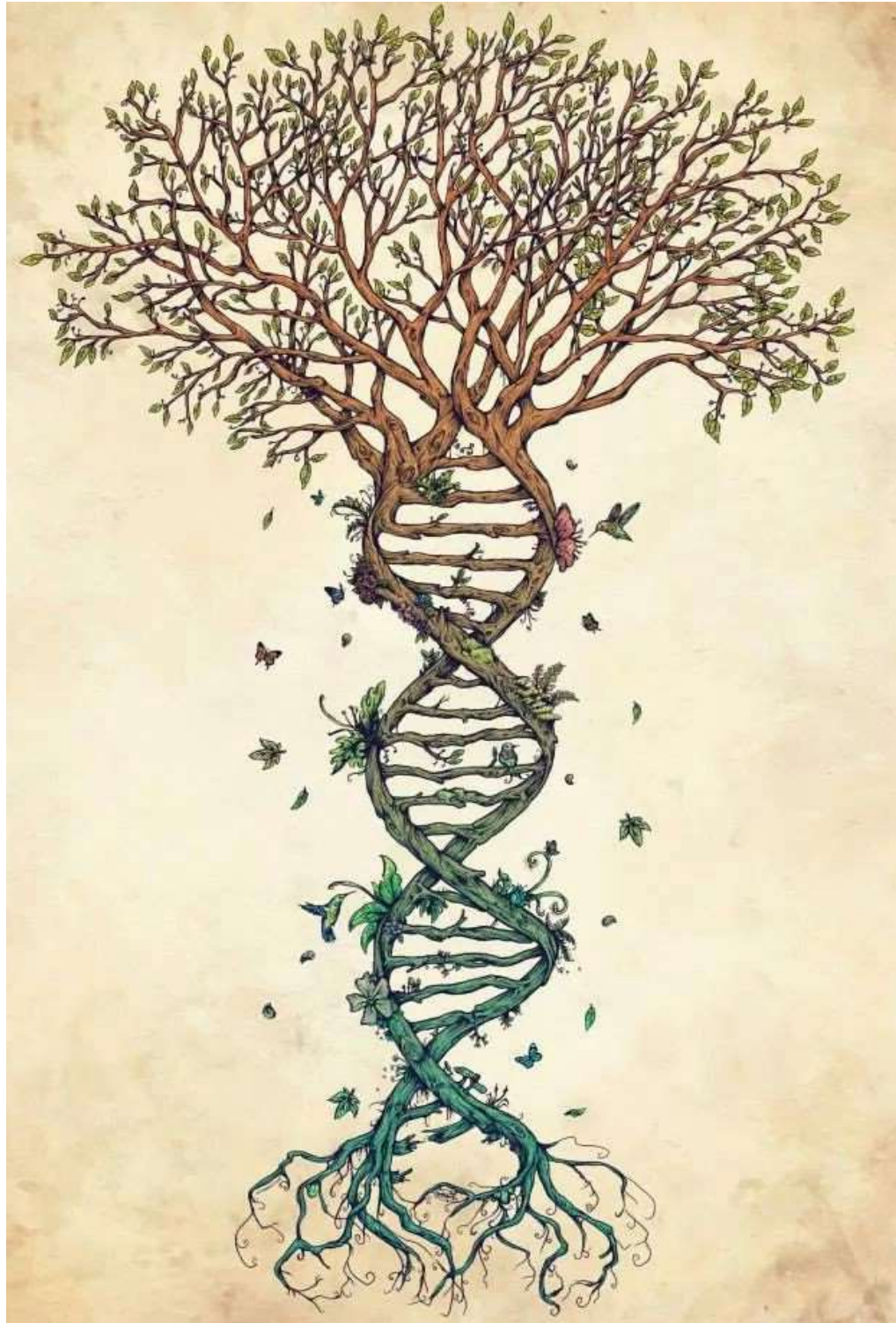


*A Thread in the Vine:
The Deep Ecology of Contemporary Ayahuasca Discourse*



'The Fabric of Life' by Rene Campbell

Jeff Baker 2015

A Thread in the Vine: The Deep Ecology of Contemporary Ayahuasca Discourse

Jeff Baker
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with Honours in Cultural Studies and Communications

Reviewed and approved:
Doctor Angela Coco
Thesis supervisor
Southern Cross University

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Abstract

This thesis uses the philosophy of deep ecology as a theoretical framework to explore ecospiritual themes as a key feature of increasing discourse around the ayahuasca phenomenon. The broad objective of the research is to use contemporary ayahuasca discourse to reveal the way cross-cultural seekers engage with and discuss shamanic practices that inform a postmodern ecosophical ontology and deep ecological praxis. Three convergent discourses inform this research; the transcultural ayahuasca phenomenon, nature-based spiritualities of the New Age and the philosophy of deep ecology. Threading through these discourses are ecological and spiritual themes that capture a web of meanings for contextualising the transcultural emergence of ayahuasca spirituality. A key paradigmatic shift suggested by contemporary ayahuasca discourse is a shift in human consciousness toward a non-dualistic ontology regarding humanity's place in nature. An ecocultural studies approach provides theoretical support for interpreting how the elements of this paradigmatic shift are discussed, understood and practiced. As the internet functions as a superlative site for discursive formations of ayahuasca, a thematic content analysis of selected discussion forums within the Ayahuasca.com website was conducted using a multiparadigmatic, deductive and inductive approach. Naess and Sessions' (1984) eight platform principles of deep ecology were used as a framework to deductively locate textual articulations of the philosophy. Further inductive analysis revealed not only embedded deep ecological themes but also articulations of an ecocentric praxis arising from experiences of unitary consciousness and plant sentience. The deep ecology articulated in contemporary ayahuasca discourse further raised an explicit challenge to hegemonic anthropocentrism through expressions of an expanded sense of self that accentuates the countercultural bearings of entheogenic informed ecospirituality.

Key Words

Ayahuasca discourse, deep ecology, ecospirituality, ecocultural studies, ecopsychology, entheogens, nature-based religion, online spirituality

A Thread in the Vine:¹ The Deep Ecology of Contemporary Ayahuasca Discourse

Introduction

This research seeks to present an examination of the deep ecological themes present in the discourse emerging from the contemporary use of ayahuasca,² an Amazonian psychoactive³ medicinal brew consumed ritually as a physical, psychological and spiritual healing tool (Beyer, 2009; Shanon, 2002; Metzner, 1999a). The transcultural consumption of ayahuasca is now manifoldly embedded in the digital arena as a proliferation of websites come to serve as significant vehicles for the communication, transmission, dissemination and reception of its discourse. The primary aim of this research is to reveal how the discussion of the ayahuasca experience reveals a profound resonance with deep ecology's imperative call for reawakening and understanding of Earth wisdom through personal introspection, purification and harmony of being (Naess, 1973). The theoretical analysis of ayahuasca discourse's concomitant deep ecology is therefore informed by an ecocultural study into how contemporary shamanic practices invoke alternative environmental ontologies that subvert dominant anthropocentric modes of relating to the nonhuman world. In a rapidly globalised and interconnected world facing accelerating environmental crisis, the deep ecology embodied by contemporary ayahuasca discourse consequently represents the development of an experientially informed ecological postmodernism⁴ implicating an emergent hybrid spirituality at the intersection of nature and culture.

¹ The word 'thread' is used to directly reflect the structure of online discussion forums as utilised in this research and to denote a general 'theme' within their discourse. Additionally the word 'thread' metaphorically alludes to a the manner by which things are ecologically interconnected and to the helical stranded nature of the *B. Caapi* vine central to ayahuasca.

² For ease of reading, ayahuasca is most commonly pronounced *aye-ah-was-kah*.

³ Drawing on Schultes & Hofmann's (1992) rendering of 'hallucinogenic' as inadequate and alluding to the unreal, psychoactive is generally understood to refer to the properties of both natural and synthetic materials which "directly and sometimes dramatically affect the lived texture of human consciousness" through the "temporary changes in perception, mood, consciousness and behaviour" induced by their consumption (Davis 2012, p. 185).

⁴ The term Ecological postmodernism is often attributed to Charlene Spretnak (1999) denotes a radical rejection of the anthropocentric view of modernism and scientific reductionism while embracing the notion of organic 'self-organisation' held by systems and chaos theory.

As escalating discourse moves ayahuasca from the cultural margins to the centre, a re-examination of deep ecology is accordingly germane given ayahuasca's exemplary status among the psychedelics' and their documented potential to enhance and transform human relationships to the natural world (Dickens, 2013; Lawlor, 2009). An expansive field of academic inquiry into ayahuasca merits this project's sociocultural analysis of contemporary ayahuasca discourse in order to reveal its significance as firmly grounded in the making of spiritual meaning inherent to the broader objective of this research. A vibrant global resurgence of interest in shamanic practices reveals contemporary ayahuasca practices as nonetheless embedded in the counter hegemonic discourse of entheogenic spirituality. Ayahuasca's unique anthropological origins and transcultural amalgamation also render a new lexicon that reflects the complexity and hybridity of the contemporary ayahuasca phenomenon. As ayahuasca brings increased sensitivity toward ecological issues (Luna, 1986), an implicit challenge to anthropocentrism arises from the inherent animistic phenomenology and experiential reconfiguring of *a priori* perceptions of self, spirit and nature raised by its discourse.⁵

As ayahuasca and its alkaloids continue to be propagated by multiple textual sources, the realm of digital media serves as a principle facilitator for the "remarkable infiltration of the ayahuasca meme into Western popular culture" (Beyer, 2012). The salient theme of plant sentience in ayahuasca discourse reveals a consummate basis for re-examining deep ecology's philosophical ideals given a worsening state of environmental affairs forty years on from Naess' (1973) conception of the philosophy. As ayahuasca takes a discursive status as the most conspicuous facet of a larger phenomenon which Ott (1996)

⁵ With human consciousness being notoriously difficult to measure, Callicott (2013, p. 38) explains that it may not ever be possible "to reconcile the Western Amazonian belief in plant agency and interspecies communication with a Western scientific point of view".

refers to as ‘The Entheogenic Reformation’,⁶ examination of its nascent position within the environmental milieu of nature-based spiritualities becomes a pertinent subject of enquiry. Examining the implicit non-anthropocentric values and beliefs within the discussion forums of the Ayahuasca.com website⁷ devoted to and engendered by the ayahuasca experience, thus serves as a means for understanding how members ‘think through the eco’⁸ not found in more openly visible forms of popular discourse (Slack, 2008). This research therefore impels an ecocultural studies attendance to understanding how a thriving contemporary ayahuasca phenomenon discursively interlocks with deep ecology’s philosophical framework to inform a countercultural praxis.

A significant factor shaping formal discourse on ayahuasca is the proliferating field of interdisciplinary academic research, with the evolution of an ‘ayahuasca studies’⁹ positioning this thesis in the context of unique research opportunities opened up by a need to address the ecocultural dimensions of ayahuasca’s increasing global reach. That, the *Bulletin of the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Science*¹⁰ (Brown, 2009) and *The Journal of Ecopsychology* (Luke, 2013)¹¹ have both recently attributed issues solely dedicated to the connexions between psychedelic/entheogenic substances and

⁶ Ott (1996) acknowledges the influence of McKenna’s (1991) *Archaic Revival* articulated as a dynamic interest in ancient ritual practices that provide direct access to spiritual, mystical and religious experience.

⁷ The Ayahuasca.com website has positioned itself as “a multi-disciplinary project devoted to the Spirit Vine *Ayahuasca*, and its home, the great forests of the Amazon” and frequently publishes articles on ayahuasca spirituality, healing, science, mythology, botany, shamanism and ecology as well as media and art” (Ayahuasca.com, 2012).

⁸ Taylor (2010) points to Orr’s (1992, p. 102) elucidation that “connectedness is central to the meaning of both the Greek root word for ecology, *oikos*, and the Latin root word for religion, *religio*”.

⁹ A term advanced by the not-for-profit educational organisation ‘Wasiwaska; Research Centre for the Study of Psychointegrator Plants, Visionary Art and Consciousness’ established by Luna (2003), <<http://www.wasiwaska.org/research/ayahuasca-studies>>.

¹⁰ The *Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies* (MAPS) founded in 1986 is a “non-profit research and educational organisation that develops medical, legal and cultural contexts for people to benefit from the careful uses of psychedelics and marijuana”. The bulletin now provides extensive summaries of increased cross-cultural collaborative research and provides critical and creative dialogues around psychedelic culture, personal reflections, experiences and writings from leading figures in the community, <<http://www.maps.org/>>.

¹¹ Ecopsychology seeks to integrate the study of the human/nature relationship into psychology by addressing the divide between the inner reality of ‘mind’ and outer reality of ‘nature’ (Roszak, Gomes & Kanner, 1995; Schroll, 2007, 2013).

ecological awareness reveals this convergence as a pertinent issue.¹²

Acknowledging the centrality of ‘altered states’ and their connection to ‘the sacred’, Hanegraaff (2012) further affirms the need for scholars to take the phenomenon of Western entheogenic practices seriously as the spiritual use of psychoactive substances signifies an important contemporary cultural phenomenon.¹³ While Taylor (2009, p. 53) confirms it as “heuristically valuable to analyse the religious dimensions of radical environmentalism”,¹⁴ the nature-based epiphanies of contemporary ayahuasca practices warrant attention to the crystallising of hybrid forms of ecocentric-religiosity and ecospirituality. As research reveals transcultural ayahuasca drinkers¹⁵ to frequently report powerfully psycho-spiritual experiences incongruent with their previous worldview (Lewis, 2008), the merit of this project therefore lies in understanding how ayahuasca discourse informs an ecological postmodernism.

While the discursive countercultural progression of ayahuasca practices are firmly embedded in spiritual and religious ritual contexts, the politics of identifying with psychoactive plant use considered illegal in many countries, necessitates clarification of the rhetoric used to articulate ayahuasca practices. Of the variant idioms used to refer to substances with a recognised antiquity of use (Beyer, 2008; Ott, 1996; Schultes & Hofmann, 1992) such as ayahuasca, it should be reflected that “no single term is entirely adequate”¹⁶ with particular neologisms often loaded “with unsubstantiated connotations of

¹² Luke (2014, p. 3) acknowledges the area of literature addressing the psychedelic-ecological fusion as ‘somewhat nascent’, pointing to the *MAPS* (2009) special edition as “the only prior collection of this kind”.

¹³ The multidisciplinary approach to psychedelics also manifests as a convergence of metaphysical and ‘folkloric’ narratives with the neural and biological, having “the additional feature of throwing our changing notions of the self into sharp relief” (Davis 2012, p. 187).

¹⁴ Taylor’s (2001a, 2001b) conflation of deep ecology and radical environmental activism is loaded with unnecessary connotations of militant ecoactivism though is also to denote any ecospirituality that is countercultural.

¹⁵ The term drinkers is commonly used throughout contemporary ayahuasca discourse and carries the additional connotation of being discursively separate from the term ‘users’ as commonly associated with dominant drug discourse.

¹⁶ Many of the terms used in this research are revealed as potentially problematic as they become “contested labels for practices or persons that are integral to the formulation and expression of identity politics” (Tramacchi 2006b, p. 7).

psychopathology” (Tramacchi 2006b, p. 16). The classifications entheogen¹⁷ and psychedelic¹⁸ are therefore used here flexibly in accordance with their historical, social and cultural positioning and contextual positions.¹⁹ While the term ‘entheogen’²⁰ serves to incorporate the ecospiritual sentiment this project intends to highlight, ‘psychedelic’ is also used as a broader referential indication.²¹ As ayahuasca “travels out of the Amazon along the Web” into the Western drug paradigm, its consumption becomes counter-hegemonic while nevertheless remaining definitively that of a sacred traditional Indigenous medicine “profoundly linked to religious forms and forces” (Davis 2012, p. 191). Importantly, Labate (2014) reveals that ayahuasca is an essentially hybrid tradition embedded in processes of cultural exchange encompassing novel adaptations of ancient principles into new modalities of healing that involve the “creation of knowledge as a bodily, collective, and cosmic enterprise” (Labate, Cavnar & Freedman 2014, p. 9).

What is Ayahuasca?

The nomenclature of ayahuasca essentially derives from a Quechua word that translates approximately as ‘vine of the dead’²² or ‘vine of souls’²³ also known

¹⁷ Etymologically meaning ‘to generate a sense of divinity from within’, the term entheogen was coined by Ruck et al. (1979) to accentuate the spiritual context of these substances and to replace the hedonistic connotations of the more socioculturally loaded term ‘psychedelic’.

¹⁸ While Osmond’s (1957) original definition of psychedelic meant ‘mind manifesting’, its true meaning may be closer to an ‘announcement or proclamation from the soul’, as ‘psyche’ and ‘soul’ are etymologically analogous.

¹⁹ These two words have now come to specify two very different approaches and methods of utilising essentially the same group of plants and their molecules.

²⁰ Tramacchi (2006b, p. 20) notes however that the term entheogen is ‘far from perfect’, as the prefix *en* denotes an inward ‘narcissistic spirituality’, one that is “the fruit of culturally specific historical processes that do not authentically reflect environmentally directed, relationship-oriented, animistic ontologies of indigenous peoples” and that the suffix *theos* is even more overtly cultural specific. Additionally there is a notable lack of traditional references to ‘divinity’ or to ‘god’ within entheogenic discourse (Oroc, 2008).

²¹ As these ancient shamanic ritual practices have entered Western culture “what kinds of plants or chemicals fall into the category of entheogen is a matter of debate” and these categories are consequently “by no means clearly discreet” (Tupper 2002, p. 500).

²² As ayahuasca is understood as facilitating access to and contact with the spirit realm, this includes humanity and thus communication with the souls of deceased ancestors is perceived as possible and often connected to experiencing a ‘death’ of one’s own ‘self’ (Luna, 2003).

²³ Highpine (2012, n.p) points out that while “differences in dialect cause confusion about the translation of the word *aya*”; the interpretation that may best convey the essence that *ayahuasca* holds in Amazonian Quechua, is ‘vine *with* a soul’.

as Yagé.²⁴ The common designation of ayahuasca has come to dominate the myriad of different names given to it by Indigenous groups²⁵ that have long utilised comparable forms of the brew (Grob, Greer & Mangini, 1998; Highpine, 2012). Ayahuasca now generally refers to any decoction that utilises the distinctive and pharmacologically complex synergy of the *Banisteriopsis Caapi* vine and the *Psychotria Viridis* shrub²⁶ although other admixtures are known to be used (McKenna, 1992; Ott, 1996; Schultes, 1972, 1976, 1990; Schultes & Hofmann 1992). Ayahuasca and the *B. Caapi* vine are often referred to synonymously, as traditionally the vine is considered to be ‘the mother of all plants’ from which knowledge of other plant spirits and their properties are gleaned (Highpine, 2012; Schultes & Raffauf, 1992). The spirit of Yagé therefore forms the *alma mater*²⁷ of the forest and *axis mundi*²⁸ of many Indigenous Amazonian worldviews for its integral role as “a mediator and translator between the human and plant worlds” facilitating communication between them (Highpine 2012, n.p). Although its ‘prehistorical’ origins are shrouded in the mists of time,²⁹ notable uncertainty arises regarding its antiquity, with competing spiritual and scientific discourses regarding how such a specific synergy was discovered (Highpine, 2012).³⁰

²⁴ ‘Yagé’ or ‘Yajé’ is the Quechua name that represents both the native Amazonian *Banisteriopsis* species of vine as well as the visionary healing brew prepared from it (Highpine, 2012; Luna, 2003; Metzner, 1999a).

