level and communicate with various spirits who appeared during a ceremony.

Returning to Agata, after one year of her "work with the Plants" she felt more courageous, determined, and positive towards life. For her, healing through the Plants was not about finding an immediate cure. It was a multifaceted, slow process of gradual transformation and overcoming depression with the support of the Plants and their spirits, who would listen to her and help her figure out better ways of living a conscious and fulfilling life. Like many other people I talked to, she felt that the Plants, especially ayahuasca, "came to her" and would remain present in her life long after the ceremonies had taken place. By healing herself through her "work" with the Plants, she would contribute to global healing.

***

This paper draws on fourteen in-depth interviews I conducted in the summer of 2016 in Poland with people who participated in or organized ceremonies with the Plants, as well as on an extensive analysis of secondary sources such as discussions in international and local online forums. The terms: „Plants of Power" (*Rośliny Mocy*), „Medicine" (*Medycyna*) or simply „the Plants" (*Rośliny*) were used by my interlocutors and refer here to several different plants, herbal mixtures, and fungi used individually and during ceremonies in Europe. These include the so-called "jungle ayahuasca," "Polish" or "Slavic" ayahuasca, two cacti: wachuma and peyote, as well as mushrooms: psilocybin and fly agaric mushroom (*Amanita muscaria*).

Among the fourteen interlocutors thirteen used ayahuasca, a psychoactive brew made of *Banisteriopsis caapi* vine (called ayahuasca) and *chakruna* (*Psychotria viridis*) leaf, which contain, respectively, harmala alkaloids and dimethyltryptamine. The brew, used for centuries in the Amazon Basin for healing and spiritual purposes (Labate, Cavran 2014; Labate, Cavnar 2018b; McKenna 2007; Narby 1999),

was popularized in the West in the 1990s and has spread globally in recent years (Fotiou 2016; Tupper 2009a). Four people, including Agata, used the so-called "Polish" or "Slavic" ayahuasca,[2] a brew in which Syrian rue (*Peganum harmala*) seeds are used instead of *Banisteriopsis caapi*, as its active ingredients: harmaline and harmine, which have monoamine oxidase inhibitor properties. Furthermore, all of my interlocutors used the mescaline-containing cactus wachuma (*Trichocereus pachanoi/Echinopsis pachanoi*), six consumed peyote, and eleven worked with various psychoactive mushrooms such as psilocybin mushroom (*Psilocybe semilanceata*), golden teachers (*Psilocybe cubensis*), and fly agaric mushroom (*Amanita muscaria*). In addition, some of my interlocutors took other psychoactive substances, such as LSD, for medicinal purposes.[3]

The use of the Plants for healing and spiritual purposes in the Amazon and beyond has been fairly well studied (i.e. Fotiou 2012; Labate, Cavran 2014; Winkelman 2014a; 2014b), and perception of the Plants as agentive beings, who "come" and "talk" to humans, is not uncommon. What I find worth exploring is the idea that the Plants *come* to people and *make* them do things, and that their agency extends beyond individual healing to planetary transformation. In this paper, I situate my interlocutors' reconceptualizations of health, healing, and illness through encounters with the Plants within the framework of the Plantocene: a speculative, imaginary epoch in which psychoactive plants are envisioned as the primary agents of planetary change and our shared future. I derive this concept from Christopher Kennedy's *Emergent Plantocene*, which he defines as an epochal alternative to the Anthropocene that "foreground[s] the value and wisdom of urban spontaneous plants, also known as weeds" (2020). While Kennedy emphasizes the resilience and agency of spontaneous urban vegetation, my focus is on psychoactive plants, their capacity for interspecies communication (Callicott 2013), and their envisioned potential to shape the planet and its future. My application of the Plantocene is both speculative and analytical. I do not assert that my research or Agata's healing occured *in* the Plantocene. Rather, I explore the possible ethical implications of the imagining the Plants as agentive and communicative beings capable of influencing human decisions and actions. This theme run through my research, and raises important questions about the ethical implications of attributing such agency to the Plants, and responsibility for (more-than-)human actions and choices.

This paper develops in the following way. Firstly, I discuss how people who use the Plants think about health, healing, and disease, and how they evaluate the role of the Plants in healing, given that personal healing is considered as situated in broader social and global processes. Secondly, I reflect on the Plants as agentive beings who have personalities and are able to communicate with humans not only

[2] Like the "jungle ayahuasca," the use of "Slavic ayahuasca" is illegal in Poland; it is listed as *Peganum harmala* among the group I-N narcotics.

[3] The use of LSD and other psychoactive substances for psychotherapeutic and other medicinal purposes has been studied quite extensively, especially in the US (Cardeña, Winkelman 2011; Labate, Cavnar 2018a).

during ceremonies but also prior to their consumption. Thirdly, I describe my interlocutors' relationships with the Plants, and I examine the role of ceremony organizers in facilitating encounters with the Plants and how they perceive different types of knowledge and of expertise – indigenous, Western – in healing. My interlocutors used the language of the Plants-as-personalities in parallel with scientific, medical descriptions of how the Plants "worked," and indigenous knowledge was seen as less suitable for addressing the challenges of modern world. Finally, I juxtapose the idea that the Plants are agents of global change, who guide humans in serving "one humanity" and bring healing to the planet with the attempts to nationalize and appropriate certain Plants and practices as "Slavic" or "native," and I critically discuss the ethical dilemmas that may arise from over-romanticizing the Plants as main agents of planetary change. I situate this particular ethnography within a broader discussion on the globalization and internationalization of the Plants, and the question of more-than-human agency and interspecies communication in shaping planetary futures.

Healing with the Plants

The therapeutic use of psychedelic plants has deep roots in indigenous traditions, while gaining transnational traction through modern mental health frameworks and spiritual tourism (Labate, Cavran 2014). In recent years, the increasing availability and popularity of the Plants in the West has led scholars to speak of a second wave of psychedelic renaissance and to open a debate on possible implications of the mainstreaming of the Plants (Labate et al. 2025). Nevertheless, while governments of some European countries, such as Portugal, the Czech Republic, and the Netherlands, have legalized the use of psychoactive plants (Neicun et al. 2019), their use has been criminalized in Poland and the list of prohibited species classified as drugs has been expanded (Simonienko et al. 2013). It does not mean that the Plants have not been used; on the contrary, the knowledge of them has been popularized through literature and popular media, and the reasons for their use are far more sophisticated than the popular image of psychedelics and recreational drugs would suggest (Tupper 2009a; 2009b). People turn to the Plants in search of mystical experiences and spiritual and personal growth (Lewis 2008), out of curiosity or, as in Agata's case, when they feel powerless after conventional treatments have failed (Doyle 2012; Fotiou 2012).