²⁵ With the Shipibo of Peru, Shuar of Ecuador and various Tukano groups in Colombia becoming better known for their use of ayahuasca, Luna (1986) has documented the use of ayahuasca decoctions among at least 72 indigenous groups within the Amazonian Acre area. Identifying the extensive Amazonian ethnic groups with acknowledged use of Ayahuasca is also somewhat problematic due to ambiguous tribal/ethnic identifications and arbitrary Western classificatory systems (Highpine, 2012).

²⁶ This combination creates its effect by rendering the highly psychoactive *n*-dimethyltryptamine (or DMT), contained within the *Psychotria* leaves orally active via the mechanism of the monoamine oxidase inhibiting beta-carbolines and harmalines of the *B. Caapi* vine (McKenna, 1992; Ott, 1996; Schultes & Hoffman, 1992).

²⁷ Translating literally as kind or nourishing mother and the title for various mother goddesses, the term also carries collegial inferences suggesting the forest to be a university of information.

²⁸ Represented across religions and mythologies, The *Axis Mundi* (*axis* meaning pole and *mundi* meaning world) comes to refer to the connection between Heaven and Earth or cosmic axis, world axis, world pillar, world centre or world tree (Eliade, 1987).

²⁹ While the earliest written account of ayahuasca’s effects was made by geographer Villavicencio in 1858, the anthropologist Richard Spruce had noted its usage among the Indigenous people of Northwest Amazon in 1851. Jesuit Priests in 17th century Peru had previously observed ayahuasca use as the consumption of ‘diabolical potions’, condemning the practice as witchcraft in their cultural domination of Native peoples (Metzner, 1999a; McKenna, 2005; Shanon, 2002).

³⁰ The discovery of ayahuasca’s uniquely complex pharmacological combination by Indigenous peoples is variously attributed to ‘trial and error’, ‘serendipitous encounter’ and to direct knowledge imparted by the ‘living spirit’ of the vine as deeply embedded in the creation

Contemporary ayahuasca discourse continues to not only represent ayahuasca as a feminine entity, often *La Madre*³¹ who facilitates a transcendental path from individualistic to universal consciousness but as the very voice of Mother Nature, *Pachamama*³² (Labate & Cavnar, 2014) and more frequently *Gaia*.³³

Ayahuasca typically induces powerful visions across all perceptual modalities eliciting profound mystical experiences (Shanon, 2008)³⁴ and is intrinsically tied to an exploration of the mind/body/nature ecology via interrelated insights and visions (Labate, 2014).³⁵ Saez (2014, p. xxi) attributes the efficacy³⁶ of ayahuasca to its allowance of distinct otherworldly perception and concurrent awareness of this reality in a “broad, synesthetic association between visions, music and verbal creations that is not necessarily forthcoming for other psychoactive substances”.³⁷ As Davis (2010) notes, ayahuasca is serious spiritual work that is not entirely pleasurable and its representation as *La Medicina*³⁸ reflects its non-recreational context. Furthermore ayahuasca is essentially a purgative substance taken for cleansing and healing both mind and body hence *La Purga*,³⁹ which usually requires strict prior adherence to

mythologies and cosmology of many Amazonian peoples (Metzner, 1999; Narby, 1999; Nemu, 2014).

³¹ Literal translation is ‘The Mother’.

³² Pachamama is a goddess known as the earth/time mother dating back to Inca mythology and has been adopted by the New Age as the benevolent Mother Earth and infuses ayahuasca discourse from its use by the Quechua people of the Andes (Hill, 2010).

³³ Gaia was the Greek god generally known as Mother Earth and the primordial element from which all the other Greek gods were said to originate.

³⁴ It must also be noted that “the belief system of participants, both collective and individual” shape ayahuasca visionary experiences, although common archetypal ‘nature tropes’ have been observed (Metzner 1999a, p.232).

³⁵ Integral to the mediation of the ayahuasca experience is the role of the shaman, whose *icaros* (or song of the plants spirit) used during ceremony, is sung to facilitate culturally specific mimetic exchanges that guide these perceptual shifts in consciousness (Callicott, 2013; Luke, 2013).

³⁶ Saez (2014, p. xxi) adds that “a magical object is authentic only to the degree that it produces effects” even unintended effects that negate the idea of a medical or cultural placebo.

³⁷ Saez (2014, p. xxi) further explains how “ayahuasca owes its success to being located midway along a scale running from substances that produce light inebriation to others causing a deeper and more dangerous plunge into other worlds”.

³⁸ A clear and obvious translation here is ‘The medicine’ as Schultes and Hofmann (1992, p. 122) elucidate; “Ayahuasca is above all, a medicine—the great medicine”.

³⁹ In its Indigenous context the purging of negative forces is considered equally important as any visual effects or psychological revelation, as (Beyer 2009, p. 209) notes the Amazonian expression “*La purga misma te enseña* [or] ‘vomiting itself teaches you’”. The etymology and phenomenon of *purge* as cleansing or purifying also aligns with ‘purgatory’ as the place or state of suffering inhabited by the soul before going to heaven in the Catholic doctrine.

diet and *La Dieta*⁴⁰ Traditionally used to obtain divine guidance and to communicate with the spirits that animate the plants (Luna, 1996, 2003; Shanon, 2002), ayahuasca is frequently described as connecting its drinkers to what is often considered ‘the spirit world’, ‘sacred nature’, ‘divinity’ and ‘plant and natural energies’ (Winkelman 2005, p. 214). The recognition of the *Caapi* vine and ayahuasca synergy as imbibed with not just a living spirit but a revered “plant teacher” (Highpine, 2012; Luna, 1984; Tupper, 2002; Schultes & Hofmann, 1992), signifies a method of direct dialogical and empathetic human-ecosystemic engagement with a pre-eminently sentient natural world (Krippner & Luke, 2009). Experiences of a ‘seeming intelligence’ (Doyle, 2011, 2012) are said to trigger or enhance “powerful ‘*biophilic*’ feelings [and] spiritual bonds with the natural world” (Harpignes 2007, p. 2) and frequently raised in contemporary ayahuasca discourse as going on to inform and shape the environmental attitudes and practices of everyday life for participants (Winkelman, 2005, 2013).⁴¹

As it is acknowledged that deep ecology may be arrived at via mystical experiences with nature (McLaughlin, 1995), explicit connections between psychedelics and ecology are attributed to an ecocentric haecceity and invocation of a numinous, noetic sense of sacredness and ‘greater than-self’ consciousness (Brown, 2009).⁴² Common experiences involve a boundary-dissolving sense of interconnectedness, oneness or unity with nature and reverence for the natural world often including “a long-term evolutionary perspective on our current historical situation” (Brown 2009, p. 4).⁴³ From

⁴⁰ *La Dieta* refers to both certain dietary and behavioural restrictions placed on drinkers prior to ceremony as well as to the lengthy process that apprentice shaman undergo in order to learn the spirit of different plants (Labate, 2014).

⁴¹ Reports of increased nature awareness with most psychedelic substances further reveal ayahuasca as “eminently suited to fostering an ethos of communication with and empathy for nonhuman nature” (Krippner & Luke, 2009).

⁴² Taken from the Pahnke’s (1969) Mystical Experience Questionnaire which was constructed as part of the 1962 Good Friday experiment to measure the psychedelic experience in terms based on “a universal definition of spontaneous mystical experiences as recorded from all religions, ages, and cultures (Pahnke 1969, p. 153).

⁴³ Additionally, the most widely reported transpersonal event for psychedelic substances such as ayahuasca was the encounter with “plant consciousness” (Krippner & Luke 2009 p. 14).

animism and shamanism, Jungian archetypes⁴⁴ and Indigenous mythology to paganism and green spirituality, an ‘ecology of consciousness’⁴⁵ with perennial philosophical iconography and ideations is principally experienced with these naturally occurring psychoactive substances (Luke, 2013). Doyle (2011) describes the actions of ayahuasca as ‘ecodelic’, exemplifying the multiplicities of experience and holistic perception of the psyche⁴⁶ wherein distinctions between subject and environment are eroded and a transpersonal self is invoked.⁴⁷ Given appropriate ‘set and setting’⁴⁸ psychedelics such as ayahuasca can therefore “give rise to a sense of deep connection with nature [or] interspecies communication” and by extent contribute to formulating and maintaining an animistic or ecocentric worldview⁴⁹ (Luke 2013, p.7). Ayahuasca thus becomes prototypical of an entheogen that merges internal ecology of the mind with the external ecology of the natural world, mediated by forces discursively attributed to both the agency of plant spirits and the properties of its pharmacological constituents (Tupper 2009b, p. 272).⁵⁰

With the transcultural proliferation and inherently numinous nature of ayahuasca gaining increased attention from both academic and media sources, the discussion forums of the Ayahuasca.com website thus serve as an consummate site for examine the convergences of deep ecological themes with

⁴⁴ Despite the many analogies between the psychedelic experience and Jungian archetypes, Jung himself “vehemently questioned the value of psychedelics for personal growth, and he uncompromisingly opposed their therapeutic application” (Hill 2013, p. 6-7).

⁴⁵ Synonymous with Bateson’s (2000) *Ecology of mind* as the way in which consciousness changes and forms patterns, both on a social and individual level from which ‘mind ‘ is likened to an ecosystem with ideas being the flora and fauna of this system.

⁴⁶ In contrast to Cartesian duality, the psyche as “etymologically linked with breath, life, and self” is thus seen as existing on a continuum in the mind/body system (Doyle 2012, p. 30).

⁴⁷ Pahnke’s (1969) Mystical Experience Scale also observes the notion of a separate ‘self’ as ceasing to exist alongside the merging with and/or encountering of ultimate reality as a predominant factor in psychedelic encounters (Griffiths, .et al. 2008).

⁴⁸ Dobkin De Rios & Grob (2005) confirm Leary, Metzner & Alpert’s (1964) theory that, a key factor in determining the apparent outcome of ayahuasca ingestion is the ‘set and setting’ alongside the role of suggestibility. ‘Set’ being the state of mind and mood that an individual brings to the experience and setting being the surrounding physical, social and cultural environment, people, place, time, etc.

⁴⁹ Krippner & Luke (2009, p. 12) explain that “on one level we can understand that this may be due to a basic appreciation of place and aesthetics that accompanies the increased sensory experience, or that since psychedelic plants come from Nature we are forced to enter its realms when we search them out”.

⁵⁰ Davis (2012, p. 190) asserts that “these explanations are ultimately less important than the zone opened up between neuroscience and traditional spiritual philosophy and practice”.

contemporary ayahuasca discourse. Given the distinctly biocentric rhetoric of contemporary ayahuasca discourse, an ecocultural studies approach facilitates analysis of the phenomenon's unique confluence of deeply ecological, social, spiritual and countercultural forces. This research consequently proceeds by providing a background to contextual currents informing the contemporary ayahuasca phenomenon and an outline of deep ecology's underlying norms, premises and platform principles. A literature review encompassing the intermeshed and overlapping fields of ayahuasca, New Age spirituality, the philosophy of deep ecology and ecocultural studies theory provides a critical evaluation of the many convergences that position ayahuasca as exemplary of entheogenic informed spiritual ecology. A methodological outline of this project's paradigmatic approach, sampling and coding techniques and thematic analysis method is further developed for the qualitative framework of this research. Findings are subsequently presented according to the rigours of thematic analysis and followed by conclusive discussion of the deep ecological themes found within the Ayahuasca.com discussion forum.

Background

Ayahuasca is astutely observed as now “swimming in the cultural water supply” (Davis 2010, p. 13) as various popular and countercultural texts produce discursive formations of ayahuasca. Central to the emergence of the contemporary ayahuasca phenomenon is the establishment of officially recognised syncretistic ayahuasca religions (Bronfman, 2006; Labate, MacRae & Goulart, 2010; Luna, 1995), the development of an expansive ayahuasca tourism industry and the propagation of transcultural networks of ayahuasca practices (Fotiou, 2012; Labate, Cavnar & Freedman, 2014; Tupper, 2009). Inevitably enmeshed in the New Age milieu, ayahuasca has become implicated in the discursive reconfiguration of shamanism and bound to a postmodern entheogenic spirituality that draws on perennial traditions (Metzner 1999a; Ott, 1996; Winkelman, 2007, 2013). The internet consequently serves as a principle vehicle for the communication of ayahuasca discourse (Labate, 2014; Tupper, 2009a) revealing knowledge and beliefs that deeply resonate with postmodern desires for spiritual healing and yearning for deeper ecological relationships (Davis, 2012; Metzner, 1999a). Developed as a philosophy to critique anthropocentrism, deep ecology essentially advances the equality of all life and a metaphysical interconnectedness achieved through a ‘deep questioning’ of the self and dominant anthropocentric cultural conventions (Devall & Sessions, 1985). As a result, the underlying premises and formulated principles of deep ecology interrelate with the contemporary ayahuasca phenomenon through a cross-cultural use of ritual that metaphysically informs an ecosophical ontology and praxis of deep ecology.

Contemporary Ayahuasca Discourse

The beginning of increased popular interest in ayahuasca is attributed by Beyer (2012) with some exactitude to the publication of Luna and Amaringo’s (1991) *Ayahuasca Visions*.¹ Also cited as notably influential in the Western awareness

¹ Bringing the vivid, intricate and sublime paintings inspired by Pablo Amaringo’s shamanic visions and journeys with ayahuasca forward into the Western imagination, Luna and Amaringo’s (1991) publication remains profoundly influential and frequently cited.

of ayahuasca is William Burroughs' (1963) *The Yagé Letters*² based on correspondence with Allen Ginsberg's descriptions of his experience with the brew. The development of public awareness around ayahuasca is marked by increasing overt references to the brew in popular movies,³ television dramas,⁴ reality shows,⁵ news exposés⁶ and documentaries.⁷ A number of independent releases⁸ have sought to critically examine and reflect the nuances of the contemporary ayahuasca phenomenon, although in the last decade a litany of Youtube clips have also arisen under the term ayahuasca.⁹ Additionally, numerous print and online news publications¹⁰ have included articles reporting on ayahuasca alongside editorials catered to travel¹¹ and health and lifestyle¹² with the recent presence of ayahuasca books in Walmart signalling a profound mainstream demand. While popular cultural references reflect and crystallise understandings and attitudes about ayahuasca, its exotic origins, relative obscurity and clear distinction from dominant drug discourse have allowed popular conceptions to be largely shaped by the entheogenic community itself (Beyer, 2012; Frias, 2012). As such, the increasing amount of academic publications devoted to ayahuasca and an upsurge of scientific and semi-scientific conferences focussing on ayahuasca's surfacing issues become

² Burroughs' (1963) narrative documents a seven month journey through the Amazonian jungles of Colombia, Ecuador and Peru in the hopes that finding *Yagé* (or ayahuasca) could relieve or cure his opiate addiction.

³ While explicit cinematic discourse of ayahuasca is still rare (the romantic comedy *Wanderlust* (2012) mentions it, though portrays it entirely inaccurately), a myriad of more implicit cinematic allusions to analogous brews, ritual or phenomenon provide better rendered impressions and of particular note is Jan Kounen's (2004) psychedelic Western *Blueberry*.

⁴ *Nip/Tuck* (2009) and *Weeds* (2008).

⁵ *Anthony Bourdain's No reservations* (2006) and *Extreme celebrity detox* (2005).

⁶ BBC (2008) *Amazon*, CBC (2012) *The Jungle Prescription*, *This is Life with Lisa Ling* and the Nine Network, 60 minutes *Jungle Fever*.

⁷ National Geographic Channel (2011) *The witch doctor will see you now* and Channel 4 (2001) *To the ends of the Earth -Jungle trip*.

⁸ *Aya awakenings* (2013), *Ayahuasca: Vine of the soul* (2010), *Heaven Earth* (2008), *Metamorphosis* (2009), *Other worlds* (2004) and *Stepping into the fire* (2011).

⁹ A cursory Youtube search for 'ayahuasca' revealed at last count 'about 167,000 results'.

¹⁰ *New York Times* (2014) 'Ayahuasca: A strong cup of tea', *Washington Post* (2010) 'Peruvian hallucinogen ayahuasca draws tourists seeking transforming experience' and *Time Magazine* (2009) 'Down the Amazon in search of Ayahuasca'. Also locally, *News.com* (2013) 'Australians flock to Peru for 'spiritual awakening' and ABC Radio's (2013) *Mind at Large*.

¹¹ Hudson (2011) cites Delta Airway's in-flight magazine *Sky* and the tripadvisor.com website as promoting ayahuasca retreats.

¹² *Elle* (2014) 'My journey with a life altering drug: Ayahuasca', *Marie Claire* (2014) 'The new power trip: Inside the world of ayahuasca' and 'The dark side of ayahuasca', *Men's Journal* (2013), 'Ayahuasca at home: An American experience' and *Vanity Fair* (2011) 'Letters from the Amazon; Magnificent Visions'.

another prominent discursive space in which “poetic facts collide with scientific ones” (Davis 2012, p. 190).¹³ The ongoing manifold of personal narratives,¹⁴ spiritual publications,¹⁵ evocative visionary artwork,¹⁶ inspired music,¹⁷ travelogues¹⁸ and celebrity testaments¹⁹ further corroborate ayahuasca’s profoundly transformative effects and will undoubtedly continue to discursively shape public perceptions of the brew.

The expansion of ayahuasca and its accompanying discourse is intrinsically tied to the emergence, establishment and growth of both the highly syncretic ayahuasca religions of *Santo Daime*,²⁰ *União do Vegetal*²¹ and *Barquinha*²² (Labate, MacRae & Goulart, 2010; Luna, 1995). Embedded in Colonialism and the process of cultural exchange,²³ the international expansion of ayahuasca

¹³ Many of these conferences, symposiums and meetings are highly interdisciplinary and also interface directly with the international psychedelic movement, with the recent *Aya2014: World Ayahuasca Conference* (2014) in Ibiza of note <<http://www.aya2014.com/>>.

¹⁴ Generally termed ‘trip reports’, individuals become compelled to share the insight gleaned from their experiences with ayahuasca, usually within the context of a journey to one of the many Peruvian ayahuasca retreats. As Tupper (2009, p. 124) observes, online narratives about the ayahuasca experience that emphasise personal healing, spiritual insight and transformation are almost as prevalent as the use of brew itself.

¹⁵ Many ayahuasca books are making their way into the New Age section through bulk distribution deals with publishing companies.

¹⁶ A vibrant visionary art movement has grown around the use of entheogens such as ayahuasca, with the extraordinary visual phenomenon rendered in a variety of mediums and a proliferation of emerging artists among which Alex Grey (1990) figures prominently.

¹⁷ Of note here is Australian artist Ben Lee’s (2013) album *Ayahuasca Welcome to the work*.

¹⁸ While Casper Greef’s (2009) book *The Ayahuasca diaries* is of note, a multitude of individual’s are relating their Amazonian journeys and experiences with ayahuasca on websites like LosViajeros.com and Pulsetours.com as well as innumerable personal blogs sites.

¹⁹ Celebrities that have spoken about their encounters with ayahuasca include Paul Simon, Sting and Tori Amos with Lindsay Lohan’s mention of ayahuasca on her television show *Lindsay* (2014) receiving widespread viewership

²⁰ Originally founded in the 1930’s as *Alto Santo* and fracturing into CEFLURIS in the 1971 with the death of *Mestre Irineu* (Raimundo Irineu Serra), *Santo Daime* translates as ‘Holy-Give Me’. Membership is hard to estimate and is suggested at upward of 5,000 across Australia, Britain, America, Canada, France, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy, Japan, Russia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland (Dawson, 2013).

²¹ Officially formed in northern Brazil in 1961, the *União do Vegetal* or UDV means ‘Union of the Plants’ founded by *Mestre Gabriel* (José Gabriel da Costa) and is the largest unified ayahuasca church, with an international membership of over 17, 000 (Labate & MacRae, 2008; Labate, MacRae & Goulart, 2010; Luna, 1995).

²² Created in 1945, *Barquinha* translates as ‘little boat’ founded by *Mestre Daniel* (Daniel Pereira de Mattos) and is the smallest of the three Brazilian churches though its centres remain primarily within Brazil (Labate & MacRae, 2008; Labate, MacRae & Goulart, 2010).

²³ The Amazonian Rubber plantations of 1879 -1912 laid fertile ground for cultural flow, exchange and interchange between rural and urban, Indigenous, Western and Mestizo communities (Labate & Cavnar, 2014; Luna, 2003). Acting as cultural hubs these spaces

churches beyond the Amazon have played a pivotal role in ayahuasca's dissemination (Labate, 2014). The 2010 UDV-DEA agreement²⁴ further marks a significant point in the expansion of ayahuasca by acknowledging its religious and spiritual import and establishing social and legal legitimacy for its members (Bronfman, 2006).²⁵ Within their unique incorporation of "diverse cultural, esoteric and philosophical tendencies", the doctrines of ayahuasca religions also commonly involve valorising the quest for 'untamed nature' and knowledge that is deemed ancestral (Labate, Macrae & Goulart 2010, p. 14).

Ayahuasca's profound globalisation has also been facilitated by a burgeoning tourism sector with the local staging of ayahuasca rituals for foreigners (Labate, 2014) via pre-packaged retreats or lodges where tourists can 'experience the jungle' or 'contact the rainforest'²⁶ growing exponentially.²⁷ While this milieu of ayahuasca's material and symbolic exchange blurs boundaries between spirituality, therapy and tourism services,²⁸ the popularisation of ayahuasca inevitably raises many concerns for stakeholders.²⁹ Nonetheless, the rise and uptake of an organised and expanding ayahuasca tourism sector has also arisen from reciprocal cultural flows between networks of actors both within the Amazon and other parts of the world (Fotiou, 2012;

provided increased access to ayahuasca rituals and their eventual assimilation with symbolic imagery from Catholic, African and Indigenous traditions (Dobkin De Rios & Grob, 2005).

²⁴ The lengthy legal battle in 2006, eventually saw the United States Supreme court legalise the use of ayahuasca for religious sacrament by the UDV's American branch *Centro Espírita Beneficente União do Vegeta*. For further details of the case, see Bronfman (2006).

²⁵ Hanegraaff (2012, p. 293) draws attention to the issue of entheogens playing any legitimate role in religion as causing controversy among scholars "for reasons that have less to do with factual evidence than with certain ingrained prejudices rooted in Western intellectual culture".

²⁶ The marketing of Amazonian shamanic rituals for tourists has inevitably led to increasing numbers of cross-cultural ayahuasca seekers travelling to the Amazon in search of physical, and psychological healing as well as spiritual or philosophical insight and to some extent an exotic or mystical traditional shamanic experience (Grunwell, 1998).

²⁷ Commencing in the 1960s and reaching their potential in the 1980s these retreats mostly located in Peru, Colombia, and Brazil show no sign of abating (Grunwell, 1998).

²⁸ Mantere (2013, p. 4) notes how ayahuasca communities understand South American retreats as a multidimensional phenomenon in which categories of 'pilgrimage', 'tourism' and 'spirituality' are interrelated.

²⁹ Brabec De Mori (2014) observes how political, social, cultural and ethical tensions surface between and among local communities as well as invested parties. Understandably, cultural commodification and production, intellectual property and bio-conservation resulting from the circulation, dilution and monopolisation of traditional or Indigenous knowledge emerge as important matters (Holman, 2011; Tupper, 2009a).

Langdon & Rose, 2014; Tupper, 2009a).³⁰ The remodelling of ayahuasca shamanism has been further accelerated by the development of retreat websites (Freedman, 2014; Holman, 2010; Hudson, 2011; Shepard, 2014; Tupper, 2009a) becoming enmeshed in imbroglios of dynamic interaction involving “new subjects, discourses, substances, and images that now circulate on a global scale” (Labate 2014, p. 182).³¹

New global ayahuasca networks represent another stage for the diasporic process of ‘transculturation’³² or ‘shamanisation of the world’³³ from which dynamic reinventions simultaneously create hybrid flows, cultural ruptures and a renewal of tradition (Labate, 2014; Labate & Cavnar, 2014). As a result of ayahuasca expansion and internationalisation, a new lexicon of terms now articulates the unique set of applications such as *vegetalismo*³⁴ and *curanderismo*³⁵ that utilise what are traditionally known as plant teachers, plant tools or *Doctores* (Tupper, 2009a).³⁶ The contemporary phenomenon of international and cosmopolitan ayahuasca practices known as *neo-vegetalismo*³⁷ focusses more specifically on Western expectations of psycho-spiritual or therapeutic healing as performed by *Ayahuasqueros*,³⁸ *Neo-*

³⁰ Labate, Cavnar and Freedman (2014, p. 12) point out that in many ways ayahuasca tourism also presents challenges to hegemonic notions of Indigeneity, authenticity and purity as it caters to outsider’s perceptions and becomes a “product of deliberate local strategies to adapt to changing socioeconomic conditions”.

³¹ Discourse around the internationalisation of ayahuasca appears to also re-generate demand for ‘ayahuasca tourism’, further setting “local religious or therapeutic practices in a strange new relationship with global markets and European esoteric traditions” (Shepard 2014, p. 34).

³² ‘Transculturation’ emphasises the often-ignored impact of a peripheral culture on the one that assumes dominance in the phenomenon of hybrid cultures (Ortiz, 1947),

³³ Labate (2014, p. 200) refers to the promotion of a reverse colonisation or new diaspora in which “exogenous symbols and practices are appropriated and incorporated selectively and creatively” then returned to their points of origin from which they are re-elaborated on..

³⁴ *Vegetalismo* mostly refers to Mestizo ayahuasca practices designed for tourists and is primarily a 20th century Peruvian Amazonian practice or “urban healing tradition based on indigenous ayahuasca shamanism” (Labate & Cavnar, 2014, p. 6).

³⁵ *Curanderismo* can be considered traditional ‘holistic’ or ‘folk’ healing and may utilise a myriad of natural substances to address ailments occurring at any or all of the interrelated material, spiritual or mental levels (Luna, 1986).

³⁶ The term meaning doctors is used to a term used in reference to both “the plant-teachers and to the spirits which may be contacted through these plants” (Luna 1986, p. 120).

³⁷ *Neo-Vegetalismo* is marked by a syncretic integration of Indigenous iconography, New Age tropes and Western scientific discourse with practices often employing other entheogenic substances alongside ayahuasca (Labate, 2014).

³⁸ An *Ayahuasquero* is generally someone who has the ability to prepare or cook ayahuasca, sometimes holding a ceremony though also referring to a healer still in training (Luna, 1986).

Ayahuasqueros,³⁹ *Curanderos and Curanderas*⁴⁰ or *Vegetalistas* (Luna, 2003).⁴¹

In stark contrast to Western medicinal treatments, contemporary ayahuasca practices follow an Indigenous ontology which conceives of illness as having simultaneous physical, psychological and spiritual dimensions and involve a complex process of healing that takes place in and outside of a ceremonial context (Fotiou, 2012).⁴² Tupper (2009a) identifies three main contexts of contemporary ayahuasca consumption outside its traditional geographic territory as being; religions or syncretistic churches, comparatively non-structured psychonautic contexts⁴³ and cross-cultural *vegetalismo* ceremonies in mostly commodified centres.⁴⁴ As evidence and awareness grows of ayahuasca's positive psycho-spiritual therapeutic benefits, the implications of introducing a powerful shamanic tool into the West (Tupper, 2009b) have only recently led to some deontology of ayahuasca practices.⁴⁵ While any code of ethics must necessarily include all stakeholders,⁴⁶ the nascent development of such platforms reflects ayahuasca's sociocultural critical mass.

³⁹ *Neo-ayahuasqueros* are contemporary non-Indigenous and Mestizo practitioners often operating under the moniker of shaman and usually with extensive training by Indigenous practitioners although sometimes not (Luna, 2003).

⁴⁰ A *Curandero* (male healer) or a *Curandera* (female healer) is a 'trained', experienced healer who works with a large repertoire of pharmacology and cosmology tools and knowledge of plants and plant spirits in order to cure a wide variety of ailments (Luna, 1986).

⁴¹ The emergence of practitioners of *Vegetalismo* reveals "a juxtaposition and fusion of roles" that while not necessarily explicit are generally accepted and understood (Labate 2014, p. 185).

⁴² Postmodern ayahuasca healing is understood "as a process in which the patient carries the responsibility for their own healing" rather than a singular event (Fotiou 2012, p. 6).

⁴³ The term psychonaut, coined by Ernst Jünger (1970) refers in essence to psychological, phenomenological or spiritual travellers and as Tramacchi (2006b, p. 22) explains, is a "relatively unproblematic expression for individuals who use psychoactive materials to achieve a subjective sense of excursion or inner exploration without necessarily implying, or precluding, a religious orientation".

⁴⁴ Tupper (2009a, p. 120) notes, "these types are neither mutually exclusive nor necessarily exhaustive" as ayahuasca is now implicated in a process of innovation in which spiritual seekers or healers engage in hybrid ritual forms that incorporate ayahuasca in diverse practices.

⁴⁵ 'The Plantaforma Code of Ethics' (2012), also called the 'Code of Ethics for Organisations which Use Ayahuasca in Spain' was developed in consultation with Spanish Ayahuasca organisations in an effort to integrate ayahuasca spiritual healing rituals into Western concepts of psychological health: <http://www.plantaforma.org/codigo_etico_esp.html>.

⁴⁶ The problematics of establishing an international code of ethics for ayahuasca consumption is reflected in a recent critique addressed toward the Ethnobotanical Stewardship Council's (ESC) mission to ensure safe and sustainable use of ayahuasca (NEIP, 2014).

Ayahuasca and the New Age

A significant contour in the transnational ayahuasca phenomenon is the discursive construct of ‘shamanism’, which cannot be understood as a concept in and of itself independent of its dialogically contextual positioning (Langdon & Rose, 2014). Current, newly constituted and emergent forms of ‘neo-shamanism’⁴⁷ represent a heterogeneous and universal phenomenon with belief systems that cannot be considered exclusively traditional or modern (Langdon & Rose, 2012). Standing at a paradoxical cross-road, contemporary shamanism has consequently become a socioculturally and historically situated phenomenon and construct, modified, revitalised and spread through the persistent but central feature of Indigenous plant medicines that induce ‘altered states of consciousness’ (Beyer, 2009; Eliade, 1964; Langdon & Rose, 2014; Winkelman, 2000).⁴⁸ The multifaceted role of neoshamans as naturopathic healers, holders of ecological knowledge and ritualistic performers (Beyer, 2009; Shepard, 2014)⁴⁹ has consequently obscured less amenable features of shamanic belief systems as they become “temporarily discarded in sanitised and exotic idealised representations” (Freedman 2014, p. 150).⁵⁰ As Amazonian shamanism is a complex ethno-medical and ritual practice (Callicott, 2013) contemporary neoshamanism must consequently be understood as a product of its integration into the ongoing transformative milieu of the ‘New Age’.⁵¹

⁴⁷ The modern idiom of ‘neoshamanism’ is defined by its eclectic and syncretic set of beliefs and practices and should be distinguished from what Harner (1980) refers to as ‘core shamanism’ or the centrality of underlying, universal features of shamanism unbound by any specific cultural perspective or group (Townsend, 2005).

⁴⁸ Winkelman (2000) asserts that “the validity of shaman as a cross-cultural concept” rests on the neurobiological basis and efficacy of shamanic techniques for inducing spiritual experiences and their universal archetypal foundation.

⁴⁹ While Indigenous groups are often perceived as the supposed “millennial caretakers of ancient sacred traditions” they are nonetheless implicated in the same processes of globalisation, environmental destruction and change as Westerners (Shepard 2014, p. 34).

⁵⁰ The curing of ailments is but one aspect of traditional Indigenous Amazonian shamans’ role as magico-religious practitioners in a highly complex network of social and inter-ethnic relations in which ayahuasca is bound to ambiguous notions of good and evil, bodily sorcery, pathogenic objects, prescience for hunting and warfare, local politics and social relations (Beyer, 2009; Eliade, 1964; Luna, 2003).

⁵¹ The amorphous term ‘New Age’ while useful, has become as Partridge (2005, p. 71) describes a ‘broadly mystical’, ‘catch-all’ but ‘notoriously slippery’ category involving an “enormous constellation of spiritualities and therapies”.

Migrating from an Indigenous ceremonial practice to a central aspect of syncretic churches and embedded in the entheogenic revival, ayahuasca has now become an inevitable part of ‘New Age’⁵² rituals conducted around the world that seek to revive archaic spiritual practices (Trichter, 2010). While New Age spirituality is often characteristically seen as drawing on an idiosyncratic *bricolage* of heterogeneous traditions, concepts and iconography, within the spiritual milieu there is consistent embracement of the notion of a perennial or enduring truth (Aupers & Houtman, 2006; Hanegraaff, 1996; Heelas, 1996; Possamai, 2001). With the renewal, restoration and revival of interest in ‘archaic religion’ and resurgent use of shamanic techniques,⁵³ the veraciously eclectic reconstitution of ayahuasca shamanism emerges as a “most visible manifestation of this astonishing historical atavism” (Ott 1996, p. 18). Attributed to broader popular interests in alternative forms of spirituality (Labate, 2014; Langdon & Rose, 2012), entheogenic practices have additionally been observed as embracing “a nature valuing or *organophilic* ethos...often coupled with a professed deep reverence for Indigenous peoples and their ethnopharmacological knowledge” (Tramacchi 2006a, p. 91). Contemporary ayahuasca shamanism is therefore embedded in notions of reclaiming direct or ‘lost’ knowledge of ancient Indigenous wisdom (McKenna, 2005; Winkelman, 2009, 2013)⁵⁴ and inevitably carries a re-unification of animistic and pantheistic beliefs, albeit with scientific understandings and modern technology.

Ayahuasca in the Digital Domain

The conspicuous convergence of psychedelic spirituality and cyberspace as a synthesis of technology, spirituality and confluence of ancient and modern

⁵² It is anticipated that some contemporary ayahuasca drinkers may resist the superficiality and commercialistic connotations that come with the term New Age potentially perceived as *maladroit*.

⁵³ A perennial fascination of anthropology, shamanic practices represent what Eliade (1964) refers to as ‘archaic technique of ecstasy’ suggesting that in most cultures shamanism may be the most ancient form of sacred awareness in the world due to the potential for mediation between the temporal and spiritual realms.

⁵⁴ Albeit, with significant departures from ‘shamanic’ characteristics of ‘pre-modern’ societies.

knowledge (Partridge, 2005)⁵⁵ has undoubtedly established “novel sociological conditions for ayahuasca to enter the popular mindscape” (Tupper 2009a, p. 123). Consequently, the digital arena is now perhaps the central force in communicating, transmitting and disseminating “vast amounts of information about ayahuasca” (Hudson 2011, p. 41).⁵⁶ The rapid evolution of digital media and communication technologies serves to place entheogenic practices as a visible and more accessible form of spirituality with an explosive growth of online sources addressing entheogens and shamanism (Hanegraaff, 2012). While ayahuasca may appear to have become, as Beyer (2009, p. 2) remarks, “a trope for the edgy, the transgressive, the seriously cool” in popular media,⁵⁷ within social networks however, it remains a serious tool for healing with a transformative and redemptive form. Campbell (2005b) maintains that, as a ‘cultured technology’, the internet and the culture in which it is utilised act to shape each other and websites thus serve as an extremely important vector for cohesion among entheogenic communities (Tramacchi, 2006b).

The internet and new digital media have unquestionably played the most critical role in lodging ayahuasca in the popular mindscape of Western cultures by disseminating information that re-contextualises its perception by mainstream society (Frias 2011; Tupper, 2009a). Internet forums, online communities and mailing lists have over the last decade or more generated heterogeneous spaces and networks of hybrid activities that place ayahuasca at the interstices of experimental spirituality, therapeutic and travel services, research and activism (Labate, 2014). While enabling ayahuasca to spread beyond the Amazon and around the globe, specific internet sites have simultaneously served to cohere geographically separated members in a

⁵⁵ As the internet was partly born out of 1960’s psychedelia, its transcendent liminal quality and boundaryless nature also gave rise to the sub-cultural imaginings of transhumanism, technosis, cyber-shamanism and psychonautics (Davis, 1999; McKenna, 2005).

⁵⁶ Hanegraaff (2012, p .403) observes that, as a result of the internet making “discussion of potentially illegal practices so much safer and easier” ayahuasca and associated practices become accessible and attractive to a new generation.

⁵⁷ While popular media reflects and propagates ayahuasca awareness, this trend may be equally attributed to Hollywood’s ongoing relationship with emerging alternative healing practices and spiritualities as well as a noted connection between psychedelics and creativity (Davis, 2012).

‘virtual community’.⁵⁸ The diversity of expressions about ayahuasca and related issues within particular internet sites also allow researchers and advocates to discuss and observe interactions between ayahuasca readers and drinkers (Labate 2014; Tupper, 2009a). Such robust and actively informative websites⁵⁹ also enable individuals who are seeking ayahuasca or regularly drink it, to discuss, share and exchange information⁶⁰ and to celebrate the flow of ideas and discourse on the subject of ayahuasca as a spiritual medicine (Frias, 2011; Grunwell, 1998). A common discursive thread among the members of online ayahuasca forums is the ongoing project of self-enlightenment as achieved through the establishing of “a deep connection with nature that leads to emotional healing” (Frias, 2011).

The Discourse of Deep Ecology

Deep ecology has been variously described as a philosophical, political, religious, scientific, spiritual and social movement for its rethinking of human/nature relations and assertion of “the continuing environmental crisis...as [one] of character and of culture” (Devall & Sessions 1985, p. ix). The philosophy of deep ecology conceived by Naess (1973)⁶¹ is one of ecological harmony or equilibrium, adopting the word ‘deep’ in order to contrast against environmental concerns that were considered ‘shallow’ or merely concerned with human interests (Naess, 1973).⁶² The word ‘deep’ also accordingly signifies and embodies the intensely felt or spiritual connections and ethical obligations to the biosphere that adherents hold as part of their

⁵⁸ Online communities are observed to act as a medium, platform and space, providing religious information and facilitating spiritual formation and expression (Campbell, 2005a),

⁵⁹ Among them; Dmt-nexus.me, Entheogen-network.com, Erowid.org, Lycaeum.org, Psychonaut.com, Reset.me.com and Shroomery.org.