Among my interlocutors, stories of healings and transformations were circulated to speak for the Plants as messengers of hope: in these stories, people who had been failed by conventional medicine were cured of asthma, Lyme disease, diabetes, alcoholism, eating disorders, infertility, and depression. The list of cured diseases based on my interviews included ovarian cyst, allergy, tachycardia, inflammatory ear disease, endometriosis, and psoriasis. In the case of particularly difficult-to-cure illnesses and, especially, in the case of addictions such as alcoholism, it was necessary to use a Plant numerous times or to combine it with other

treatment. But there were also instances of curing an illness just in one session. Two female interlocutors who had suffered from eating disorders for several years, and whom conventional treatments had failed, were cured during one session with the wachuma cactus. Two males who had suffered from hepatitis C and Lyme disease respectively were tested negative after one session with ayahuasca. What those healings had in common were a clear intention and a strong orientation towards the healing of a specific illness prior to and during a ceremony.

Asked about health and healing, my interlocutors would express their scepticism towards conventional medicine, which they associated with "Western ideology," positivistic approach and mechanistic worldview. Twelve of my fourteen interlocutors claimed that they had not used conventional medical care for many years, which either started afterwards or was empowered by their encounters with the Plants. The other two had a more balanced approach to both, preferring to see conventional and "alternative" medicine as complementary. The most common criticism was that a great majority of medical doctors, who had been trained to alleviate symptoms, would not know what health really was and would lack an understanding of "the nature of health and disease." Jan, a man in his fifties whose father was a medical doctor, insisted that most doctors could not be trusted. They were incompetent, corrupt, and had a very simplistic understanding of what being healthy could mean:

> Doctors perceive our bodies as if we were machines. They do not see the complexity of a human being as a creature, as a being. They prescribe pills to relieve your symptoms, but they do not understand the roots of your illness. A typical visit lasts a few minutes; no attention is paid to your daily habits, your life history or your diet. The most important thing in healing is to prevent and do no harm: *primum non nocere*, right? (…) But it is all about money and pharmaceutical companies that do not want people to have the ability to heal themselves.

Conversely, working with the Plants would make it possible to apply a holistic approach to one's health, without separating the body and the mind (see also: Espinoza 2015). Regardless of how much time was needed to heal, regaining health was described to me in terms of regaining freedom and reconnecting with and returning to one's true self. Being healthy was thus seen as a natural state of harmony and balance, to which one would return, and disease as a result of disharmony, burden, and energetic disorder. The encounter with the Plants was a breakthrough on many levels: self-perception, personal relationships, perceptions of the world, career and professional development, nutritional choices, and self-care. Judith, who was a clinical psychologist and psychotherapist, and who used ayahuasca for herself and for her patients, conceptualized disease as a psychosomatic disorder, an effect of emotional and energetic imbalance:

> Disease does not come from the outside, it comes from within. It is a signal from our consciousness, through our bodies, that we are not seeing something important. (…) Our culture promotes a sick and blasphemous attitude towards the body.

> It promotes beauty canons set by the fashion industry instead of promoting health. We should thank our bodies and organs every day, for carrying us no matter how badly we treat them.

For Judith, matter was secondary to energy; therefore, therapy at the energetic level, during the ceremony with the Plants, would ensure the healing of the psychical body. "The Plants help us to heal ourselves," she told me, "by giving us insight into the causes of our diseases, and we can choose whether we want to live healthy, or leave with dignity." In a similar vein, Agata would reflect on her own healing:

> The Plants help us by broadening the awareness that illnesses do not come from outside, but appear in our lives to show us something, to heal some aspect of ourselves, because all illnesses, according to me and my knowledge, come from situations in our lives and from energy.

Those who used the Plants saw disease as a way of communication between the body and the mind, a signal from the body that "something wrong was going on" in one's life. Similarly, healing was also seen as a form of communication, in which the Plants played an active role as facilitators and instructors. During their work with a Plant, my interlocutors would experience having a conversation with their cells, with the Plants, would see a specific illness leaving their bodies, and would gain a feeling of inner confidence that the illness would not return.

Furthermore, disease was not seen as a genuinely personal problem, but was linked to collective consciousness, with social and civilizational conditions being mentioned as possible significant causes of most diseases. Tom, a thirty-year-old artist, suggested that instead of asking "what's wrong with me," we could ask, "what is wrong with us, because the whole society, the whole planet is sick." For the majority of my interlocutors, their encounters with the Plants were situated in the context of a "global humanity turn" or "the global shift in consciousness," to which they would also contribute by using the Plants: if health of the planet and humans were interrelated, as Tom suggested, then all the improvements at the personal level were contributing to the healing at the global level. In this new world the Plant users are global healers, humanity becomes "one," cultural differences and political borders gradually disappear, and the question of cultural appropriation becomes irrelevant, which is reinforced by a belief that the Plants have come to Europe of their own free will.

Indigenous and Western knowledges

Among my interlocutors only three went to South America, where they participated in ceremonies with ayahuasca and wachuma, and one took part in meetings held at the Canadian branch of Santo Daime church. Others used the Plants in retreats in their hometowns or they travelled to those European countries

where the Plants are legal, such as Portugal, the Netherlands, and the Czech Republic. Apart from practical reasons – ceremonies in Europe, even if illegal, are far more easily accessible – the decision to use the Plants in Europe was also driven by a sense of greater comfort and safety. In comparison to "traditional" and "culturally foreign" *curanderos*, who were perceived as too restrictive against new information and progress, local ceremony organizers, if well prepared, were seen as more competent to work with other Europeans and in the European context: they were "more self-reflexive," "more open to different tools and methods," eager to "modify healing techniques by introducing new elements," and "able to learn from different sources." Moreover, the ways in which the ceremonies were organized in Europe differed from Agata's experience in Colombia. Regardless of their location,[4] ceremonies in Poland were highly ritualized (see also: Labate 2014; Harms 2021) and the space would be prepared in line with the organizers' understating of what "holding the space" would mean.[5] Such sacralization and ritualization of a psychedelic experience beyond Amazonia can be seen as a way to challenge the prevailing Western discourse on the Plants as "drugs" (Labate 2014). But considering group sessions with the Plants, ceremonies can also mean that their transformative potential reaches far beyond the direct effect of the Plants (Harms 2021). Consequently, many participants in ceremonies, like Agata, agreed that working with the Plants in a familiar environment,[6] and, more importantly, under the (co)supervision of a person from the same socio-cultural context, familiar with contemporary knowledge and the challenges of the modern world, was less challenging and safer than a "jungle" experience.