⁶⁰ Some sites also serve to provide information on how to cultivate ayahuasca’s constitutive plants, prepare ayahuasca and its analogues as well as information on retreat destinations in the general ethos of harm reduction.

⁶¹ Naess’ (1973) inspiration for deep ecology is variously rooted in the ethos of Gandhian nonviolence, Mahayana Buddhism and mountaineering and combines Spinozian philosophical pantheism with Rousseau’s rejection of Abrahamic orthodoxies in order to resacralise the world by identifying god with Nature (Sessions, 1995).

⁶² Naess (1973, p. 95) explains shallow ecology as actions against pollution and resource depletion whose central objective is “the health and affluence of people in the developed countries” and Drengrson (1997, p. 114) clarifies that “the shallow-deep spectrum...is not the same as the old right-left split” and cuts across most conventional distinctions.

underlying beliefs.⁶³ Naess' (1973) expansive ontology embodies a "rejection of the man-in-environment (*sic*) image in favour of the relational, total-field image" that goes beyond egoic understandings to include a sense of self and other "as knots in the biospherical net...of intrinsic relations" (Naess 1973, p. 95). The philosophical underpinning of deep ecology is therefore an 'ecosophy'⁶⁴ or ecological 'wisdom' taken up as "an ongoing, comprehensive, deep inquiry into values, the nature of the world and the self" (Drengson 1997, p. 110). The core of deep ecology therefore rests on a process of 'Self-realisation!'⁶⁵ as involving any spiritual growth or unfolding that leads to "an identification which goes beyond humanity to include the nonhuman world" (Devall & Sessions 1985, p. 67).⁶⁶

Deep ecology in the academic sense rests on a fundamental ontology of 'metaphysical holism'⁶⁷ and an axiology of 'biocentric egalitarianism'⁶⁸ from which the praxis of bioregionalism⁶⁹ often flows (Keller, 2009). Metaphysical holism encapsulates a nature of being in which the biosphere is viewed as consisting "not of discrete entities but rather internally related individuals that make up an ontologically unbroken whole" (Keller 2009, p. 207). Deep

⁶³ Naess (1996a) maintains that everyone has a total view whether they know it or not and these provide the basis for one's 'life's philosophy' and consequently for an understanding of the ecological 'big picture'.

⁶⁴ Naess (1973) named his own personal ecosophy; 'Ecosophy T' referring both to his mountain home *Tvergastein* in Norway in which the philosophy was reached and the Norwegian word for interpretation (*tolkning*) as central to Naess' (1973) philosophy of language and communication.

⁶⁵ Naess (1986b) originally expressed this with a Capital 'S' self so as to distinguish the larger ecological-Self from the small 's', ego-self, with the exclamation point used to denote that "this is not a mere description, but that it says something that ought to be" (Drengson 1997, p. 115). It is however, commonly dropped in most deep ecology literature and shall be from here.

⁶⁶ Observed as often taking the form of ancient or revitalised non-anthropocentric belief systems like Eastern religions (Buddhism, Hinduism and Taoism) and Indigenous traditions such as animism, monism, paganism, panpsychism, etc (Naess, 1986a).

⁶⁷ Metaphysical holism arises from self-realisation through which the interconnectedness and interrelatedness of all life forms is tied to recognition of the illusory boundaries of the self and other living beings, through which identification and symbolic coexistence with the lifeworld in its entirety is achieved (Anker, 1998; Fox, 1990).

⁶⁸ Biocentric equality is similarly explained as "intimately related to the all-inclusive self-realisation in the sense that if we harm the rest of Nature then we are harming ourselves" (Devall & Sessions 1985, p. 67).

⁶⁹ The term bioregionalism coined by Van Newkirk (1975) in essence entails the notion of becoming native to one's place (Mathews 2000) by drawing political boundaries along ecological or geo-regional lines and is often presented as the activist face or prevailing social philosophy of deep ecology (Taylor, 2005),

ecology's inference of 'biocentric' or 'ecocentric' equality is described as a principle which holds "all organisms and entities in the ecosphere [as] parts of the interrelated whole [and] equal in intrinsic worth" (Devall and Sessions 1985, p. 67). Bioregionalism naturally extends from the previous fundamentals as an affective recognition and engagement with nonhuman life that leads to a relationality and reciprocity with one's immediate local biota community and by extent an affective concern for nature (Mathews, 1995).⁷⁰ The contemporary bioregional perspective inevitably embraces the notion of 'wilderness epiphanies', primal nature rituals and living in intimate contact with inhabitants of wild ecosystems as enabling animistic perceptions of interspecies communication (Sessions, 1995). As Drengson (1997, p. 111) explains, by exploring embodiment and place via the ecological-self "we discover our affinities with other beings as part of our humanity".⁷¹ Consequently, through solidarity between human and nonhuman life we acknowledge that the value of human relationships to the natural world "takes place in a place and it must be grounded in information and experience" (Snyder 1995, p. 45).⁷² A central tenet of deep ecology is therefore an antipathy toward dominant anthropocentric views of human/nonhuman relations that shares the advocacy of "a biocentric [or ecocentric] sense of reality and value" (Berry 1995, p. 3) with contemporary ayahuasca discourse.

Anthropocentrism

The anthropocentrism which deep ecology critiques has been variously attributed to apparent physical, psychological, spiritual and cultural separation

⁷⁰ Taylor (2001a, 2000b) asserts that affinity with 'sacred nature' and 'living place' inevitably yields a view that the actions of environmentally-destructive industry are 'desecration' which in the context of deep ecology morally obligates resistance, restoration and reconsecration.

⁷¹ It is this sense of the ecological-self, connected to and inseparable from the diversity of all living things that ties deep ecology to mystical experiences, the transformation of consciousness and 'self-realisation' (Naess, 1989).

⁷² Snyder's (1990, p. 7) '*Practices of the Wild*' asserts that "Nature is not a place to visit, it is home"; therefore acknowledging 'nature' not as a singular, homogenous concept but as a set of distinctive bioregional areas in which the landform and its life are part of the culture.

between human kind and the biosphere.⁷³ Humankind's domineering and conquering relationship to nature has often been attributed to the discourse of the Abrahamic traditions⁷⁴ and the ordainment of 'divine' status to human kind (White, 1967) while simultaneously demonising shamanic and pagan practices (Metzner, 1999a & 1999b; Shepard, 1969). Berry's (1988, 2000) ecotheological stance maintains the cause of ecological crises as an abnormal relationship⁷⁵ on the part of the human species unable to emotionally perceive their mother Earth's presence. While anthropocentric attitudes have aggravated ecological imbalance, if human's like all species seek to maximise their own survival and a 'homo-centric' viewpoint is inevitable, it may well be our ability to psychologically transcend this perspective that redeems us (Metzner, 1999b).

Ecopsychology posits a suicidal/ecocidal discourse framing the human species' myopic fixation and arrogant pursuit of economic growth at all costs as an addictive compulsion⁷⁶ towards environmental destruction despite all evidence of impending catastrophe (Scroll, 2005, 2011). Metzner (1995b, p. 61) observes a common refrain in explaining the human/nature disconnect as being the notion of a modernity induced collective amnesia, that "as a species [we] have forgotten something our ancestors once knew and practiced". The notion of a spiritual loss of connection with the Earth also extends to a critique of 'rational' sciences' construction of a hegemonic hierarchy of sentience and dismissal of altered states of consciousness as vehicles to ecospirituality

⁷³ Richard Louv (2005) coins the term 'nature deficit disorder' to highlight the creation of an entire generation detached from natural surroundings through increased industrialisation and development.

⁷⁴ While "the domination and exploitation of nature was not an explicit teaching of the Christian church", it was nonetheless reinforced by a theology which perceived the divine as wholly inaccessible and relegated the corporeal or 'natural' to "the corrupted world of the fall" (Metzner 1993, n.p).

⁷⁵ Berry (1988) proposes humanity as children figuratively autistic towards their mother, while Shepard (1969) similarly diagnoses industrialised pathological destruction as a case of arrested development analogous to a fixation like juvenile psychosis.

⁷⁶ Metzner (1993) explains the metaphor of addiction or compulsion on a global cultural scale as consistent in many ways with the teachings of Asian spiritual traditions such as Buddhism and Taoism, which posit dissatisfaction as the inevitable feature of all human consciousness and craving or desire as the root of suffering.

(Drengson, 1997; Schroll & Walker, 2011).⁷⁷ It is through the lens of ‘lost knowledge’⁷⁸ that Native American and Indigenous cultures come to be perceived of as “preservers of a traditional wisdom” which Western society has both suppressed and ignored (Hanegraaff 2012, p. 408).

Perennial Philosophy

Deep ecology’s primary assertion that “the ecological crisis is a symptom of a deeper metaphysical crisis” in human culture and consciousness therefore advances perennial models of apprehending reality that recognise the sacrality all life forms and their interdependent relations (Mathews 2005, p. 8). Naess’ (1973) expression of ecosophy is intuitively grounded in Huxley’s (1945) perennial philosophy⁷⁹ which maintains an ever-relevant, inexhaustible theme of mystic experiential knowledge or gnosis to be the highest common factor of all theologies (Hanegraaff, 1996; Possamai, 2006). Drawing on a variety of traditions that embrace non-dualism, animism, pantheism and holistic metaphysics, deep ecology has in this sense become a “contemporary manifestation of a primordial metaphysics” (Greer 2012, p. 298). Perennial gnosis is commonly embodied by contemporary ayahuasca discourse because the experience is inter-culturally perceived as providing access to the ‘other’, beyond a cultural ‘other’ to “a global, universal, timeless and even divine other” (Fotiou 2014, p. 170). Contemporary ayahuasca shamanism thus comes to implicate a deep ecology through the attainment of a radical pantheism or cosmotheism accessed via a direct experiential knowledge limited neither by monotheism or rational philosophy (Hanegraaff, 2012).⁸⁰ Drawing from the

⁷⁷ It has been proposed by deep ecologists “that the postmodern thinking imported from Europe has undermined the status of ‘nature’...as a whole that includes but exists independently of humankind” (Taylor & Zimmerman 2005, p. 457).

⁷⁸ Harrison et al. (2007 p. 134) evoke the notion of gnosis inherent in perennial philosophy as far from lost but “still there for everyone to find...just under the surface of things”.

⁷⁹ Attributing the phrase *philosophia perennis* to Leibniz (1714), the term perennial philosophy stems from Huxley’s (1945) book of the same name, Huxley (1945, p. 1) defines “a metaphysic that recognises a divine reality substantial to the world of things and lives and minds”.

⁸⁰ As revealed by Harner’s (1980) model of ‘classic’ shamanism in which the presence of common transcultural experiences of a spiritual self, engaged with a non-ordinary reality are achieved through a universality of techniques.

pool of perennial philosophy,⁸¹ deep ecology and contemporary ayahuasca discourse both promote the notion of ‘paradigmatic shift’ as essential in “redirecting the ecologically destructive path of modern industrial growth societies” (Sessions 1995, p. ix).

Deep ecology’s critique of anthropocentric modernity as a failure to identify with other species is also redressed via contemporary ayahuasca discourse in which the nonhuman and inorganic world is visibly materialised in human cultural form⁸² within an intersubjective field of perception (Callicott, 2013; Virtanen, 2014). The fundamental biocentric equality of deep ecology appears integral to contemporary ayahuasca discourse through direct dialogical contact with “those nonhuman entities...whose appearance is linked to the disappearance of the self” (Doyle 2011, p. 112). A revival of animistic worldviews consequently stems from such alterations of self and other and nature comes to be understood as a series of subjects and not just utilitarian objects (Metzner 1997). As ayahuasca allows for recognition of the spirit moving in all of nature and in its nonhuman creatures (Saraiva et al., 1992),⁸³ a metaphysical holism arises through consideration of humanity’s “place in the greater scheme of life [and] other living things as our kin” (Mathews 2005, p. 72). Ayahuasca’s animistic discourse further brings to light deep ecology’s bioregional approach to sociocultural life as the biotic community is intertwined with spiritual community and ‘spirit of place’ or *genius loci* is predicated on understanding system of interdependent relations (Metzner, 1995a).⁸⁴

⁸¹ Taylor (2001a, p. 180) explains the existence of such a perennial philosophy as “a global religion of primal, ancient lineage, encompassing diverse, nature-beneficent cultures and lifeways” as still expressed in Far East religions and Jewish, Christian and Islamic mysticism.

⁸² The worldview of ayahuasca shamanism is permeated “by a multiplicity of unseen but sensed spirit entities that are causal agents underlying the variety of phenomena” (Winkelman 2007, p. 148).

⁸³ Plant teachers like ayahuasca potentially hold “the ability to transform the subtle, non-material world into something very palpable” (Saraiva, et al. 1992, p. 105).

⁸⁴ Molnar (2013, p. 78) raises the important but relatively nascent issue of considering the ethical (and spiritual) considerations of using “plant-based entheogens outside of the geographic areas in which they were grown”.

The importance of ritual involving intimate, conscious and communicative relationship with the natural world endorsed by deep ecology (LaChapelle, 1985) is exemplified by contemporary ayahuasca practices as a sophisticated social and spiritual technique for engaging with nonhuman life. The re-emergence of entheogenic practices and perennial worldviews that seek to restore more ecocentric, symbiotic relationships between humanity and its environment inevitably have “profound potential for shifting human cultural discourse” (Callicott 2013, p. 40)⁸⁵ through deep ecological praxis. This research consequently seeks to examine the contours of this alignment by examining the way contemporary ayahuasca discourse reveals the use of nature-centric ritual to disrupt dominant anthropocentrism and facilitate experiential, ecological wisdom deemed timeless, invaluable and ever-relevant. Having identified the discourses of the contemporary ayahuasca phenomenon and philosophy of deep ecology as significant contours in postmodern spirituality, the multifaceted aspects and intersecting themes will consequently be explicated in a review of the relevant literature.

⁸⁵ While many accounts of the ayahuasca experience “stress the transcendence of time and space” this can often translate into “transcendence of cultural boundaries” as well (Fotiou 2014, p. 170).

Literature Review

Grounded in common counter-cultural currents, the manifold forces surrounding the contemporary ayahuasca phenomenon, New Age spiritualities, deep ecology and postmodern ecoculturalism expose similar tangential challenges to dominant anthropocentric norms. As such, the body of literature evaluated for this review broadly identifies and incorporates the four predominant and convergent fields of academic interest as ayahuasca, New Age spirituality, deep ecology and sociological and cultural studies theorists who encompass such entanglements. A critical overview of the extensive ayahuasca literature is essential for understanding the context of contemporary ayahuasca shamanism and its discursive expansion. Additionally, the academic field of New Age spirituality serves to address emergent hybrid practices involving nature-based belief epiphanies while converging deep ecological and entheogenic practices with cyberspace.¹ The abundant literature developed around deep ecology, while a “hotly debated discursive field” (Greer 2012, p. 297),² is integral to this research for furthering an understanding of the manifold philosophical, ethical and political contentions and cross-disciplinary polemics of deep ecology as it applies to ayahuasca discourse. Ecocultural studies literature supports the counter-hegemonic discourse of ayahuasca and nonhuman communication and deep ecology’s critiques of anthropocentrism while further serving to address the unique nature-human-technology convergence that is the digitally situated context of this research.

Ayahuasca Academics

The growing body of academic ayahuasca literature while also providing discursive formations, spans multiple disciplines from anthropology,

¹ Ayahuasca practices appear to align with the New Age spirituality’s interrelated ideas and beliefs; variously expressed through an understanding of the ‘unity of all things’, the need for self-discovery, realisation, growth and transformation towards higher states of being (Heelas, 1996).

² Greer (2012, p. 11) notably observes the category deep ecology as polyvalent and asserts no singular definition, proposing the graphical designation ‘DE’ instead to avoid referring to a “particular interpretation, but to the field of discourse that is referenced when the term deep ecology is used”. This research however uses Naess & Session’s (1984) formulation and retains the original referential category.

ethnobotany,³ neurology, pharmacology and psychology with more recent moves into interdisciplinary fields.⁴ The diverse range of terms, etymologies, conceptual practices and rich vernacular given by Highpine (2012) and (Luna, 1986, 2003) serve to clarify contemporary ayahuasca discourse and understandings of the vine and the brew. Grounded in the 1960's countercultural movement's interest in exotic plants that induce altered states of consciousness (Hanegraaff, 2012), understanding of ayahuasca discourse is also embedded in a growing body of resurgent psychedelic science⁵ (Hendricks, 2014; Grob, Greer & Mangini, 1998; Roberts & Hruby, 2002; Winkelman & Roberts 2007; Sessa, 2012; Shroder, 2014).

In recent decades, extensive studies into the expansion of syncretic ayahuasca religions⁶ have contributed greatly to scientific understanding of the brew⁷ the practices and beliefs of its members, cross-cultural configurations, global dissemination and variant intersections with religious-state law that discursively inform ayahuasca spirituality (Dobkin De Rios & Grob, 2005; Labate, MacRae & Goulart, 2000, Luna, 1995).⁸ In response to new, expansive

³ The foundation of scientific research into ayahuasca owes a significant debt of gratitude to knowledge founded by early anthropological figures such as Davis (1997), Harner (1972, 1980), Schultes (1972, 1976 & 1990), Schultes and Hofmann (1992) and Taussig (1987) from which a myriad of ethnographical studies into Amerindian Indigenous ayahuasca use emerge.

⁴ The emergent field of transpersonal studies is noteworthy here and includes anthropology, ecology, psychology and parapsychology.

⁵ After promising clinical investigations into the therapeutic potential of psychoactive substances in the 1950's and 60's was impeded by unmitigated prohibition a postmodern renaissance of wider academic and clinically rigorous psychedelic science has developed into a vibrant new field embraced by a multitude of disciplines "now, once more legally exploring psychedelics' vast potential for treating various physical and psychological problems" (Friedman 2006, p. 39).

⁶ Langdon & Rose (2014, p. 83) note the difficulty in generalising about these groups as each forms its unique characteristics from their incorporation of various elements of other spiritual traditions, with each centre taking on expressions of its leader's specific cosmology and interpretation of syncretic practices.

⁷ Seeking to examine the efficacy and safety of ayahuasca consumption, the UDV played an integral role in the Hoasca project initiated by Terrence McKenna in 1991. Implemented by medical and academic colleagues in 1993, the project scientifically investigated the acute and the long-term effects of regular ingestion of ayahuasca tea by church member volunteers using in-depth structured psychiatric interviews, serotonergic responses and pharmacokinetics measurement (McKenna, Callaway & Grob, 1998).

⁸ Based on visions experienced by their charismatic founders, ayahuasca occupies a central position within these religions and takes the central role of sacrament consumed as part of religious ceremony for the development of spiritual, emotional and ethical well-being in its adherents (Dobkin de Ríos & Grob, 2005).

ayahuasca networks, sections of scholarship have only recently begun to address the sociocultural implications of ayahuasca's increasing popularity, examining the effects of globalisation on Indigenous practices and the commodification of shamanic practices (Fotiou, 2012; Hudson, 2011; Trichter, 2010; Labate & Cavnar, 2014; Labate & Jungaberle, 2011; Tupper, 2009a; Winkelman, 2005).

Understanding of ayahuasca's phenomenological, metaphysical, theological function and role in the shamanic lore and animistic cosmology of Amerindian and Mestizo culture is provided by Beyer's (2009) detailed ethnographical accounts. Metzner (1999a) and Shanon's (2002) extensive participant interviews into ayahuasca phenomenology facilitate the comparison and contrast between traditional ecological belief systems and allow dominant archetypal and perennial patterns to emerge. The notion of contemporary ayahuasca practices as a 'phenomenon' itself, is informed by Labate (2011) and Labate and Cavnar's (2014) critical examinations of ayahuasca's modern cultural reinvention, hybridisation and postcolonial context of spiritual healing. Virtanen (2014, p 76) extends this work to include the nonhuman realm by pertinently examining the emergent "horizontal openings between new actors, beings, and entities" created by shifting power relations between Indigenous, Mestizo and dominant societal hierarchies.

Cavnar and Freedman (2014) caution against the quest for cultural authenticity in ayahuasca shamanism and further reveal the vicissitudes of inter-ethnic and global alliances within contemporary transcultural ayahuasca networks that cater to Western perceptions of ayahuasca ceremony. Unique postmodern configurations of shamanic rituals signify ayahuasca practices as aligning with modern New Age modalities of self-help and a potent method of "reflexive self-knowledge" (Labate 2014, p. 184). The contested construct of shamanism, its origins, evolution, conceptual nuances and cross-cultural application shed further light on the integral role of alternate states of consciousness in

Indigenous ritual practices (Atkinson, 1992; Eliade, 1964; Winkelman, 2000, 2007, 2013).

Of direct relevance to this thesis are a small set of papers that have only recently undertaken analysis of ayahuasca's discursive expansion in the specific medium of internet communications. The potential of new media forces to proliferate ayahuasca discourse has been observed as propelling the brew and practices into the popular mindscape of Western cultures (Beyer, 2012; Frias 2011; Hudson, 2011; Tupper, 2009a). While popular texts are beginning to shape understandings of ayahuasca by producing, distributing and increasing consumer awareness and perpetuating ayahuasca commodification (Beyer, 2012), internet sites are noted as facilitating the international exchange of ayahuasca information for well over a decade (Grunwell, 1998; Hudson, 2011). The role of ayahuasca websites is observed as serving multiple functions notably advertisement for retreats⁹ said to exert 'Corporate', 'New Age' and 'Exotic' discourses (Holman, 2011). Retreat websites are however also catering to a supply and demand of ayahuasca rituality (Losonczy & Cappo, 2014) and consequently facilitate an emergent form of spiritual pilgrimage (Mantere, 2013).

As a complex site of agency between local and global actors, ayahuasca websites also act as 'virtual communities' assisting religious groups to maintain social cohesion despite geographical separation (Frias, 2011; Hudson, 2011).¹⁰ The utilisation of the Ayahuasca.com discussion forum as a research site therefore enables the motivations, experiences and outcomes of cross-cultural ayahuasca drinkers to be heard directly (Frias, 2011; Mantere, 2013). Although these discussions may appear outwardly to employ discursive strategies that construct a spiritual language in order to separate ayahuasca

⁹ Holman's (2011) discourse analysis focussed on the Blue Morpho website, one of the more prominent at that time.

¹⁰ Frias (2011) also notes that Ayahuasca.com members are also variously situated in differing social contexts where ayahuasca may be embedded into daily life or shunned for its association with psychedelic drugs

practices from dominant drug rhetoric (Frias, 2011), larger dialogical currents and forces position entheogens as sacrament exclusively used in ritual contexts with healing intentions (Fotiou, 2012).

The general resurgence of interest in entheogenic, shamanic practices (Atkinson, 1992; McKenna, 1991; Ott, 1996; Winkelman, 2005, 2013) further signifies ayahuasca as having a unique role of in mediating human perceptions of the natural world (Callicott, 2013; Doyle, 2011, 2012). Explicating the way Indigenous ontologies of ‘human-plant interconnections’ are positioned in stark contrast to the anthropocentrism of Western ideals relate ayahuasca’s role in perceiving traditional ecological knowledge (Harpignes, 2007; Metzner, 1997, 1999a & 1999b). The significance of ayahuasca’s ability to facilitate postmodern ecocentric spirituality beyond Amazonian ontologies (Luna, 1995; Pollan & Davis, 2001) is grounded in phenomenological analysis of the ecological implications arising from psychedelics’ broader propensity to enhance semantic connections with nature (Brown, 2009; Harrison et al., 2007; Lawlor, 2008; Luke, 2013, Krippner & Luke, 2009). Of particular expedience are recent biosemiotic analyses by Callicott (2013) and Doyle (2011, 2012) that focus on ayahuasca specific techniques that enable interspecies communication and the method by which plant spirits convey information to the human mind through an indexical semantic process. Consequently, Doyle’s (2012, p. 38) ascription of ‘agency’ to ayahuasca places drinker and vine in an inseparable biosemiotic system whose ‘mark’ is the “self-evident experience of being a biological and hence radically interconnected being”¹¹ and exemplifies the deeply ecological nature of contemporary ayahuasca discourse.

Numinous Nature in the New-Age

Contemporary ayahuasca discourse inevitably forms a juncture with New Age spiritual belief systems as an exemplary form of ‘Entheogenic Esotericism’

¹¹ Contemporary ayahuasca ritual regards the vine and brew as a person; the ‘mother of ayahuasca’ called into being from the web of relations through its *icaros* as sung by the shaman or *Ayahuasquero* holding the space (Labate, 2014).

(Hanegraaff, 2011, 2012)¹² that converges with deep ecology via a general re-sacralisation of nature (Taylor, 2001, 2001b). In order to cater for its competing discourses and diverse formations deep ecology is often bound to the ‘New Age’ as a form of contemporary esotericism (Greer, 2012).¹³ Nature-based philosophies such as deep ecology are also considered “increasingly, although not exclusively, ‘orthodox’” (Taylor, 2001b).¹⁴ Deep ecology is also bound to the consecration of convergent spiritual, technical, cosmological and evolutionary narratives as a cohesive belief system through growing Western re-enchantment with the construct of ‘occulture’ (Partridge, 2006).¹⁵ Examining the perception, invention and expression of emergent nature-based-religiosity,¹⁶ Taylor’s (2001a, 2001b; 2005, 2008, 2010) body of work further becomes formative in identifying the “continuities, discontinuities and ironies” among deep ecology and its postmodern manifestations (Taylor 2001b, p.225).¹⁷

Contemporary ayahuasca discourse can be seen through the lens of ‘Earth and Nature-based spirituality’ as a countercultural movement that melds with the New Age through a reverence for and personification of nature itself as a transforming and transcendent power (Taylor, 2001a, 2000b). Just as deep ecology is rooted in a wide range of intuitive and affective experiential encounters (LaChapelle, 1985; Seed et al., 1998), contemporary ayahuasca

¹² While Hanegraaff (2012, p. 392-3) asserts the need for this type of religion to “be understood as a form of ‘esotericism’” he also provides a corollary that “the notion of ‘entheogenic religion’, if taken literally, does not strictly imply such substances”, after all, there are many other modalities that may facilitate or trigger such states of ‘enthusiasm’ as have also been used in antiquity.

¹³ Deep ecology is considered by Greer (2012) as a form of esotericism for its claims of access to truth and higher knowledge through experiential gnosis in a similar manner in which Hanegraaff (2012) describes the ‘entheogenic’ revival as esoteric.

¹⁴ An increasing amount of scientists are beginning to express reverence or at least ‘awe’ for nature, consequently leading to their involvement with earthen spirituality and rituals to the point that Taylor (2001b, p. 235) indicates “the emergence of a new religious movement that can be called ‘scientific paganism’”.

¹⁵ Partridge (2005, p. 68) uses the term ‘occulture’ to refer to an often hidden, rejected and oppositional form of contemporary Western religiosity.

¹⁶ Taylor (2010) points to the importance of using flexible definitions of religion and spirituality particularly in relation to earth based-belief systems as strict terminological boundaries prevent new perceptions and insights.

¹⁷ Sessions (2006, p. 168) maintains that Taylor “appears to be largely unfamiliar with Naess’ writings”, and his tendency “to view deep ecology through the prism of the *Earth First!* movement” consequently equates the philosophy with environmental radicalism.

practices exemplify a deep ecological ritual that involves ‘altered states of consciousness’ and ‘hallucinogenic epiphanies in nature’¹⁸ through which individuals find ‘ultimate meaning’ (Taylor, 2001a, 2000b; Taylor & Zimmerman, 2005). Deep ecology is observed by Taylor (2010, p. 13) as bound to a nature-based religiosity by its “deep sense of belonging to and connectedness in nature” and perception of the Earth and its living systems as “sacred and interconnected”. The discursive conjunctions between the New Age milieu, contemporary ayahuasca practices and deep ecology arise through their implication in an “ongoing and dynamic process of popularisation, innovation and appropriation” (Greer, 2012, p. 308) and form part of a concerted ‘ecologisation’ of everyday life (Latour, 1988).

The construct of the New Age (Heelas, 1996)¹⁹ parallels the countercultural development of deep ecology and the contemporary ayahuasca phenomenon as drawing on nature-centric practices antecedent to the New Age’s ambiguous fusion of spiritual, consumer and populist ideas (Partridge, 2006). Embodying science-infused metaphysics (Taylor, 2010), deep ecology further melds with the *sensu stricto* of the New Age²⁰ that views the entire biosphere and Earth itself as a complex, self-organising, self-regulating, living system or entity (Hanegraaff, 1995) as posited by Lovelock’s (1979) Gaia hypothesis.²¹ Lovelock’s (1991) various articulations and revisions of Gaia theory represent a productive confluence between scientific understandings and cultural discernments (ancient and new) of human society as existing within the larger

¹⁸ Taylor (2001a, p. 184) points out that “although peyote, ‘magic’ mushrooms, and some other drugs have fostered earthen spirituality” in the deep ecology movement, such aids are not deemed necessary and that “through extended time in undefiled wilderness, anyone can learn to discern the earth’s sacredness”.

¹⁹ Heelas (1996, p. 9) notably resists operational definitions of the New Age suffice to define its common theme as “the wisdom of the experiential”.

²⁰ Hanegraaff (1996, p. 67) describes the ‘paradigm of self-organisation’ as a prominent example of ‘organicistic holism’ and central to criterion of the New Age.

²¹ Lovelock (1979) used the Greek goddess Gaia as a metaphorical idiom to explain the biological and evolutionary coupling of living organisms to their environment. However he never proposed a teleological ‘purposefulness’ and merely used Gaia to put forward the concept of “planetary medicine as a way of seeing the Earth’s problems differently” (Lovelock 1991, p. 6).

continuum of life (Taylor, 2010).²² Gaia theory draws some deep ecological critique for advocating human inaction from Earth's perceived inherent resilient and a consequently negation of stewardship (Sessions, 1995). As Gaia theory is enduringly comparable to "ancient animistic views of the world-as-organism" holding intelligence, soul or consciousness (Sessions 1995, p. 300) it expectedly exemplifies discursive connections between deep ecology and contemporary ayahuasca discourse.

Deep ecology's New Age permeations consequently align with contemporary ayahuasca discourse in their integration of Teilhard de Chardin's (1966) concept of the noosphere²³ and Russell's (1982) 'global brain'.²⁴ The concept of digitally facilitated unified consciousness is slated by Sessions (1995) as vindicating a cybernetic, mega-technological utopian vision of anthropocenic and planetary domination that runs counter to deep ecology's ethos. Gaia theory is however inextricably woven with cyberspace in expansive and discursive countercultural spiritual narratives paralleling the psychedelic movement's expression of New Age ideologies as part of an elective affinity with both magical and digital technologies (St John, 2009; Zandbergen, 2010). Partridge (2005) observes the presence of entheogenic culture in cyberspace and neoshamanism as the recent incarnation in a broader movement of modern psychedelic spirituality. Many congruent and complementary currents of "animistic and polytheistic 'nature religion'" exist within cyberspace (Aupers 2010, p. 220) alongside deeper digital connexions with psychedelics (Davis, 1999, 2012; Eagar, 2003; St John, 2009) that highlight the many tangential

²² Taylor (2010) draws parallels between Lovelocks (1979) Gaia Theory and Deep Ecology as both embodying a type of Gaian Naturalism.

²³ The Noosphere (*nous* 'mind' and *sphaira* 'sphere') is a concept attributed to Teilhard de Chardin (conceived as early as 1922) to represent the mental sheathe of Earth. While life on Earth is seen as a unified system, it is suggested that the noosphere is an inevitable and ongoing stage of terrestrial evolution, as the thinking layer subsumes and transforms the biosphere on which it rests and becomes the ultimate extension of the global brain.

²⁴ Russell's (1982) concept of a 'global brain' is similarly that of an emergent networked intelligence grounded in the evolutionary principle of universal Darwinism and the Earth as a superorganism. Essentially, a worldwide homeostatic 'intelligence' is said to be arise (or have arisen) from the increased speed, processing power and global scope of communication technologies, binding its users together into a single information processing system, which serves as the Earth's nervous system formed by humans.

complexities informing the deep ecology of online ayahuasca discourse at the heart of this research.

In deep ecology's inevitable overlap with New Age postmodern spiritual worldviews (Sessions, 1995) advocacy of environmental change via ecocultural paradigmatic change is contested as a form of eco-utopianism (Zimmerman, 1991).²⁵ Similarly, deep ecology's ecotheosophical leanings are seen as "psychologically and spiritually regressive" and that embracing a nature-oriented spirituality denies the transcendent aspect of humanity in favour of immanence in nature (Wilber 1995, p. 166).²⁶ While Huxley's (1945) perennial philosophy has been marked as profoundly influential to "the spiritual essence of the deep ecological vision", any generally accepted form of deep ecology is said to differ "from mainstream New Age thinking in its rejection of humanism". The deconstruction of deep ecology towards a transpersonal ecology²⁷ is consequently an attempt to encompass both a hierarchy of sentience and the experience of the human self (Fox, 1984, 1990).

Christian traditions can also be largely compatible with the deep ecology (Berry, 1988) movement in maintaining a "spiritual exaltation of the deep mysteries of existence" (Berry 2000, p. 111) through which an ecological-self manifests in a 'deep ecumenical' theology (Fox, 1988).²⁸ To this end, Abrahamic religion, alongside the Euro-American industrial age is however

²⁵ Taylor (2010) points out that dark green religion can take both extreme ecotopian and millennial forms of expression

²⁶ Huxley's (1947, p. 1) description of perennial philosophy finds "a divine reality in the soul and man's final end in the knowledge of the immanent and transcendent ground of all being". Similarly, Latour (1993) asserts that nature exists in states of both transcendence (that which surpasses us infinitely) and imminence (that of our own making).

²⁷ As Fox (1989, p. 274) explains "a cosmological basis for identification is an attempt to convey a lived sense that all entities (including ourselves) are relatively autonomous modes of a single, unfolding process...on the tree of life" meaning that we should strive, 'insofar as it is within our power to do so', not to exclusively identify ourselves with one specific aspect of the biotic community such as other human beings.

²⁸ It should be clarified here that Mathew Fox (1988) proposes "a transpersonal ecology in the form of a Christian philosophy and practice" that finds reverence for nature through redemption of the Cosmic Christ principle. This is not entirely incompatible with the transpersonal ecological-self offered by Warwick Fox (1984, 1989, 1990) who is cited more frequently elsewhere in this thesis.

seen as culpable in the anthropocentric domination complex and the perceived split between the natural and the sacred (Metzner, 1993, 1995b, 1997) with traditional ecological knowledge advocated as thoroughly more harmonious and ethically sound (Rowe, 1993, 1994). Nonetheless, Taylor (2010, p. 13) places deep ecology under the rubric of ‘dark green religion’²⁹ to encompass the wide range of beliefs that inform a global proliferation of ‘Earth and nature-based spiritualities’ existing in the context of a growing ‘environmental milieu’³⁰ of which the contemporary ayahuasca phenomenon is a remarkable facet.

Deep Ecology; Definition and Discernments

With a dizzying array of formations and interpretations, deep ecology has nonetheless become a blanket term that now serves as a catchphrase for a myriad of nonanthropocentric views which are variously but not exclusively environmental ethics, philosophy or religion (Greer, 2012). Deep ecology’s rapid development now comes to incorporate a wide range of fields including ecocriticism, ecofeminism, ecopsychology, ecotheology, humanistic and transpersonal psychology and social ecology each with their own unique philosophical and ethical perspectives and interpretations (Drengson, Devall & Schroll, 2011).³¹ As such, a decisive amalgamation of core literature (Devall & Sessions, 1985) is required for outlining the basic intuitions, ultimate norms and platform principles of deep ecology (Sessions, 1995).³²

²⁹ Taylor (2010, p. ix) uses the label 'dark' “not only to emphasise the depth of its consideration for nature...but to suggest that such religion may have a shadow side” and points to the importance of employing a flexible definition of *religion* when focussing on the phenomenon of a Naturalistic Animism and Gaian Naturalism.

³⁰ Taylor (2010, p. 13-14) adapts on Campbell’s (1972) term 'cultic milieu' to denote the convergence of spiritual and scientific discourse and amalgamation of ideas “drawn from diverse cultural systems, religious traditions and political ideologies” while also describing the ‘environmental milieu’ as the situation in which “environmentally concerned officials, scientists, activists and other citizens connect with and reciprocally influence one another”.

³¹ The rise of Green politics and environmental ethics in recent decades has exponentially increased the amount of overviews, revisions, celebrations, criticisms, polemics and general commentary on deep ecology, making it a notably extensive literary field.

³² In considering the past, present and future of the deep ecology movement at that point, the litany of critical figures gathered in Sessions (1995) comprehensive anthology, discuss the variant views and issues concerning the Deep Ecology movement and includes extensive unpublished manuscripts by Naess (1973, 1986, 1993, 1989, 1991).

A concise framework of the deep ecology movement is outlined by Naess' (1986a) Apron diagram as integral in articulating any ontological or epistemological hypotheses and its global, cross-cultural applicability. Developed as a four-level system of questioning and articulation, Naess' (1986a) Apron diagram displays how the ultimate norms of differing religious and philosophical belief systems (level 1) and platform principles (level 2) in conjunction with hypotheses and views about global states of affairs (level 3) logically direct a level (4) of practical 'ecological' actions (Sessions, 1995). Drengson, Devall, & Schroll's (2011) analysis of the diagram's four levels of discourse observe the first level as being the ultimate premises and norms of self-realisation and the ecological-self that encompass individual's ecosophies³³ at which any perennialism of ayahuasca discourse would expectedly be found. The second level of discourse is the eight platform principles (Naess and Sessions, 1984)³⁴ which serve as a charter to identify deep ecology's unifying ideologies in a terrain of commonality³⁵ and therefore elucidate the philosophy in other cultural phenomena (Drengson, Devall, & Schroll, 2011). The third level of discourse advances deep ecology's sociopolitical progression and addresses the formulation of specific policy, from which the fourth level proceeds to implement their action as applied to particular concrete situations and events which are "in a sense continually adapting to the world as it changes" (Drengson 1997, p. 111). Although the platform principles serve both descriptive and prescriptive functions, they are not singular or final expressions and as such can include the vast scope of relevant social, political and ethical formulations of deep ecology (Naess, 1973).³⁶ This articulated framework of deep ecology (Drengson, Devall, &

³³ Drengson, Devall, & Schroll (2011, p. 107) clarify that, "each person's ecosophy can be given a unique name, possibly for the place they live, or for something to which they feel strongly connected" and at this level there is also considerable diversity (Drengson, 1997).