In Poland and other European countries to which my interlocutors travelled, ceremonies with ayahuasca, wachuma, peyote or mushrooms were organized by local facilitators and led by indigenous *curanderos*, or by foreigners and locals who had received relevant teaching from the *curanderos*, or who, as one person

[4] In Poland, most ceremonies with ayahuasca were held indoors, on private properties, and the participants would remain seated or lying down in a circle until the early morning. In turn, ceremonies with San Pedro were organized during the day, often outside, in nature, and although introspection was recommended over interaction, interpersonal contact was not prohibited. Three of my interlocutors participated in "ceremonies of connection," during which ayahuasca was used at night, and San Pedro on the following day. Such "work" was regarded most comprehensive, as it involved both feminine and masculine principles, the soul and the heart, the day and the night.

[5] Most common elements were the opening speech and the closing circle, during which personal experiences were shared. People were often instructed to dress in white, and a special dietary protocol had to be followed in days preceding the ceremony. The ceremony leaders would make an altar, sometimes of earth and fresh flowers, at other times of colourful scarfs, on which they would place candles, a bottle of water and personal objects such as crystals, necklaces, stones, pipes, rattles, or Tarot cards. An altar would symbolize four elements: fire, water, earth, and air, the latter represented by breath and smoke. A variety of music, ranging from *icaros* to Santo Daime hymns and contemporary spiritual songs sung in English, Spanish and even Polish, was performed by shamans leading the ceremony. All these elements were described to me as influential in shaping the personal experience with particular Plants.

[6] According to Agata, her experience with ayahuasca was different in Columbia than in Poland "not only because the ingredients and the setting were different (…) but because different spirits work in the Amazon, and different in Poland."

put it, "have learned how to do it from the Plants themselves." Of the six people who organize ceremonies with the Plants, one called herself a "Polish shaman,"[7] and others described themselves in a variety of terms such as medicine woman, medicine man, therapist, healer, seeker, time traveller, psychotherapist, and transpersonal coach. For all of them, the main purpose of working with the Plants was individual and collective healing, and they would advocate combining modern Western knowledge with "indigenous shamanic practices," from which they "drew." Four among the six healers I spoke to received formal training in human healthcare: two being certified psychotherapists, and two being nurses. A psychotherapist living outside of Poland who used the Plants in her practice[8] reflected on combining her "psychotherapeutic skills and knowledge with shamanic tradition" in the following way:

> It is very important that those who work with the Plants have at least a basic knowledge of the human psyche, so that they know what they are dealing with and can treat people according to their problems. Many shamans don't have psychological or psychotherapeutic knowledge, so what they do is like acting, sensing what's going on. If they see that someone has drifted too far away, they pull them back to the body, but they do it with spikes or by pinching the body. This is their health and safety procedure, but they don't conduct it in a way in which psychotherapy is conducted. Which is what we do. We, for example, ask, "What are you vomiting, what have you thrown up now? Name it. Are you ready to let it go?" (…) And, you know, people later say that such and such words were absolutely necessary, that they needed to hear this, that this was their breakthrough.

On the other hand, some of my interlocutors were sceptical of ceremonial and group settings, which they interpreted as forms of socializing and economizing psychedelic experience. In a conversation with Jan I was told that the Plants, as strong beings and carriers of active substances, did not require any external framework and facilitation, and an individual meeting with them was sufficient:

> It mostly doesn't matter [who conducts the ceremony]. And if the shaman is such that he actually understands something there, then he might help a person out of some process. I've never come across something like that, but I imagine with my brain that it's sort of possible. On the other hand, let's just admit this, without fooling ourselves, all this is about is drinking this medicine and going through what a person is supposed to go through. To go to the other side and experience the truth. And that's it. Nothing external is needed. The only thing that is needed

[7] In the context of my research, the word "shaman" was mostly used in reference to practices of spiritual character regarded as indigenous and traditional, but some of my interlocutors were aware that it was a "Western" term, foreign to indigenous healers, who called themselves *curanderos*.

[8] Working mainly with ayahuasca, she would organize ceremonies on the beach, by the ocean. In her view, the sound of the ocean was an "indigenous sound": it was soothing and it would "sync with the source."

> is for there to be peace and no disturbances or threats from the outside, nothing else. It's all just a form of social activity and making money for people. I don't believe in all this esotericism and all these spirits.

In conversations about the Plants, the language of kinship, communication and "the Plants-as-personalities" would intertwine with scientific, biomedical descriptions of the Plants, and the ways they impacted human body and brain. The names of substances, neurotransmitters and organs were used together with words such as spirit, shaman, ritual, and ceremony. Such medicalization and psychologization of the psychedelic experience, and juxtaposition of biomedical and shamanic knowledge, is not novel (Labate 2014). But whereas the internalization of *vegetalismo*[9] in the Amazon has created tensions between scientization and medicalization on the one side, and retraditionalization and shamanization on the other (Labate 2014), it seems that the mainstreaming of the Plants and their use in an urban context not only privileges biomedical and scientific justifications of how the Plants work (Labate et al. 2025), but may result in the exclusion of indigenous people from epistemological and economic cycles. Of the ceremony organizers I spoke to, only three had received teachings from indigenous *curanderos* and other three admitted that their knowledge of how to hold ceremonies was based mainly on their own experience. After having worked with the Plants for an extended period of time, they were "called by the spirit of a Plant" and received detailed information about how to "work with them." As I further argue, the idea that the Plants *direct* a person to become a healer and "bring them to Europe" is deeply problematic and constitutes what I call an imagined Plantocene: an epoch in which the Plants are portrayed as agents of global change, which legitimizes the use of the Plants outside their eco-social habitat.

The Plants as agentive beings

The Plants were not seen as merely carriers of (psycho)active substances, but agentive beings who had their biographies, personalities, and were valued in terms of their ecological, social, and cultural situatedness. Their effect depended on many factors such as the place they came from, the person who prepared them,[10] the conditions in which they were consumed, personal intentions, and many others. Marek, who was among the persons organizing ceremonies in Poland, told me that for him consumption of the Plants was experienced as a "very powerful encounter, where you just open up with the help of the Plants to wider spaces, you work with different parts of yourself, with energy, with different beings." Such a perspective, in which both humans and the Plants become organisms-in-the-environment

[9] This stands for diverse indigenous shamanic traditions in the Peruvian ayahuasca practice (Labate 2014).

[10] In the case of ayahuasca, which has to be brewed for several hours, the songs sung during that process were regarded as having an impact on the medicine's strength (see also: Callicott 2013).

(Hsu 2010; Ingold 2021), whose wellness and state of being is re-shaped through relations and interactions, was crucial for understanding my interlocutors' perceptions of health, illness, and healing, which I described above. Below I would like to expand on some aspects of working with the Plants: their social positioning, the importance of ceremonial setting, and the role of those organizing ceremonies and "holding the space."