³⁴ Platforms like those developed for any given movement such as Amnesty International or Greenpeace.

³⁵ The eight principles are formulated and developed to be broad enough to allow, recognise and encourage "differences in more logically ultimate philosophies" (McLaughlin 1995, p. 86).

³⁶ From a historical perspective if the platform principles were to become grounds for "widespread unity within a movement directed toward...creating a nonanthropocentric society", it may well cease to be considered a specifically 'deep ecology' position (McLaughlin 1995, p. 90).

Schroll, 2011) consequently acts as a means of identifying the underlying philosophical premises and theoretical tenets of praxis discursively found in the contemporary ayahuasca phenomenon.

As a philosophical formulation with underlying tenets, the heart of deep ecology is its platform principles which allow for “a variety of paths to the same position” (McLaughlin 1995, p.91) and consequently encompass a critique of anthropocentrism that transcends cultural boundaries (Drengson, 1997).³⁷ The platform principles set out a common ground to articulate and clarify deep ecology’s aims and values in order to unite the diversity of individual beliefs³⁸ and can therefore be utilised to examine the way contemporary ayahuasca discourse embodies practices that might realise similar paradigmatic change. The eight platform principles that continue to serve as a framework for supporters of deep ecology³⁹ developed by Naess and Sessions (1984) are as such:

- 1.** The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman Life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent value). These values are independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes.
- 2.** Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realizations of these values and are also values in themselves.
- 3.** Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital human needs.
- 4.** The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of human population. The flourishing of nonhuman life requires such a decrease.
- 5.** Present human interference with the nonhuman world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.

³⁷ Naess (1973, p. 98) stated from the outset, that it must “be borne in mind that the norms and tendencies of the deep ecology movement are not derived by logic or induction” but founded on intuitive generalisations which are “only tenable if made more precise in certain directions”.

³⁸ Within the deep ecology movement, individuals may hold divergent “ultimate understandings of themselves, society, and nonhuman nature” (McLaughlin 1995, p. 86).

³⁹ Naess (1973) favoured the phrase ‘supporters’ of deep ecology or the deep ecology movement, as opposed to ‘deep ecologists’

6. Policies must therefore be changed. These policies affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.

7. The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating life quality (dwelling in situations of inherent value) rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great.

8. Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation to directly or indirectly try to implement the necessary changes.

With the rise of deep ecology as a countercultural movement,⁴⁰ ‘ritual innovation’⁴¹ plays an important role in reviving intimate relations with place (Taylor, 2010) as held by many ‘sustainable’ cultures of the world using practices that connect humans to the nonhuman world with “the whole of our being” (LaChapelle 1995, p. 6). No longer seen as definitive of the movement, navigating Naess’ (1973) radically pluralistic views and deep ecology’s multifaceted narratives has led to the recent synthesis of interdisciplinary fields. Ecopsychology (Schroll, 2007, 2010),⁴² ecophilosophy (Drengson, 1997), transpersonal psychology (Fox, 1990) and transpersonal ecosophy (Drengson, Devall & Schroll, 2011)⁴³ are advanced as better encompassing the ethics of selfhood and conceptual links with animism, shamanism and anthropology (Schroll, 2013) and further evidence conceptual links between deep ecology and ayahuasca practices. In light of deep ecology’s “ontology before ethics”⁴⁴ approach which downplays dicta and considers consequentialism, deontological and virtue ethics superfluous, the underlying

⁴⁰ A significant tangent of deep ecology is the vast historical literary tradition of naturalism and pastoralism in America and Western philosophical thought (Devall & Sessions, 1985).

⁴¹ Taylor (2010, p. 21) describes deep ecological ritual practices as tools for re-awakening “understandings of spiritual realities that people today rarely perceive but that they believe animate nature in its many expressions”.

⁴² Clear overlap between psychedelic research and ecopsychology stems from “common origins in the counterculture, human potential and transpersonal psychology and traditional psychology camps...intrinsic to the genesis of all these movements” (Luke 2013, p. 2).

⁴³ Drengson, Devall and Schroll (2011, p.113) define transpersonal ecosophy as a field that includes “ecocriticism, ecopsychology, the deep ecology movement, the anthropology of consciousness, humanistic and transpersonal psychology”.

⁴⁴ As deep ecology is informed by Spinozian panpsychism and perennial philosophy, Devall and Sessions (1985) acknowledge that without access to mystical, intuitive ways of knowing-any system of ethics becomes frivolous and unviable in its application.

tenets of deep questioning, self-realisation and non-anthropocentrism remain core (Fox, 1990). As the discipline of environmental ethics inevitably intersects with deep ecology, contentions arise around incongruities between ‘letting nature be’ and the duty of conservation and stewardship (Callicott, 1989; Katz, 1997; Katz, Light & Rothenberg, 2000; Mathews, 2005). A somewhat semantic shift of deep ecology’s biocentrism toward a more ‘deep’ or ‘dark green’ ecocentric stance⁴⁵ cites ethics as inherent to all relationships and not an ‘optional’ extra for humans in an attempt to broaden categories of living entities (Curry, 2011; Rowe, 1994, 1996).⁴⁶ This wider approach nonetheless assists in reconciling ayahuasca discourse’s perception of nonhuman ‘living’ entities, deeply felt spiritual connections to nature and metaphysical holism with environmental ethics.

Ongoing contentions exist between deep ecology and ecofeminism (Cheney, 1987; Fox, 1989; Kheel 1990; Mathews, 1994; Salleh, 1992, 1993; Warren, 1996; Zimmerman, 1994) through a perceived failure to recognise how misogyny has contributed to ecological problems by being gender essentialist, androcentric and perpetuating the normative dualisms that plague Western patriarchal power structures.⁴⁷ Ecofeminist critiques from Cheney (1987), Plumwood (1996, 2002, 2003) and Warren (1996) contend that metaphysical perceptions of the self by extent privilege the transpersonal over the sociocultural self and consequently obscure the politics of identity and difference (Diehm, 2002). Deep ecology is also criticised as maintaining the inherent unresolved human/nature dualisms that hegemonically reiterate the divide between human and nonhuman worlds (Plumwood, 2002; Warren, 1996). Nonetheless, the inherent feminine nature of ayahuasca and reverence for Mother Earth/Gaia embodied by contemporary ayahuasca discourse

⁴⁵ Fox (1990, p. 272) also proffers the term ‘eco’ from the Greek *eco* or ‘home’ as more immediately informative by its implication of being ‘Earth-centred’ rather than the etymologically ‘life-centred’ term ‘bio’ and therefore enable the encompassment of the monistic, panpsychic and pantheistic beliefs underpinning many ecosophies.

⁴⁶ Curry (2011, p. 8) points out though that “within the deep ecology movement, the terms ‘biocentric’ and ‘ecocentric’ tend to be used interchangeably”.

⁴⁷ Salleh (1992) further asserts the deep ecology movement to be largely white, male and middle class and therefore reflective of the very institutions of power that contribute to environmental problems.

appears to provide an experientially consolidation to the ecofeminist/deep ecology conjecture.

Social ecologists further assert that deep ecology favours nature over humanity and is therefore inherently misanthropic and advocates the interests of nonhuman beings and places over social justice relationships (Zimmerman, 1991, 2000). The most radical critique is taken by Bookchin (1987) who not only binds deep ecology to the *Earth First!* movement but to the harbouring of ecofascist⁴⁸ leanings remnant of Heideggerian anti-modernism by putting the priorities of Mother Earth before that of the human species. Deep ecology's philosophical leanings are also seen as upholding 'inherent' value of all species to mean 'equal value' (Callicott, 1999) indicting deep ecology as representing a 'procrustean ethics' (Fox, 1984).⁴⁹ The rise of social sciences and humanities is additionally accused of manifesting anthropocentrism through the denouncing of "legitimate forms of knowledge which are both universal and local"⁵⁰ (Sessions, 2006), with Haraway's (1991) transhumanist stance seen as exemplifying a postmodern alienation from nature (Zimmerman, 1994). While Sessions (2006, p. 145) contends that the postmodern social constructivist position of relative truth perpetuates nature as "a social construction totally dependent on culture" it is nonetheless acknowledged as "a new and novel basis for the resolution of the Culture/Nature issue".

Naturecultural Studies

As deep ecology and ayahuasca discourse both hold a sense of connection and belonging to nature as defining features, they are theoretically linked by

⁴⁸ Taylor & Zimmerman (2005, p. 458) define Ecofascism, in its extreme form, as the linking of "the racial purity of a people to the well-being of the nation's land" and thereby calling for "removal or killing of non-native peoples" which in turn is seen as justifying "profound individual and collective sacrifice of its own people for the health of the natural environment".

⁴⁹ Diehm (2002, p. 31) points to Fox's (1984) assertion of deep ecology's "tendency to emphasise sameness in relations to others" as emphasising the common fallacy of mistaking equality for similarity.

⁵⁰ Sessions (2006, p. 145) further maintains that postmodernism contributes to Nature being assimilated into and eliminated by culture and therefore undermining "the credibility of the world scientist's warnings about the ecological state of the world".

sociological and cultural studies theory that seeks to understand beliefs and practices considered part of New Age spirituality.⁵¹ Contemporary ayahuasca practices inevitably fall under scholarship of the New Age (Hanegraaff, 1998, 2012) for its broad description as advancing the experiential, transformative self as locus of power through a symbolic discourse of re-enchantment, albeit within prosaic patterns of consumption (Heelas, 1996).⁵² New Age spirituality's contemporary relevance is also countercultural and can be seen as an active response to everyday power relations as it involves a "reappraisal of the sacred dimension of social and cultural life" (Reddon 2011, p. 650). The penetration of ayahuasca into the public sphere and the re-sacralisation of nature in everyday life consequently become "socially constructed, transmitted and reinforced in the spiritual milieu" (Aupers & Houtman 2006, p. 219). The notion of 'perennialism' embraced by deep ecology is further revealed as a more fundamental premise of New Age spirituality (Aupers & Houtman, 2006; Hanegraaff, 1996; Partridge, 2006; Possamai, 2001) than the idiosyncratic '*bricolage*' often asserted as its principle or doctrinal characteristic (Taylor, 2010). In examining the deep ecology of contemporary ayahuasca discourse, theories of New Age spirituality confirm ecospiritual expressions as always grounded in sociocultural contexts (Aupers & Houtman, 2006; Redden, 2011).

The idea of a wholly secular Gaia (Latour, 2013)⁵³ is equally relevant to contemporary ayahuasca discourse as it becomes imperative in mobilising a new scientific and political ecology with the Earth as a fully-fledged actor and agent of history in the late anthropocene (Latour, 2013).⁵⁴ Rejecting the sentimental notion of Mother Earth, the certitude of Gaian interrelatedness and

⁵¹ Just as the field of deep ecology has prospered in the last forty years, the entheogenic revival shows no signs of abating, and "is most decidedly not some New Age fad, however devoutly the forces of repression might wish it to be" (Ott 1996, p. 18).

⁵² Reddon (2011, p. 650) explains that the New Age "is at once movement and marketplace, materialistic and spiritual, individualistic and bent on collective transformation".

⁵³ Latour (2013) acknowledges the scientific and metaphorical value at the core of Lovelock's many revisions of Gaia theory as an Earth composed of multiple, reciprocally linked, but ungoverned self-advancing processes.

⁵⁴ While the term 'anthropocene' is sufficient to surpass the modern/non-modern schism by acknowledging the inseparability of nature and culture, it may also capitulate a discursive *fait accompli* by accepting humanity as the dominant animal and thereby potentially diminishing the outrage and moral imperative to action (Latour, 2013).

perceived fundamentalism of deep ecology, Latour's (1998, 2009, 2011) solution to the ecological crisis is connected to a complete emancipation from technological and scientific, religious or even 'ecotheological'⁵⁵ worldviews (Latour, 2009). Latour (1993) proposes a conception of the world beyond the four reductive categories of 'nature', 'discourse', 'society' and 'being' articulated instead as a series of 'naturecultures'. The dismantling of socially constructed divisions of nature/culture, spirit/matter, modern/primitive, rational/magical and subject/object⁵⁶ in discourse of the ayahuasca ritual presents "a new way to handle all the objects of human and non-human collective life" by recognising a hybrid assemblage or 'parliament of things' (Latour, 1993). The unique, artifactual, 'social nature' of the ayahuasca discussion forums can in this case be seen as a relationally discursive nexus of plant-human-technological interconnectedness as expressed by Latour's (1993) notion of heterogeneous networks.⁵⁷ This phenomenon exists replete with 'quasi-objects' and 'quasi-subjects' or in-between things and beings (Latour, 1993) and applicably serves to illustrate the amalgamation of plant/spirit/chemical and technological allies present in contemporary ayahuasca discourse.

The notions of interspecies communication inherent in ayahuasca discourse challenges many of the "inherited dualisms that run deep in Western cultures" (Haraway 2004, p. 2) in a manner analogous to deeply ecology's underlying norms and principles. While Sessions (2006) accuses Haraway (1991) of obliterating the ecological functioning of Nature, of being a 'technological determinist',⁵⁸ an analysis of technologies of the self as 'boundary

⁵⁵ Deep ecology's notion of 'restoring' or 'returning' to a reverence of nature consequently raises the "paradoxes of nature and society" that Latour (1993, p. 32) refers to the same 'modern' and 'nonmodern' dichotomy that allow for the very social construction of nature.

⁵⁶ While Latour (1993) dismantles the notion of modernity itself as having never been anything more than a mode of classification, he also presents the idea of 'Middle Kingdom' or a reconfigured non-modernity in which transcendent and imminent networks exist in neither exclusively natural, cultural nor social configurations.

⁵⁷ Aupers (2010) also highlights how technopaganism's convergence of magic and technology aligns with Latour's (1993) theoretical framework of the 'modern divide' between 'rational' technology and 'irrational' magic as being haunted categories of the 'in-between'.

⁵⁸ Haraway's (1991) *Cyborg Manifesto* is cited by Sessions (2006) as promoting a transhumanism or technotopianism completely alienated from the 'natural'.

transgressing' proves germane in examining how humans discuss their engagement with nonhumans in the digital domain. The notion of interspecies 'becoming with' (Haraway, 2003, 2008)⁵⁹ also deeply resonates with ayahuasca shamanism's "relational, intentional, conscious, and communicative" entering into of relationships with "other-than-human autonomous personalities" (Beyer 2009 p. 113).⁶⁰ Disrupting powerfully discursive and ideological constructions of ontological categorisation through a unity of myth and tool (Haraway, 2004; Latour, 1993), serves to understand the discourse of contemporary ayahuasca drinker's reconceptualisation of 'nature' by revealing the various "interactions among material-semiotic actors, human and not" (Haraway 2004, p. 68). An explication of the way ayahuasca drinkers interpret and engage the process of deep ecological meaning making also draws on the concept of the wholly relational, ecological-self through an understanding of hidden zones and an 'ontopoetics' that examines the 'core of things' (Mathews, 1995, 2005). Furthermore, analysis of contemporary ayahuasca discourse's experiential, theoretical and philosophical animism (Plumwood, 2002)⁶¹ is grounded in an ecopolitics of the native-self brought to light by an 'ensoulment' of the world and re-animation of nature (Mathews, 2005).

The hegemonic construction of 'nature'⁶² (Williams, 1983) as arbitrated by science, religion, culture and media (Haraway, 1997) serves to implicate the deep ecological spirituality and praxis of the contemporary ayahuasca phenomenon in a resistive discourse that challenges dominant views of human and nonhuman relations. While heuristic nature-resacralisation may well be

⁵⁹ Virtanen (2014, p. 64) observes that the female nonhuman being that is ayahuasca allows the person taking 'it' into his or her body to assume the point of view of others, such as animals and to learn from this metamorphosis and transcendence of human subjectivity.

⁶⁰ As Beyer (2009, p. 112) explains ayahuasca shamanism allows for "humans and animals [to] constantly shift into each other" in a highly transformational world and this otherworldliness represents "a coherent conversation between people and animals" which consequently depend on a recognition of their very 'otherworldly' subject status (Haraway 2004, p. 143).

⁶¹ Bird-Rose (2013) distinguishes and distances Plumwood's (2002) philosophical animism from the traditional anthropologically constructed animism which is seen as being in service of hyperseparated binaries between 'civilised' and 'primitive' peoples.

⁶² Williams (1983, p. 219) observes 'nature' as the most complex and contested word, simultaneously meaning "the essential characteristics of a thing...the external, unmediated material world [and] the all-encompassing force controlling things in the world".

“gaining cultural currency” (Taylor 2010, p. 295), dominant and contradictory conceptions of nature and religion continue to resist both the ecological and spiritual dimension of the entheogenic revival (Hanegraaff, 2012; Harpignes, 2006; Metzner, 1999a).⁶³ The hegemonic and counterintuitive classification of sacred Indigenous medicines as ‘drugs’ can therefore be seen as an attempt to negate the use of ‘plant tools’ as legitimate vehicles for attaining cosmotheistic gnosis (Hanegraaff 2012, p. 392). Ayahuasca ritual practices thus continue to attract a complex counter dialogue (Labate, 2014) irrespective of the historical universality of entheogens and their use “as sacraments...principal instruments of religious rituals and spiritual work” (Shanon 2002, p. 85).⁶⁴

The added inference of “ayahuasca as a panacea against various evils of modernity”⁶⁵ (Labate, 2014, p. 191) embedded in the discourses of both ‘psychedelic’⁶⁶ and ‘entheogenic’ healing,⁶⁷ while transgressive are nonetheless both anthropologically viewed as “a kind of ritual; a purposive, intentional structuring of a state of consciousness” (Metzner 1997, n.p). The ‘animistic discourse’ of plants as “beings endowed with ‘psyche’” (Doyle 2011, p. 40), let alone direct communication with a pre-eminent sentience occasioned by ayahuasca, becomes a contested one as it “transgresses a fundamental ontological, but discursive boundary” (Letcher 2007, p. 75)⁶⁸ generally “considered beyond the pale of reason” in Western society (Metzner

⁶³ Hanegraaff (2011, p. 90) highlights the coherence of entheogens practices with a definition of religion as “any ‘symbolic system’ which influences human action by providing possibilities for ritually maintaining contact between the everyday world and a more general meta-empirical framework of meaning”.

⁶⁴ Grunwell (1998, n.p) vindicates that contemporary spiritual seekers engaging with such substances approach them with “reverence and awe mixed with outright fear” as something “not to be trifled with” whose dispassionate use is “at best pointless, and at worse, physically and mentally dangerous”.

⁶⁵ Particularly against drug abuse, depression and anxiety alongside a myriad of other more general sociocultural ills understood to be particularly Western in nature (Labate, 2014).