Firstly, when talking about the Plants, my interlocutors were using not only botanical (e.g. *Amanita*) or common names (e.g. *Caapi*, *Aya*, Polish/jungle ayahuasca), but (much more frequently) kinship terms. Within the literature there are variations of kinship nomenclature reflecting local cosmologies, social situatedness of each individual Plant, and their Western appropriations: whereas all psychoactive the Plants have been called "teachers" among various indigenous groups (Callicott 2013; Winkelman 2014a), ayahuasca was regarded as a grandfather in urban Germany (Harms 2021). My interlocutors would admit to "drawing" from different traditions and relying on their own experience while evaluating the Plants, but there were some commonalities in terminology, at least among people I talked to: the cactus was the Grandfather (*Dziadek*), and it was associated with the masculine and with the energy of the sun and the light, while ayahuasca was the Grandmother (*Babcia*), associated with darkness and the feminine principle. Consequently, ceremonies with ayahuasca were mostly held at night, and ceremonies with cacti during the day.

As the Plants were treated as persons, meeting them was a relational, highly personalized experience. Julia, who had been using the Plants for several years, described ayahuasca to me as both loving and caring as well as rigorous, direct and strict, "unwilling to accept denials and refusals." If a person tried to deny the truth that the Grandmother wanted them to see, the experience could turn out to be very unpleasant: a person could get stuck, get chased or attacked by dark spirits, or re-experience painful moments from their own life. The solution was to "let go of the illusion and to surrender to the process," as this was the only way to healing, even if the process was difficult and painful. She was convinced that ayahuasca could not only reset human cells and structures in the brain; it could even restructure human DNA, bringing healing at the deepest level. As a participant of women circles, she valued ayahuasca most, because of the association with the feminine principle.

Marek, who facilitated group ceremonies with the Plants, felt the greatest connection with the cacti, which he considered a medicine of the heart, much gentler and subtle. Cacti would "never give more than one could take," and an encounter with them was "not about vision, but really about peace to one's heart." Darek, who had used various Plants for several years with his family, valued his experience with mushrooms, both growing in Poland (*Amanita muscaria* and psilocybin mushrooms) and overseas, and he described such encounters in terms of lightness and clarity:

> First of all, there is no vomiting with mushrooms. There is no discomfort in the body, there are no serious bodily sensations. They are like children, really. You get such simple, quick answers that it's just impossible to get wrong. Yes, I have much more

> beautiful communication with mushrooms than with the Grandmother (…). You have to have questions and you have to think very deeply, if you want an answer to a question. Because they don't wrap it up, they show you the truth the way it is. For me, this is amazing and beautiful.

Although preferences regarding the origin of the Plants varied, I noticed a growing interest in exploring what was considered "our," "local," or "Slavic" medicine, which in the context of my research was "Polish ayahuasca" and mushrooms that grow in Poland, namely psilocybin and *Amanita muscaria*.[11] Such Plants were not only considered part of "local tradition" and thus culturally closer, but also valued in terms of their socio-ecological situatedness, as belonging to "our land."

Secondly, my interlocutors experienced different forms of communication with the Plants and were convinced that the Plants had "come to them" and "wanted" to be consumed. Jan's first experience with the Plants was with psilocybin mushrooms, which he took during a lonely trip to the forest. He decided to eat the mushrooms because he felt they *called out* to him. In a similar way, two of my other interlocutors were *called out* by a cactus and by *Amanita muscaria*, which *informed them* during a physical encounter that they wanted to be eaten. For one person it was a voice in his head, another described it as a feeling of attraction and being called when he looked at mushrooms. In turn, ayahuasca and cacti would "come" to my interlocutors through intermediaries: people who had previously consumed them would appear on their way and mention the Plants "by chance"; the Plants or ceremonies would appear in visionary dreams, journal articles, books or even pop culture (such as the movie *Avatar*) attracting attention in manifold ways.

The idea that plants communicate with humans is not novel. Mushrooms in Anna Tsing's book emerge willingly in a blasted landscape, "willing to put up with some of the environmental mess humans have made" (2015: 3–4), nurturing trees and actively participating in what she calls "kind of collaborative survival." Fruits, such as mangos,[12] "invite" humans, through their qualities such as softness, smell, colour, juiciness to be consumed, harvested, and cultivated (Van de Port, Mol 2015: 169). But whereas matsutake or mango communicate with humans through their relationships with other species, and their ability to adapt and respond to environmental changes, the Plants *talk* to people, and *provide* them with information and instructions.

---

[11] The fly agaric and psilocybin mushrooms, both growing and used in Eurasia and regarded as "our forgotten tradition" (Vunduk, Biketova 2022), have been consumed privately, either microdosed or in larger amounts for healing and visionary purposes, and, in recent years, during facilitated, organized ceremonies.

[12] According to Portuguese gendering, mango is a "she," and whether it is sucked or eaten depends on the mango and on the context: whereas *chupar* is an intimate act which cannot be comfortably performed in front of others, *comer* can happen in a more public space. Both *comer* and *chupar* belong to different ontologies, and involve different activities (Van de Port, Mol 2015: 175). The authors do not explain why mango would invite humans to consume it and whether mango would prefer to be *chupar* or *comer*.

The Plants communicated with my interlocutors in several ways: through intermediaries, when in local proximity, and during the psychedelic experience, when they were encountered as voices heard, spirits sensed, or persons seen. This frames psychedelic experience as not merely a series of neurochemical hallucinations, but a phytosemiotic dialogue between the two species (Callicott 2013), a "corporeal fusion" (Davis 2012: 13), that is intimate, embodied, and deeply rooted in and experienced through the physical world.

During ceremonies, the Plants provided my interlocutors with guidance, experienced as symbolic visions or specific instructions, regarding health and daily routine including exercise, diet, or changes in one's work environment. Experience with one of the Plants often led to the use of another, and the processes that followed were seen as complementary. For all except one a ceremony with wachuma or mushrooms was a consequence of previous encounter with ayahuasca: people were *instructed* by ayahuasca to work further with other Plants, or *instructed* to use the Plants in work with other people.