⁶⁶ Under the domain of Western clinical science, psychedelic therapy is generally undertaken in clinical environs and remains fundamental grounding “in the paradigm of scientific biomedicine” (Tupper 2009b, p. 270).

⁶⁷ A more “spiritually-oriented therapeutic practice”, entheogenic healing places a central focus on shamanic ritual practices and setting in order to facilitate and guide the process of ‘self-healing’ (Tupper 2009b, p. 272)

⁶⁸ Letcher (2007, p. 88) notes how “encounters with discarnate spirit entities” or ‘animaphany’ as analogous to ‘theophany’ but transgressive of “a fundamental cultural boundary about the ontology of non-ordinary experience” and in Foucauldian terms consequently resistive in regards to “what it is acceptable to say, do, and think”.

2013, p. 67).⁶⁹ An examination of how constructed boundaries are disrupted and subverted in the discursive deep ecology of the contemporary ayahuasca phenomenon will contribute to better understanding of this postmodern ecospirituality as a situated and active response to sociocultural change “imbricated with metaphysical concerns” (Reddon 2011, p. 651).⁷⁰ Latour's (1993) supersession of nature/cultures divisions and Haraway's (2003, 2004, 2008) recognition of communicative nonhuman agency alongside Mathews' (2005) onto poetic self-inquiry therefore provide an analytical basis for examining the findings of this research. This literature therefore serves to support the theoretical framework of deep ecology's platform principles as a means of identifying and investigating the deeply ecological nature of contemporary ayahuasca discourse

⁶⁹ Scientific evidence is however increasingly vindicating the communicative abilities of plants and their chemical or electrical complexity (Baluška, Mancuso & Volkmann, 2006).

⁷⁰ Reddon (2011) notes the importance of acknowledging the discourse of metaphysical holism and self-spirituality as offering an alternative to ontological qualities that are perceived to be culturally dominant.

Methodology

The primary aim of this research is to reveal the way the philosophy of deep ecology is embodied by the discourse of the Ayahuasca.com discussion forum, using a multiparadigmatic approach. A qualitative web content analysis of selected forum threads is first employed to identify a data set (Ackland, 2013). The objective of characterising how contemporary ayahuasca drinkers express deep ecological ideas will then be facilitated by a thematic analysis of the data. Naess and Sessions' (1984) eight principles of deep ecology are used to identify themes within pertinent discussion forums from which emergent topics of conversation can be explored. Third, presentation of the findings will contextualise the relationship between deep ecology and the way contemporary ayahuasca drinkers understand, discuss and engage in a deep ecological praxis followed by a conclusive discussion of the main themes. The expression of deep ecological themes in the discussion forums further serve as a departure point for considering the broader implications brought to light by connexions between experiences that render nature sacred within the profane context of the digital world. The broad objective of this research is therefore to reveal how contemporary ayahuasca discourse conveys experiences of a ritual process that involves nature-based epiphanies which inevitably inform ontological positions analogous to those of deep ecology.

Of the variant ways the internet and religiosity converge, the Ayahuasca.com website fits with Campbell's (2005b) 'religious identity' narrative¹ in which users are empowered to affirm their religious lifestyles and identity online. This narrative is demonstrated by the Ayahuasca.com website's (2015) stated intention to "bring together individuals, communities, perspectives, insight and support regarding the use of ayahuasca, and the practice and traditions of

¹ Campbell (2007) explains four types of religious discourse in which the internet functions as; a) 'spiritual medium' for divine connection, b) 'worship space' for hosting religious ritual, c) 'mission tool' for promoting belief and d) as a 'religious identity' narrative in which belief is affirmed through online activities.

ayahuasca shamanism”. Campbell’s (2004) social network analysis² attests to the Ayahuasca.com website as a robustly active and dynamic structure. Ayahuasca discussion forums are also a network of fluid interactions and diverse narratives existing amidst loosely bounded relationships that intersect technology with postmodern desires for spiritual meaning making in the information age (Frias, 2011; Tupper, 2009a). Ayahuasca.com is therefore a rich resource and productive site for examining the way members express, interpret and put into practice an array of spiritual themes and expedient for my purposes of identifying the philosophical principles of deep ecology.

Ontology, Epistemology & Theoretical Framework

This inquiry into the way the philosophy of deep ecology is implicated in an online ayahuasca discussion forum is essentially qualitative and entails a multiparadigmatic approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). From the hypothesis that the principles of deep ecology do indeed exist within ayahuasca discourse and are therefore measurable but “imperfectly and probabilistically apprehendable” (Guba & Lincoln 1994, p. 109), this research takes a postpositivist approach assuming critical realist ontology. In its assertion that reality exists independent of human beings, albeit with underlying social structures as an interface between the natural and social world (Alvesson, 2009), critical realism supports my thesis that the philosophy of deep ecology is theoretically present in ayahuasca discourse. An emphasis on the discovery and verification of deep ecology as partially objective qualities that can be measured is also logically consistent with pre-existing knowledge and literature of the ayahuasca phenomenon. As the deep ecology I seek to identify is discursively formed, a constructionist approach recognises its presence as existing “in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature” (Guba & Lincoln 1994, p. 109). Because belief systems are in essence local and specific constructed realities, relativist ontology follows my recognition of deep ecology as

² Campbell’s (2004; 2005a; 2005b & 2007) research has greatly contributed to understandings of how ‘virtual’ or ‘online’ communities link physically separate people to “a greater collective, a global community of like minds and spirits” (Campbell 2005a, p. xvii).

culturally and historically situated. Through the context of interpretations, meanings and values that members bring to the discussion forums, any interpretive understanding of human experience also rests on a hermeneutic epistemology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Analysis of contemporary ayahuasca spirituality and its concomitant deep ecology falls under the broader paradigm of critical postmodernism as ecocultural studies theory is employed to address the textual imbrication of metaphysical, ecosophical and political concerns.

Given that the discourse forming the data is unsolicited, my presence as a researcher entails observation that is confirmatory and documentary with ongoing participant interaction negated (Ackland, 2013). As the specific vantage point of the researcher precludes capturing “the ‘whole truth’ of any aspect of the social and cultural” (Gray 2002, p. 21; Guba & Lincoln, 1994), this research adopts an emic, idiographic and case-based position to examining deep ecological themes drawn from member’s textual articulations of their lived experiences and the meanings they bring to the forum (Arasio, 2010). Identifying the deep ecology of contemporary ayahuasca discourse relies on using the pre-established eight platform principles that articulate the core philosophy of deep ecology (Naess & Sessions, 1984) as broad categories for discussion forum analysis. The themes I expect to reveal within the discussion forums are thus meaningful because they are enduring and serve to add to the growing body of knowledge regarding the contemporary ayahuasca phenomenon, deep ecology and the ecocultural dynamics of entheogenic spirituality.

Method & Sampling

The basic method of thematic analysis serves as a technique to understand the accounts, descriptions and explanations that participants bring to a phenomenon by making them visible and is particularly expedient in identifying, analysing and revealing patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Mathews & Ross, 2010). The hybrid method of thematic analysis

(Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006) employed here is a balance of deductive coding using the principles of deep ecology and inductive coding to develop specific themes that emerge from forum discussions. This method serves as a way of identifying the themes and interpreting these localised meaning systems (Mathews & Ross, 2010) and is suited to ascertaining and developing on new knowledge brought to light by the intersecting discourses of ayahuasca and deep ecology. This hybrid method further serves to reveal how contemporary ayahuasca discourse embodies experiences of a ritual process that evokes the sacrality of nature through which ontological positions analogous to those of deep ecology are arrived at and practiced.

The fundamental sample unit was the discussion forum section of the Ayahuasca.com website which consists of 27 forums in total that are divided into subsections for ‘Ayahuasca’, ‘Practice’, ‘Community’, ‘Ayahuasca Churches and Religious Groups’ and specific Spanish, Portuguese, French and Dutch language subsections. Two ‘units of observation’ (Ackland, 2013) were identified from the ‘Practice’ section, chosen for its incorporation and integration of ayahuasca into broader everyday issues. From within the ‘Practice’ subsection which consists of 10 discussion forums, the forums ‘Gaia’ and ‘World Healing’ were selected for both their explicit ecospiritual and ecopolitical makeup as self-evidently indicated by the website’s stated description. The ‘Gaia’ forum consisted of 295 topics otherwise known as threads, with 2,600 posts³ and is described by Ayahuasca.com (2012) as addressing issues such as:

We are all indigenous to the Earth. What does that mean? Discussion of our spiritual relationship to the Earth, spirit of Place, indigenous spirituality, indigenous cultures, the community of Life, all our relations

The ‘World Healing’ forum consisted of 874 topic/threads and 10,142 posts⁴ and is established by Ayahuasca.com (2012) to create a dialogue regarding:

³ ‘Gaia’ forum (Ayahuasca.com, 25 Jan 2015).

⁴ ‘World Healing’ forum (Ayahuasca.com, 25 Jan 2015).

Healing at the species and planetary level: social and economic justice, environmental issues, peace and reconciliation, and other issues facing humanity, from a standpoint of healing

Due to the unstructured nature of qualitative data, a probabilistic sampling strategy was used (Arasio, 2010; Lincoln & Guba, 2005) to select threads that might best reveal how the themes of deep ecology are valued and practiced within the existing structure of the Ayahuasca.com discussion forum texts.⁵ In order to select from the multitude of threads within these two discussion forums, sensitising concepts (Blumer, 1969)⁶ were used as a technique for sampling thread topics, which were then read to gain a general impression of the discussion context (Ackland, 2013).⁷ These sensitising concepts were drawn from Taylor's (2005) *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Nature* which provides significations of contemporary nature-based religion and spirituality by clarifying key terms and concepts such as animism, shamanism and neo-paganism that served to ground the identification of pertinent threads. The units of analysis subsequently became threads identified from within the 'Gaia' and 'World Healing' forums in which the concepts outlined by Taylor were evident.

Having immersed myself in accordance with Ackland's (2013) method of online content analysis, the final sampling units then became sentences derived from member's postings within identified forum threads, with relevant posts reread, notes taken and key terms and thematic categories of deep ecology highlighted. From the numerous threads identified, deductive thematic analysis utilised the eight principles of deep ecology (Naess & Sessions, 1984) to

⁵ In cases such as this, "the choice of material to be included in analyses is entrusted to the researcher and to his/her knowledge regarding the phenomenon" (Arasio 2010, p. 33)

⁶ Blumer (1969, p. 148) explains sensitising concepts as suggesting directions along which to look by giving "a general sense of reference and guidance" when identifying a set of phenomena or approaching empirical instances as opposed to the 'fixed and specific procedures' of definitive concepts.

⁷ While Ackland (2013) notes, that this may introduce the problem of subjectivity into the process because meaning can stretch across several posts simultaneously, the deductive nature of the process assists in limiting this.

identify relevant samples of text, from which inductive thematic analysis was used to characterise emergent themes in further detail (Boyatzis, 1998). Inductive themes were then extracted through a process of segmenting, categorising and relinking aspects of the data prior to its final interpretation (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Used widely as an analytic approach, this hybrid thematic analysis is suited to a multiparadigmatic methodology as it has the “power to yield insightful interpretations that are contextually grounded” (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe 2010, p. 297).

A series of documents were created for each platform principle of deep ecology into which applicable segments of text were aggregated and collated as they were identified from within the relevant threads. Creating a document for each platform principle in the manner of a codebook served to aim for a level of theoretical saturation according to the “credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability” that define the rigours of qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1984). The eight coding documents then enabled the deductive themes to be confirmed, the inductive themes to emerge and the interrelationships between themes to be seen (Mathews & Ross, 2010). The analysis proceeded by rereading the textual descriptions in the data set to inductively reveal conceptual characteristics that formed emerging themes (Mathews & Ross, 2010). As an inductive process and means of recognising patterns within the data, the emergent themes of ayahuasca specific deep ecology became the final analytical template with which to “ultimately interpret the data” when writing up the findings (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane 2006, p. 4). Although the coding and developing of themes required the researcher’s interpretation, participant’s original wording is optimal for categorisation (Crabtree & Miller, 1999) and reasonable attempt has been made to implement names for themes, including thread titles used to arrange the findings in a way “that directly reflects the texts as a whole” (Anderson, 2007).

Ethics & Axiology

The ayahuasca forum can undoubtedly be viewed as a coherent though diverse virtual community constituted by members with social organisation and specific language and patterns of interaction via a shared culture and identity (Campbell 2005a, p. 44). As the data of this virtual community consists of personal communications, the submission of an expedited ethics request was required and granted in light of the degree to which “the twin dicta of research disclosure and informed consent [are] invoked” (Stausberg & Engler 2011, p. 467). On application to Southern Cross University’s Human Research Ethics Committee, an approval number ECN-14-189 was granted. As Hine (2008) notes, any website analysis carries an obligation to submit formal notification by way of a letter requesting the informed consent of participants. This was submitted to the Ayahuasca.com discussion forum alongside a requisite information sheet outlining my research intentions. Upon submission to the Ayahuasca.com website, approval was promptly granted by administrator/moderator ‘sachahambi’ whose advice I followed to introduce myself less formally in the ‘Introductions’ section⁸ and post my information sheet to the ‘Science’ forum.⁹

As virtual communities represent a convergence of the public/private domain, the already pseudonymised names of members are used which ensures a degree of confidentiality (Campbell, 2005a). While discussions are publically visible on the Ayahuasca.com forums, comments can only be made by registered members and are usually made after personal posting to the ‘Introduction’ section which is not publically visible. Formal membership of the group was therefore necessary in gaining complete access to data and advantageous in establishing my presence. Despite completely unobtrusive observation sometimes considered as ‘lurking’ however (Campbell, 2005a; Garcia,

⁸ <[Hello forum members](#)> posted by Jef (Jul 15, 2014), ‘Introductions’ forum, 5 replies, 54 views.

⁹ This forum is specifically allocated to “understanding aspects of Ayahuasca through science” and where “researchers are welcome to post questions...or discuss their work”, and my activity on this and the introductions forum is the extent of my participant interaction (Ayahuasca.com, 2014): <[The Discourse of Deep Ecology Research Project](#)> posted by Jef (Jul 13, 2014), ‘Science’ forum, 2 replies, 120 views.

Standlee, Bechkoff & Cui, 2009),¹⁰ within the bounds of this study it was nonetheless expedient.¹¹ Additionally, as Karaflogka (2006) points out, even in an observational capacity, awareness of a researcher's presence has the potential to influence the subject nature of posts and/or threads.¹²

My axiological stance as an individual unacquainted with the ayahuasca experience, while serving to provide a medium of objectivity is nonetheless informed by a long-standing interest in the realm of entheogenic consciousness. Hanegraaff's (2011) study of Dutch ayahuasca religions observes the methodological difficulty of researching ayahuasca without experiential knowledge of the sacrament and ceremony, though cites anti-Ottonian (1926) principles¹³ to highlight experiential knowledge as advantageous though not requisite. Hanegraaff (2011, p. 97) also notes the inherent difficulty of scholarship in addressing the gap between ineffable experiences and language in regards to a "religion grounded in the deliberate induction of altered states".¹⁴ Frias' (2010) study revealed that seeking to become 'part of' the ayahuasca community without prior knowledge of the phenomenon can be somewhat contentious. As this research seeks only to observe the discourse of deep ecology from unsolicited texts, the social reality of participants is thereby safeguarded (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

¹⁰ Campbell (2005a, p. xiv) describes 'lurkers' as discussion list members who stay "in the virtual shadows of the groups, reading but not posting, their names only known to the computer that facilitates subscriptions to the list".

¹¹ As with any community of practice, it is also important to understand 'lurkers' as peripherally associated members of the discussion group who, while less active may choose merely to observe and learn from the input of others (Coco, 2011). This can be seen by the contrast between numbers of replies and views within Ayahuasca.com discussion threads.

¹² Over the course of this project, my initial 'research intentions' post inevitably slipped down the thread order as newer posts take precedent of place in the forum.

¹³ Regarding the study of religious phenomenon or religion itself, Otto (1926) asserted that "without such personal experience it is impossible to gain any adequate understanding at all".

¹⁴ Hanegraaff (2012, p. 97) does however note, that in studying ayahuasca religions "the experiential dimension is readily available for scholars to explore" as conversion is not explicitly required or expected.

Findings

The Ayahuasca.com website is a firmly established online cosmopolitan network of members from diverse cultural backgrounds who represent a fusion of all three modes of ayahuasca consumption previously noted by Frias (2011) and Tupper (2009a).¹ As such, because this research sample addresses only two of 27 forums, findings presented here are merely indicative of the extensively inherent ecospiritual sensibility engendered by ayahuasca discourse. Member's individual comments are therefore by no means intended to be representative of the entire community. It should also be noted that as online discussion forums can be highly intertextual, with articles, essays and links from external sources posted by moderators in order to stimulate discussion, these can often take precedence in a thread over other member's briefer comments/replies. Transcriptions of deep ecology and related philosophical texts occurring in threads, some previously addressed in the literature review have therefore been omitted to delimit results to member's personal expressions only.

In the following presentation of findings, discussion forum dialogue has purposely been noted in italics and cited to participant's already pseudonymised forum username in order to distinguish member's citations from the operational convention of other in-text citation as members are in some cases also ayahuasca researchers, academics and authors.² While not anticipated in the initial process of deductive analysis, several Level one themes of Naess' (1986a) Apron diagram of deep ecology emerged as salient during the inductive phase. These Level one ultimate philosophies, or underlying norms and values of deep ecology are incorporated here in support of my hypothesis that deep ecological themes are embedded in contemporary ayahuasca discourse. From analysis of the data set, a significant number of

¹ Frias' (2011) study confirms the population of the Ayahuasca.com forums to be made up of a blend of three types of contemporary ayahuasca drinkers; syncretistic church members, participants in transcultural *vegetalismo* ceremonies and individualistic psychonautic consumers (Tupper, 2009a).

² Additionally as some member's may not speak English as their first language, original text has been persevered to retain the style and essence of the text.

texts evidenced Level one articulations of self-realisation, the ecological-self and metaphysical holism and are listed under the headings; ‘*A Spiritual Call-Out*’, ‘*The Earth Conscious sELf that we are*’ and ‘*The Great Awakening*’.

Using headings taken from thread titles, findings that evidence deep ecology’s Level one norms and values are presented first as the deep ecological discourses of self-realisation, the ecological-self and individual ecosophies of metaphysical holism from which perennial philosophical ideals arise. Second, the presence, character and context of deep ecology’s Level two discourse of eight platform principles, restated as footnotes when first mentioned, is evidenced by three inductive themes. Deep ecology’s platform principles one, two and three are revealed in ‘*We are all of the Earth*’, the fourth and fifth principles embodied by the title ‘*You Monkeys Only Think you’re Running Things*’³ and principles seven and eight are expressed through ‘*We are the ones we’ve been waiting for*’. Additionally, experiences of unitary consciousness and the deep evolutionary perspective expressed through ‘*Gaya Net-ING*’ reveal a technological mysticism that reflects Latour (1993) and Haraway’s (2004) notions of heterogeneous networks and non-dualistic enmeshment of nature and culture. Insights stemming from the way members discuss the ayahuasca ritual practice are offered as evidence of this research’s broader objective to reveal an entheogenic re-sacralisation of nature that leads to the implementation of deep ecological praxis.