Appropriation in the imagined Plantocene

> If I do not spread globally, I will face extinction, similar to humans.
> If they do not look within themselves, they will not be able to evolve
> into the expanded consciousness that is destined for the human species.[13]

The readers of the *Ayahuasca manifesto* (AM 2011), a 50-page-long manuscript anonymously published online in 2011, and circulated in social media groups my interlocutors belonged to, can learn that ayahuasca has chosen to expand beyond the Amazon Basin and to "transform into multiple cultural forms." The purpose of its "planetary mission" is to serve humanity, whose consciousness will be expanded, which will bring harmony to the earth. In the *Manifesto*, ayahuasca speaks for itself as a "legacy to the universe" (p. 5) that seeks to restore a sense of immersion with Mother Earth, a sense of connectedness across cultures and species. While ayahuasca is willing to be "officially accepted by the governments of modern society" (p. 6), it is not willing to be associated with any religion or any church (p. 9).

According to the descriptions of the *Manifesto* available online,[14] it was originally published in Spanish, translated into eight languages, including English, and over time adopted by several ayahuasca churches as their primary "sacred text." The writer initially decided to remain anonymous, because "the *Manifesto* is a profound work received through the process of channelling" and it "belongs to a greater collective wisdom." A few years later a quick internet search reveals the author to be a man called Don Jose Campo, originally from the US (Neurotek),

[13] For the source of the quotation, see: (AM 2011: 44).

[14] I am referring here to the thematic social media group (Manifesto 123) and a thematic website (Neurotek). In January 2025, the *Manifesto* was added to Google Books.

who received "clear visions" of the *Manifesto* in 2008. Through his website, a centre he has opened in Peru offers an "ayahuasca diet" in the "Amazon jungle" (Centro Munay). Created in English and hence addressed to international visitors coming from the Global North, the website promises healing, inner exploration, and positive transformation, with the 10-day diet being "an opportunity of a lifetime to release burdens that are no longer yours to carry, restore your confidence, and discover new gifts and ways to express yourself" (Centro Munay). Although Don Jose Campo considers the Amazonian forest the best place to experience ayahuasca, the *Manifesto* advocates global use of ayahuasca and thus legitimizes the use of the Plants outside of their eco-sociological habitat.

In a similar vein – although with a different take on the belonging of the Plants – people organizing ceremonies with "Slavic ayahuasca" in Poland justify the use of the Plants by claiming that ayahuasca has both Slavic and "Indian" roots. According to a thematic website,[15] the author of which identifies herself as a "Shaman" and organizes ceremonies with the Plants in Czech Republic, the Slavic belonging of ayahuasca is evidenced by the "common affinity between the two nations" and by the phonetic similarity of the name ayahuasca to the Slavic words "Gaia" and "mercy" (*łaska*). In the so-called "Slavic ayahuasca," *Banisteriopsis caapi* is replaced with Syrian rue, which is described as "the Mercy of Gaia of the Northern Hemisphere," an equivalent of the sacred liana, the "Mercy of Gaia of the Southern Hemisphere." Since both the seeds of Syrian rue and the leaves of *chakruna* can be purchased from the Netherlands, where they are legal,[16] the preparation of the "Slavic ayahuasca" allows the exclusion of indigenous people from the economic cycle of medicine production.

In this paper I do not intend to dispute the fact that the Plants are agentive (Cappo 2018), intelligent (Marder 2013) beings, capable of interspecies communication (Callicott 2013). My aim is to draw attention to the possible ethical concerns which, in my opinion, may be raised by the vision of the Plants as the "legacy" to "one humanity," or appropriation of the Amazon medicine as "Slavic," as well as the notion of the Plants "instructing" people to do certain things and willingly "coming" to Europe. Such ideas are highly problematic because they serve to legitimize "drawing" from the Plants and from the indigenous traditions without acknowledging the social and cultural situatedness of the Plants, and the rights of the indigenous people regarding their use.

Firstly, if ceremony organizers can learn *directly* from the Plants, or when the Plants become medicalized, the indigenous *curanderos* become discredited and excluded. The importance of communal relationships in the transmission and cultivation of Plant knowledge diminishes, and the call to combine the indigenous and "Western" knowledges for obtaining a more comprehensive perspective, which is foundational to decolonization (Goldstein 2019; Myers 2017;

[15] The content of the website is said to be based on "insights gained from ayahuasca ceremonies," "remarkable discoveries" that have been "confirmed by legends, myths, and ancient sacred texts of many cultures" (Ayahuasca).

[16] After one of my interlocutors, who organized ceremonies with the Slavic ayahuasca in Poland.

Tsing 2010), fails. This can lead to new forms of appropriation and biopiracy,[17] which are justified by romanticization[18] or medicalization of the Plants. In the course of my research I have not obtained sufficient information about the level of reciprocity between indigenous and non-indigenous actors at the sociological, economic, and political level (as in: Tupper 2009a: 131), and it remains unclear to me what other forms of retribution besides purchasing the Plants, financing *curanderos*, and mediating in the sale of indigenous handicrafts could there be.[19] Among my interlocutors only one person expressed open concerns about the ethical aspects of organizing paid ceremonies with the Plants in Europe, and made references to capitalism and colonialism. In other conversations, as well as in the discussions held on the Internet forums, I was struck by the lack of recognition of what cultural appropriation and biopiracy were, and by the general lack of knowledge of how colonialism might have contributed to our access to the Plants.[20]

Secondly, although the notion of the Plants having "chosen to come to Europe" seems to disrupt anthropocentrism by acknowledging the Plants' agency, it can serve to legitimize otherwise questionable practices of biopiracy and cultural appropriation (Fotiou 2016; Tupper 2009a). Indigenous communities recognize the Plants as their cultural and spiritual legacy, and even take measures to declare them intangible cultural and national heritage[21] to prevent their appropriation for "decontextualized, consumerist, and commercial Western uses" (Labate, Goldstein 2009: 54). Justifying globalization of the Plants opens the doors for their industrialization (Devenot et al. 2022), which would, again, exclude indigenous communities, deepen hierarchies between knowledges, and perpetuate existing inequalities (see also: Labate et al. 2025).

Thirdly, the assertion that the use of the Plants outside of their eco-sociological habitat can be legitimized because it contributes to global, planetary healing is both naive and harmful. I will elaborate on this by critically examining the idea that the Plants make humans more ecologically or even politically conscious, by deepening the connection to Mother Earth and re-situating humans ecologically, within a network of kin relations. Although a growing body of literature suggests a positive relation between the consumption of the Plants and other psychoactive substances on the one hand and environmentalism (Harms 2021;

[17] Biopiracy is understood here, after Tupper (2009a: 128), as the exploitation of the Plants for personal or corporate gain, without recognition of indigenous knowledge or fair compensation.

[18] Instead of romanticizing indigenous healers as "psychologists" (Labate 2014), people from the Global North may start romanticizing the Plants, by ascribing to them their own desires and agendas.

[19] This question requires further investigation that would concern the flow of symbolic and material capital at the transnational level.

[20] One of the reasons may be the perception of Poland's non-participation in colonial expansion (see also: Hrešanová 2023 about the Czech Republic, where the take on colonialism has been similar) and the idea of Poland as a colonial subject (in relation to its partitions). Another reason is the ambiguous position of Poland in relation to "the West."

[21] In 2008, Peru's National Institute of Culture declared the traditional knowledge and use of ayahuasca by indigenous communities in the Amazon to be part of Peru's national heritage (Labate, Goldstein 2009).

Hofmann 2013) or nature relatedness (Nilsson, Stålhammar 2024; Kettner et al. 2019) on the other, these studies fail to problematize how humans navigate their lives within the tensions and paradoxes of the Anthropocene,[22] where individual choices are made within frictions and contradictions created by the expansion of fossil fuel consumption.[23] For some of my interlocutors the Plants made important contributions to their careers, but not all of them can be described as environmentally friendly or ecologically sound. In the narratives of my interlocutors concerns about fossil fuel companies, pesticides, pollution, and global inequality interweaved with the acknowledgments of the benefits and developments brought about by modernization and industrialization: new technologies made limitless communication and transnational networking possible, allowed people to travel to all corners of the world, made them a part of the global community, and gave them access to knowledge and to the Plants (see also: Labate et al. 2025). The speculative future scenario,[24] in which "economic growth at the expense of our planet" would "no longer be tolerated," is not appealing to all, because financial success and consumption are seen as acts of self-care or referred to as "making it through the Matrix"[25] or being a "winner" in the "game." Within the literature, practices of new-shamanism (Atkinson 1992) or neo-shamanism (Gearin, Sáez 2021) are seen as self-oriented, individualistic practices, not necessarily oriented towards the strengthening of communal relations (Fotiou 2016). Moreover, whereas psychedelic experience can trigger a shift in political beliefs, it remains unclear which direction such a shift would take, with right-wing, conservative, hierarchy-based ideologies being a possible option able to "assimilate psychedelic experiences of interconnection" (Pace, Devenot 2021). It is, therefore, debatable whether and how personal development and personal healing achieved through the Plants would translate into global planetary healing, as one of my interlocutors suggested, and how global healing relates to degrowth (Kallis 2011).

---

[22] Arne Harms (2021), for example, formulates the notion of "accidental environmentalism" drawing on references to nature made during ceremonies.

[23] The extraction of fossil fuels has enabled carbon democracies and (consumption-based) modern freedoms (Chakrabarty 2009), but in the long run has threatened the democratic system and created a global environmental crisis (Mitchell 2011).

[24] From a short comedy film titled *If Trump Drank Ayahuasca*, made by a comedian and an "emotional healing coach" Jonathan Patrick Sears, one can learn that the "economic growth at the expense of our planet will no longer be tolerated," if ayahuasca is given to Donald Trump. The speculative future scenario involves hippies welcoming Mexicans at the border with a bottle of kombucha, and Leonardo Di Caprio appointed as a presidential environmental adviser, because he "actually cares." The comedian describes a fictional ceremony, during which the President of the United States was swallowed by a giant anaconda, purged of "daemons of power and control," to be finally reborn in a state of inner peace, connection, and care for the whole world. Among my interlocutors this provoked a series of reactions, including a debate on the extent of a transformative effect that the Plants can really have on a person, and whether and how their own work with the Plants contributed to "planetary healing." The film was circulated within the network of people who had used the Plants and can be accessed on JP Sears's Facebook profile (Awaken with JP).

[25] This comes from the idea that the world might be a kind of a holographic illusion, which was also stated in the *Ayahuasca manifesto*.

Finally, whereas I am convinced that the Plants (and plants) are capable of interspecies communication (Callicott 2013), I also agree that communication is not one-sided, but relational (Cappo 2018), regardless of participants, distance, and means. In the Amazon Basin, interspecies communication during the psychedelic experience, which takes the form of phytosemiotics, results from a diet that requires time and embeddedness in the local plant world and environment (Callicott 2013). In the case of my research, the knowledge of ceremony organizers resembles a collage of knowledges and experiences gathered from all over the world: my interlocutors "draw" from different traditions, knowledges, and locations. The line between "hearing the voice of a plant" (Callicott 2013), following a visionary experience, or projecting one's own ideas on the Plants is subtle, and it remains unclear to me who the author of the *instructions* that are said to come from the Plants really is.[26]

Conclusions

I began this chapter by describing how my interlocutors' perceptions of healing and disease were challenged through their encounters with the Plants. This shift, I argue, was fundamental for my redefinition of the Plantocene as an imagined era in which the Plants become agents of planetary change. Healing with the Plants transcends the personal, and individual actions ripple outward with global consequences.

I also emphasized the idea that the Plants engage in communication[27] with humans. Through these human–Plant encounters, the hierarchy between different ways of knowing is unsettled. My interlocutors described various ways of communicating with the Plants: during psychedelic experiences; when the Plants called out to them, willing to be consumed, and when they „came" to them through intermediaries, such as films of friends. Regardless of the way of communication, it is always relational, which means that the role of human experiences, expectations, and imagination cannot be invalidated. One of the most intriguing questions, in this context, pertains to the role of culture and personality in shaping human experience: the interplay between the neurological or biological functions and the phenomenological experiences (Winkelman 2010).

The interspecies communication is never free from its socio-cultural context. In the Amazon Basin, the Plants have taught indigenous people how to relate to their environments and acquainted them with extensive botanical knowledge including the use of other the Plants for healing purposes (Narby 1999). In Europe and in the West, however, the Plants awake different things in different people, advancing their careers, facilitating personal healing, but not necessarily

[26] In my view, this is even more valid when such instructions do not seem to benefit the socio-ecological habitat of the Plants.

[27] This opens up the question of what communication actually is, and how it can be experienced in inter-species relations.

contributing to communal or planetary benefit. When the Plants are consumed in Poland—in more familiar environments, often facilitated by local practitioners—they are perceived through kinship frameworks, and either the Plants or the experience can be appropriated as "Slavic" or "Polish." This opens the path for evaluating the Plants beyond their ecological, social, and cultural ties, and justifying their use outside of the Amazon.

The same interlocutor who expressed his concern with colonialism described what he called the "dissonance of a white savage" – someone who exploits nature in everyday material practices while simultaneously delivering liturgical speeches about ecological responsibility and potential consequences of exploitation of nature. This paradox of the Anthropocene, in which all humans are entangled in carbon democracies, seems to fade away in the imagined Plantocene, where the Plants – not humans – are seen as seting the course of planetary action. What becomes problematic—and potentially harmful—is not the idea of Plant agency itself, but the claim that the Plants "instruct" people to bring them to Europe or the West, with individuals merely following these supposed will of the Plants. Such narratives displace human responsibility, offering comfort in the belief that one's actions are part of a greater "planetary turn." In this imagined Plantocene, the cultural appropriation of the Plants – their uprooting them from their native habitats and their nationalization or commercialization – can be obscured by the idea that it was the Plants' decision. The *Ayahuasca manifesto*, written from the perspective of the Plant and devoid of an acknowledged human author, becomes a secular preaching. Although the vision of "one humanity" it promotes might be alluring, I have sought to show that it can legitimize the appropriation of indigenous cultures, and reproduce, silence or even strengthen already existing global inequalities. It produces a distorted image of the Plantocene—one in which the Plants are imagined as agents of global change, yet disconnected from the very connectivities and responsibilities that define their existence.

While I am critical of the (never benign) romanticization of the Plants, I do not discredit the positive effects they can have on human health, well-being, and personal life, transformation or career. Nor do I deny the possibility of interspecies communication, or the necessity of interspecies cooperation for planetary survival (Myers 2017). But instead of ideological preaching, I call for the recognition of the unknown, the honouring of the uncanny (Bubandt 2018), and the acknowledgement of the complexity of human and more-than-human agencies and encounters. The use of the Plants should not contribute to disregarding indigenous knowledge (Goldstein 2019), but rather offer a path towards decolonization. For that to happen, indigenous knowledges should be treated as equal to Western science. There is a subtle but crucial line between "drawing" from something and abusing it, and between acknowledging the agency of the Plants and avoiding responsibility for one's own ideas and choices.

Acknowledgements

I owe a debt of gratitude to the anonymous reviewers for their insightful suggestions and comments, and to Andrew S. Mathews for his comments on the very first draft of this paper in 2017.

References

AM. (2011). *Ayahuasca manifesto: The spirit of ayahuasca and its planetary mission*. doorofperception.com/wp-content/uploads/Ayahuasca-Manifesto_Anonymous_May-1st-2012.pdf [access: 1.07.2025].

Atkinson, J.M. (1992). Shamanisms today. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 21, 307–330.

Awaken with JP. (2017). facebook.com/awakenwithjp/videos/if-trump-drank-ayahuasca-ultra-spiritual-life-episode-56/1712115202137668 [access: 1.07.2025].

Ayahuasca. (n.d.). ayahuasca.net.pl/o-ayi.html [access: 1.07.2025].

Bubandt, N. (2018). Anthropocene uncanny: Nonsecular approaches to environmental change. In: N. Bubandt (ed.), *A non-secular Anthropocene: Spirits, specters and other nonhumans in a time of environmental change* (pp. 2–18). AURA Working Papers, vol. 3.

Callicott, C. (2013). Interspecies communication in the Western Amazon: Music as a form of conversation between the Plants and people. *European Journal of Ecopsychology*, 4(1), 32–43.

Callicott, C. (2016). Introduction to the Special Issue: Ayahuasca, plant-based spirituality, and the future of Amazonia. *Anthropology of Consciousness*, 27(2), 113–120.

Cappo, S.M. (2018). What ayahuasca wants: Notes for the study and preservation of an entangled ayahuasca. In: B.C. Labate, C. Cavnar (eds.), *The expanding world ayahuasca diaspora* (pp. 157–176). New York: Routledge.

Cardeña, E., Winkelman, M.J. (eds.). (2011). *Altering consciousness: Multidisciplinary perspectives*, 2 vols. Santa Barbara: Praeger.

Centro Munay. (n.d.). centromunay.com [access: 1.07.2025].

Chakrabarty, D. (2009). The climate of history: Four theses. *Critical inquiry*, 35(2), 197–222.

Daly, L., Shepard, G. Jr. (2019). Magic darts and messenger molecules: Toward a phytoethnography of indigenous Amazonia. *Anthropology Today*, 35(2), 13–17.

Davis, E. (2012). Ayahuasca and James Cameron's Avatar. *MAPS Bulletin. Special Edition: Psychodelics and Popular Arts*, 22(1), 12–13.

Devenot, N., Conner, T., Doyle, R. (2022). Dark side of the shroom: Erasing indigenous and counterculture wisdoms with psychedelic capitalism, and the open source alternative: A manifesto for psychonauts. *Anthropology of Consciousness*, 33(2), 476–505.

Doyle, R. (2012). Healing with plant intelligence: A report from ayahuasca. *Anthropology of Consciousness*, 23(1), 28–43.

Espinoza, Y. (2015). Sexual healing with Amazonian plant teachers: A heuristic inquiry of women's spiritual-erotic awakenings. In: G. Ogden (ed.), *Extraordinary sex therapy: Creative approaches for clinicians* (pp. 109–120). Oxon – New York: Routledge.

Gearin, A. (2017). Good mother nature: Ayahuasca neoshamanism as cultural critique in Australia. In: B.C. Labate, C. Cavnar, A. Gearin (eds.), The world ayahuasca diaspora: Reinventions and controversies. Oxon: Routledge.

Gearin, A.K., Sáez, O.C. (2021). Altered vision: Ayahuasca shamanism and sensory individualism. *Current Anthropology*, 62(2), 138–163.

Goldstein, R. (2019). Ethnobotanies of refusal: Methodologies in respecting plant (ed)-human resistance. *Anthropology Today*, 35(2), 18–22.

Harms, A. (2021). Accidental environmentalism: Nature and cultivated affect in European neoshamanic ayahuasca consumption. *Anthropology of consciousness*, 32(1), 55–80.

Hofmann, A. (2013). *LSD and the divine scientist: The final thoughts and reflections of Albert Hofmann*. Rochester: Inner Traditions.

Hsu, E. (2010). Introduction. Plants in medical practice and common sense: On the interface of ethnobotany and medical anthropology. In: E. Hsu, S. Harris (eds.), *Plants, health and healing: On the interface of ethnobotany and medical anthropology* (pp. 1–48). New York – Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Hrešanová, E. (2023). Comrades and spies: From socialist scholarship to claims of colonial innocence in the Czech Republic. *American Ethnologist*, 50(3), 419–430.

Ingold, T. (2021). *The perception of the environment: Essays on livelihood, dwelling and skill*. London: Routledge.

Fotiou, E. (2012). Working with "la Medicina": Elements of healing in contemporary ayahuasca rituals. *Anthropology of Consciousness*, 23(1), 6–27.

Fotiou, E. (2016). The globalization of ayahuasca shamanism and the erasure of indigenous shamanism. *Anthropology of Consciousness*, 27(2), 151–179.

Kallis, G. (2011). In defence of degrowth. *Ecological Economics*, 70(5), 873–880.

Kennedy, C. (2020). The emergent Plantocene: Weedy vegetal agency, radical embodiment, and ruderalism X Action(ism). *Medium*. christopherleekennedy.medium.com/the-emergent-plantocene-ff394a3bbfbb [access: 1.07.2025].

Kettner, H., Gandy, S., Haijen, E.C., Carhart-Harris, R.L. (2019). From egoism to ecoism: Psychedelics increase nature relatedness in a state-mediated and context-dependent manner. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 16(24), 5147.

Labate, B.C. (2014). The internationalization of Peruvian vegetalismo. In: B.C. Labate, C. Cavnar (eds.), *Ayahuasca shamanism in the Amazon and beyond* (pp. 182–205). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Labate, B.C., Antunes, H.F., Beachy, J., Sloshower, J., Cavnar, C. (2025). Navigating the mainstreaming of psychedelics. *Journal of Psychedelic Studies*, 9(2), 108–115.

Labate, B.C., Cavnar, C. (eds.). (2014). *The therapeutic use of ayahuasca*. Heidelberg: Springer.

Labate, B.C., Cavnar, C. (eds.). (2018a). *Plant medicines, healing and psychedelic science: Cultural perspectives*. Cham: Springer.

Labate, B.C., Cavnar, C. (eds.). (2018b). *The expanding world ayahuasca diaspora: Appropriation, integration and legislation*. New York: Routledge.

Labate, B.C., Goldstein, I. (2009). Ayahuasca: From dangerous drug to national heritage: An interview with Antonio A. Arantes. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 28(1), 53–64.

Lewis, S.E. (2008). Ayahuasca and spiritual crisis: Liminality as space for personal growth. *Anthropology of Consciousness*, 19(2), 109–133.

Manifesto 123. (n.d.). facebook.com/Manifesto123 [access: 1.07.2025].

Marder, M. (2013). Plant intelligence and attention. *Plant Signaling & Behavior*, 8(5), e23902.

McKenna, D.J. (2007). The healing vine: Ayahuasca as medicine in the 21st century. In: M.J. Winkelman, T.B. Roberts (eds.), *Psychedelic medicine: New evidence for hallucinogenic substances as treatments* (pp. 21–44). Westport: Praeger Publishers.

Mitchell, T. (2011). *Carbon democracy: Political power in the age of oil*. London: Verso.

Myers, N. (2017) From the Anthropocene to the Planthroposcene: Designing gardens for plant/people involution. *History and Anthropology*, 28(3), 297–301.

Narby, J. (1999). The cosmic serpent: DNA and the origins of knowledge. London: Orion Books.
Neicun, J., Steenhuizen, M., Kessel, R. van, Yang, J.C., Negri, A., Czabanowska, K., Roman-Urrestarazu, A. (2019). Mapping novel psychoactive substances policy in the EU: The case of Portugal, the Netherlands, Czech Republic, Poland, the United Kingdom and Sweden. *PloS one*, 14(6), e0218011.
Neurotek. (n.d.). neurotek.wixsite.com/ayahuasca-manifesto/bio [access: 1.07.2025].
Nilsson, M., Stålhammar, S. (2024). Psychedelics and inner dimensions of sustainability: A literature review. *European Journal of Ecopsychology*, 9, 4–47.
Pace, B.A., Devenot, N. (2021). Right-wing psychedelia: Case studies in cultural plasticity and political pluripotency. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 733185.
Simonienko, K., Waszkiewicz, N., Szulc, A. (2013). Psychoactive plant species: Actual list of the plants prohibited in Poland. *Psychiatria Polska*, 47(3), 499–510.
Taussig, M.T. (1989) The nervous system: Homesickness and Dada. *Stanford Humanities Review*, 1(1), 44–81.
Tsing, A. (2010). Arts of inclusion, or how to love a mushroom. *Manoa*, 22(2), 191–203.
Tupper, K.W. (2008). The globalization of ayahuasca: Harm reduction or benefit maximization?. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 19(4), 297–303.
Tupper, K.W. (2009a). Ayahuasca healing beyond the Amazon: The globalization of a traditional indigenous entheogenic practice. *Global Networks*, 9(1), 117–136.
Tupper, K.W. (2009b). Entheogenic healing: The spiritual effects and therapeutic potential of ceremonial ayahuasca use. In: J.H. Ellens (ed.), *The Healing Power of Spirituality: How Religion Helps Humans Thrive* (vol. 3, pp. 269–282). Santa Barbara: Praeger.
Van de Port, M., Mol, A. (2015). Chupar frutas in Salvador da Bahia: A case of practice-specific alterities. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 21(1), 165–180.
Vunduk, J., Biketova, A.Y. (2022). The cultural use of mushrooms. In: D. Stojković, L. Barros (eds.), Edible fungi: Chemical composition, nutrition and health effects (vol. 36, pp. 327–358). London: Royal Society of Chemistry.
Winkelman, M.J. (2010). *Shamanism: A biopsychosocial paradigm of consciousness and healing*. Santa Barbara: Praeger.
Winkelman, M.J. (2011). A paradigm for understanding altered consciousness: The integrative mode of consciousness. *Altering Consciousness: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, 1, 23–44.
Winkelman, M.J. (2014a). Therapeutic applications of ayahuasca and other sacred medicines. In: B.C. Labate, C. Cavnar (eds.), *The therapeutic use of ayahuasca* (pp. 1–21). Heidelberg: Springer.
Winkelman, M. (2014b). Psychedelics as medicines for substance abuse rehabilitation: Evaluating treatments with LSD, peyote, ibogaine and ayahuasca. *Current Drug Abuse Reviews*, 7(2), 101–116.

SUMMARY

Shamans, plants, and spirits: Health and disease in the Plantocene

This paper explores the experiences and perspectives of people from Poland who engage with psychoactive plants, referred to by me as the Plants, such as ayahuasca, psilocybin mushrooms, and mescaline-containing cacti-for healing and personal growth. Based on fourteen in-depth interviews and analysis of online discussions, the paper examines how my interlocutors conceptualize health, disease, and healing through their encounters

with the Plants. The research highlights the shift from conventional biomedical paradigms to holistic, plant-centered approaches in which the Plants are seen as agentive beings capable of communicating with humans. The concept of the "Plantocene" is introduced as a speculative framework, suggesting that plant agency influences human behavior and planetary futures. The paper considers the ethical concerns that arise from attributing ultimate agency to the Plants, and from appropriating plants as "Slavic" or "global." Such narratives legitimize "drawing" from the Plants and indigenous communities without acknowledging their rights, and may silence and deepen existing global inequalities.

Keywords: plant agency, psychedelic healing, biopiracy, cultural appropriation, Plantocene, shamanism, interspecies communication