Deep Ecology’s Underlying Norms

Ecospiritual themes were found as conspicuous aspects of both ‘*Gaia*’ and ‘*World Healing*’ forums. Explicit references to deep ecology, ecopsychology and related texts were found in several threads predominantly within the ‘*Gaia*’

³ Reflecting the intertextual nature of the forum, this phrase derives from McKenna’s (2005) essay ‘*Ayahuasca and Human Destiny*’ and is therefore not italicised.

forum⁴ and noticeably reveal the ultimate ‘level one’ norms and premises of Naess’ (1986a) Apron diagram. Through discussing and practicing deep ecology related rituals, the thread called ‘*A Spiritual Call-Out*’ exemplifies the importance of cognitive and affective dialogical exchange with the nonhuman world in facilitating non-anthropocentric perceptions. An understanding of the interests of other beings as inseparable from our own brought about through the process of self-realisation and the achieving of an ecological-self is presented in the thread, ‘*The Earth Conscious sElf that we are*’. Further understanding of perennial spirituality and the individualistic conceptions of ayahuasca informed ecosophy are rendered in ‘*The Great Awakening*’ which reflects the common refrain of Gaian metaphysical holism expressed in its multiplicity.

*A Spiritual Call-Out*⁵

An explicit deep ecological denotation was found through discussion of Seed’s et al. (2006, p. 98) ‘Council of Beings’⁶ in the ‘Gaia’ forum⁷ and indicates the importance of experiential, ceremonial and ritualistic practices in shifting perceptions toward deeper ecological understanding. The primary impetus leading this discussion of some 19 posts revolves around the posting of an article entitled “*deep ecology ∴ initiating Gaialogues with our greater self*” in which silverbirch (Dec 30, 2005) invites other members to further discuss, “*issues of deep ecology, non human life forms, shamanism, shape shifting or whatever seems relevant to the subject*”. As an engagement with rituals of interspecies-communication, members acknowledge that “*this sense of two way communication between us and nature is a very missing element in our*

⁴ <John Seed on Ecopsychology> posted by sachahambi (Jan 07, 2007), ‘Gaia’ forum, 1 reply, 234 views, <our story as gaia> posted by Silverbirch (Dec 28, 2005), ‘Gaia’ forum, 9 replies, 861 views.

⁵ <online council of all beings ∴ a spiritual call-out> posted by silverbirch (Dec 22, 2005) ‘Gaia’ forum 18 replies, 1,936 views.

⁶ The ‘Council of all Beings’ is a meditative and performative ritual designed to allow the self to be chosen by a life-form, then moving and speaking as the life-form and concluding with a structured formal ‘council’ of said beings and refers both to the work itself and the workshop or gathering in which it is held and extends to include other "re-Earthing" workshops (Seed et al., 1988).

⁷ <integrating and discussing the council of all beings.> posted by silverbirch (Dec 30, 2005) ‘Gaia’ forum, 26 replies, 1,806 views.

culture!” (carpedmt Jan 02, 2006). This invocation and consecration of nonhuman beings, therefore invites members to “*explore and consciously embody a much wider scope of who we are as individuals, inextricably woven into the body of life called Gaia*” (silverbirch Dec 27, 2005). As the core aim of this deep ecological ritual is to experientially encounter a “sense of our solidarity with all life and fresh appreciation for the damage wrought by one upstart species” (Seed et al. 1988), the practice appears both complimentary and supplementary to ayahuasca ceremony⁸ as wasankopi (Dec 23, 2006) reflects; “*the group ayahuasca (or other psychoactive medium!) is a council of all beings*”. Member’s expressions of connection to, and union with elements and beings achieved by ritually stepping aside from their “human identity [to] speak on behalf of other life-forms” (Macy & Brown 1998, p. 161)⁹ make the forums non-anthropocentric awareness apparent:

Through deep ecology we explore a series of strategies for experientially shifting our perception of ourselves from isolated individuals, into the larger identity of one eternal cosmic whole, embodied here as Gaia (silverbirch Dec 22, 2005).

*The Earth Conscious sElf that we are*¹⁰

Overtly found throughout the Gaia forum is deep ecology’s advocacy of self-interests as inextricably tied to ecological concerns through an inherently ecological-self, “*aware and feeling of its web of relationships which is the larger, greater, truer 'self-definition'*” (Mariri Apr 14, 2008). Discourse engendered by a thread on ‘biospheric curanderismo’ reveals a process by which one member explains how, “*shamanic practices lead me naturally to*

⁸ While Taylor (2010, p. 22) remarks of this practice that “participants understand that they are engaged in a creative act rather than making a mystical connection with spirits in nature”, the ayahuasca ritual is however preternaturally numinous.

⁹ As a meditative and performative practice, an integral part of the process is mourning the pain inflicted by humans on nonhumans, remembering our interconnectedness and .speaking for the other life-forms encountered in the process (Macy & Brown, 1998)

¹⁰ <The Earth conscious sElf that we are> posted by jayadaga (Mar 13, 2010), ‘Gaia’ forum, 3 replies, 194 views. The embedded allusion to Elf here appears to stem from descriptions of such discarnate entities experienced with both ayahuasca and DMT (the more visually active constituent of ayahuasca) and described McKenna (1993) as ‘self-transforming machine elves’

envisioning the Earth not only as my Mother provider, but as my extended self, my very body, the most immediately pertinent part of my Universal body” (Napolean Blownapart Apr 26, 2003).

It further becomes evident in the Gaia forum that an explication of the ecological-self stems in part from experiences of unitary consciousness that allow for members to see themselves “*not as isolated, separate, skin encapsulated egos but as part of the larger body of the Earth*” (sachahambi Jan 07, 2007). As Callicott (1989) explains, distinctions between the ‘inner’ and ‘outer self’¹¹ are an misleading part of human life’s radical contextualisation,¹² which is reiterated in the forum as “*the illusion that hurts us and the earth, that we are separate from anything at all, that separation exists, of us and them*” (wasankopi Dec 23, 2006). Within the forum, a cosmological view of the ecological-self is nonetheless relational and holistic, enjoying unique individual identity as well as being constituted by identification with the biotic community as a whole.¹³ By engaging with ayahuasca it is further explained that; “*seeing will eventually encompass your place in the web of life, the energy of this mothering planet, and the full matrix of universal existence*” (Napolean Blownapart Jan 19, 2003).

Extensive discussion around the entangled environmental and identity politics of ayahuasca use¹⁴ reveals Naess (1995) concept of self-realisation¹⁵ as inevitably eliciting an intense and painful sense of compassion and empathy

¹¹ Doyle (2011, p. 222) similarly explains that through transcending the boundaries of the self via ayahuasca, an immanent ecology arises in which “distinction between self and cosmos emerges from a nested hierarchy with as much interior as exterior connectivity”.

¹² Callicott (1989, p. 113) describes any “clear demarcation between oneself and one’s environment” as impossible to find because “the world is, indeed one’s extended body”

¹³ As Fox (1989, p. 274) explains “a cosmological basis for identification is an attempt to convey a lived sense that all entities (including ourselves) are relatively autonomous modes of a single, unfolding process...on the tree of life”. This means that we should strive, ‘insofar as it is within our power to do so’, not to exclusively identify ourselves with one specific aspect of the biotic community such as other human beings (Naess 1973).

¹⁴ <Vine Politics - Is tree hugging a symptom of aya use?> posted by Apostle (Jan 13, 2003), ‘Gaia’ forum, 152 replies, 4,246 views.

¹⁵ Sessions (1995, p. 192) also explains the concept of self-realisation as ‘self-interest’ that expands with the increasingly wider identification, obviating the need for traditionally altruistic acts as ‘place’ becomes a part of one’s ‘self’

with other life forms as Sync (Jan 23, 2003) affirms that “*empathy is a symptom of ayahuasca use*”:

As is concern for the well-being of living things because they are alive and there is some recognition of the connection between all living things. This is a symptom of beginning to understand the unity and sacredness of life.

When the interests of the nonhuman beings are experientially intermeshed and inseparable from our own, their interests are consequently seen as implicated in ours,¹⁶ so that “defending them accordingly becomes a matter of self-defence” (Mathews 2005, p. 69) and forum members naturally come to “*treat the world as an object of affection, not a resource to be exploited*” (Anonymous Jun 12, 2005). Sachahambi (Jan 07, 2007) elaborates on the ultimate norm of self-realisation¹⁷ As coming naturally “*and it seems more hopeful to expand the sense of self...than to suddenly imagine most humans becoming ‘selfless’, acting against their perceived self-interest to protect these things*”.

*The Great Awakening*¹⁸

Given ayahuasca shamanism’s geographical and cultural origins, member’s inevitably draw on Amerindian ontologies which “*indeed contain strains of a deep ecology perspective*” (Mariri Apr 26, 2003) and whose foundations “are the basic intuitions and experiencing of ourselves and Nature which comprise ecological consciousness” (Devall & Sessions 1985, p. 100). Discourse found in the ‘Gaia’ forum confirms that, within documented common archetypal descriptions of ayahuasca phenomenology (Beyer, 2009; Harner, 1980; Metzner, 1999a; Shanon, 2002),¹⁹ individuals bring their own religiosity to the

¹⁶ Curry (2011, p. 106) interprets Naess’ (1973) ecosophy as holding that, “people will ‘naturally’ do the right thing(s) when their apprehension of the natural world is correct, as a result of ever-wider identification of oneself with that world and its fellow inhabitants”.

¹⁷ Naess (1973) referred to the process of *Self-realization*, basing his conception on Spinoza’s concept of *conatus* or self-preservation and encompasses both a teleological impulse and the right to live and thrive (Devall & Sessions, 1985).

¹⁸ Reply by ayahuascakhan (Sep 08, 2009) to <waking up from the dream of life> posted by everythingflashin (Oct 07, 2008) ‘Gaia’ forum, 30 replies, 1,263 views.

¹⁹ While Shanon (2002) attests to the presence of a certain level of cognitive universal metaphysical lines of enquiry, he also notes that “the patterns that any researcher [or shaman]

experience²⁰ to include discussions extending to the notion of cosmic Christ,²¹ Gnosticism,²² Eastern philosophies,²³ Judaic²⁴ and Islamic mysticism,²⁵ Alchemy²⁶ and other traditions. While an individual forum member's ecosophies may vary, the ultimate norms and premises of deep ecology are reflected in the forum through beliefs that transcends established political or religious doctrines²⁷ which are seen as cutting people off "*from the wisdom of that which bears other labels*" (sachahambi Jan 14, 2003).

Perennial philosophical ideals were predominantly found in a 'World Healing' forum discussing the historical role of Judeo-Christianity²⁸ in the nature/culture schism, with the emergent theme being the importance of using "*spiritual messages whether they be from Christ, Buddha, Ayahuasca²⁹ or whatever*" (I am Nov 29, 2006). This quasi-religious discourse reflects the diffuse nature of member's underlying ecosophies. Amidst vibrant discussion of different religious, spiritual and philosophical traditions, there is nonetheless a sense of noetic engagement with nature that transcends cultural ideology and advances "*a return to those essential, innate Earth connected ways, not the embracing of a paradigm that is dramatically flawed at its base*" (Napoleon Blownapart Nov 28, 2006). The revivifying of "*mystical traditions that advocate direct*

observes in nature depend on cognitive constructs" and an intellectual synthesis that also reflect "culturally patterned thoughts and values" (Shanon 2002, p. 16).

²⁰ The ritual space and transcultural appeal of ayahuasca ceremony inevitably creates a space which opens the cosmos, in which multiple nonhumans beings "from various mythologies and histories may all be present" Virtanen (2014, p. 65)

²¹ <Imagery/symbolism> posted by voyage (Jul 29, 2010), 'Gaia' forum, 1 reply, 144 views.

²² <In the garden of Eden : Sumarian Resonances> posted by Mariri (Jan 31, 2008), 'Gaia' forum, 21 replies, 826 views.

²³ <shamanism and shramanism> posted by health (Aug 01, 2006), 'World Healing' forum, 7 replies, 287 views, <The Om of physics> posted by BlueMorph (Jan 19, 2006), 'Gaia' forum, 3 replies, 441 views, <Buddhism and globalization - Helena Norberg-Hodge> posted by sachahambi (Jun 20, 2004), 'World Healing' forum, 8 replies, 193 views.

²⁴ <Angels> posted by Jixe (Mar 28, 2010), 'World Healing' forum, 18 replies, 408 views.

²⁵ <Bringing Aya to Iran> posted by wahidazal66 (Mar 03, 2007), 'World Healing' forum, 61 replies, 2,123 views.

²⁶ "*As an alchemical process, interpretation transpires in a space both inside/outside and neither simultaneously*" (Sespe Jun 08, 2004).

²⁷ It must further be acknowledged that members of the forum also belong to established syncretic Ayahuasca churches which have their own syncretic and esoteric doctrines.

²⁸ <The Peace Process : Judeo Christian Islam Ideals> posted by Mariri (Nov 26, 2006), 'World Healing' forum, 95 replies, 1,926 views.

²⁹ The capitalisation of Ayahuasca is noteworthy here as it reflects member's perception that "ayahuasca is a subject in its own right, with its own intentions" (Saez 2014, p. xxv).

experience” (Sync Jan 20, 2003) spans both forums and consequently embodies the very same roots of perennial philosophy that inform the ontological underpinnings of Naess’ (1973) notion of ecosophy.³⁰

In the ecosophical perception of ‘soul’ or ‘life force’, both forums broadly embody an organicistic holism through an understanding of being part of a biosphere superorganism conceived of as Gaia and from a cosmic view of evolutionary life.³¹ Members express themselves as “*physical manifestations of the goddess*” (iristshirt Jun 20, 2003) while others view that, “*Mother Earth is 'only' a physical manifestation/expression of something that exists on a much higher/subtle level*” (jikuhchagi Jun 20, 2003). Variousy described as “*a living self-regulating system*” (hachichin Mar 05, 2007) and “*an organism or entity in and of itself*” (thevine Jul 23, 2003), this ayahuasca specific Gaian discourse aligns with Taylor’s (2010), lexicon of ‘Gaian Earth religion’. Discussion of ayahuasca embodies both literal and metaphorical veneration of the Earth as a holistic system encompassing both naturalistic and supernaturalistic worldviews which variantly crystallise in hybrid configurations of pantheism, paganism, animism and their neo-spiritual forms (Taylor, 2010).

Some members do not in fact call for “*a literal religious worship of the Earth itself as a living entity*” (cedarman Jun 19, 2003) and question whether “*conscious involvement in the Gaian situation is an exclusively human thing*” (mulga Jan 31, 2003). As members are often previously cognisant of Indigenous knowledge systems, somatonic (Apr 16, 2005) reflects that even a cursory “*inculcation/initiation into an animistic way of viewing/interacting with the world*” can be facilitated primarily “*through a direct engagement with*

³⁰ As Devall and Sessions (1985) explain, the purpose of deep ecology’s integration of perennial philosophy is to unite metaphysics, psychology, theory of knowledge and ethics in a coherently integrated worldview.

³¹ Hanegraaff (1998, p. 158) indicates that the notion of Earth as “a conscious, living organism naturally evokes the question of whether the same applies to other planets and heavenly bodies” which by extent logically applies to ever larger and smaller systems.

the drinking/communicating with the plant”³² Sachahambi (Feb 18, 2005) describes Gaian spirituality as analogous with perennial philosophy as it involves “*Participation in this ongoing Dream, rather than denial and escape and celebrates Multiplicity and Oneness together, rather than seeing them as opposed*”.

Deep Ecology’s Platform Principles

Deductive analysis guided by the eight platform principles revealed a more implicit distribution of Level two values of deep ecology, with the following three inductive themes discursively reflecting their occurrence. The forum thread entitled ‘*We are all of the Earth*’ denotes the fundamental non-anthropocentrism of the first three principles of deep ecology found in both the ‘Gaia’ and ‘World Healing’ forums, that all creatures are fundamentally interconnected and have an inherent right to exist and thrive. The invocation of McKenna’s (2005) popular phrase ‘You Monkeys Only Think you’re Running Things’ discursively alludes to the fourth and fifth principles found predominantly in ‘World Healing’ stressing the need to decrease humanity’s size and scope of interference while changing our priorities regarding the planet that sustains us. In line with the seventh and eighth principles also found largely in ‘World Healing’, the thread title ‘*We are the ones we’ve been waiting for*’ further signals an alignment with deep ecology’s advancement of ideological and political paradigmatic change via an immediate call to action.

*We are all of the Earth*³³

If you drink ayahuasca and more profoundly, visit and spend time in the Amazon- one develops a strong connection to the forest, in effect

³² <NEO-ANIMISM> posted by sachahambi (Apr 12, 2005), ‘Gaia’ forum, 45 replies, 2,475 views. <on new animism> posted by Anonymous (Apr 02, 2010), ‘Gaia’ forum, 18 views, 440 replies and <bio-regional animism> posted by TIHKAL (May 14, 2005), ‘World Healing’ forum, 3 replies, 119 views.

³³ “*We are all of the earth*” Anonymous (May 19, 2005), comment in reply to <Cultural appropriation in our community> posted by TIHKAL (May 19, 2005), ‘World Healing’ forum, 46 replies, 1,290 views.

one becomes ever more 'indigenous' to the Earth and to the forest
(wind Jun 12, 2009).

Deep ecology's first three principles are reflected equally across the 'Gaia' and 'World Healing' forums through an understanding of biocentric equality and "knowledge of all-pervasive intimate relationships" (Naess 1986a, p. 68). Members reiterate in various ways principle one's irreducible and innate rights of all living things to exist and thrive as they "*participate in the community of beings, contributing openly our inputs, not asserting or imposing them*" (Mariri Apr 18, 2006). Without explicitly mentioning deep ecology, the first principle³⁴ seems evidently familiar in Shoemaker's (Jan 12, 2008) affirmation of environmental awareness:

Knowledge of ecology helps us to understand that the well-being and flourishing of all life is linked to the understanding that there is inherent worth and intrinsic value in the non-human world independent of use value and exploitation capacity.

The first principle is framed in the both forums as a non-utilitarian valuing of the complex interconnectedness of human and nonhuman life through of acknowledgment of "*beings to whom certain ethics and understandings for altruistic coexistence with other lifeforms make themselves apparent*" (Mariri Jan 02, 2004). An understanding of nonhuman life "*in terms of its personhood*" and of the world "*as a collection of persons (only some of which are human)*" (PsillyBoy Apr 07, 2010) further reifies deep ecology's first principle of rethinking value and 'kinship' in all social-human relationships to include the subjectivity and agency of other-than-human-persons (Haraway, 1997; Mathews, 2005).

³⁴ "The wellbeing and flourishing of human and nonhuman life on Earth have value in themselves (this is commonly referred to as inherent worth, or intrinsic value). These values are independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes" (Naess & Sessions 1984, p. 5).

As a formulation for wider ecological sustainability, the second principle³⁵ posits a re-visioning of evolutionary life “as a magnificent expression of a multitude of forms” rather than one of humans as the apex of existence (McLaughlin 1995, p. 87). The appreciation of life as a value in and of itself is acknowledged in ‘World Healing’ through the importance of “*perceiving a value to nature, beyond a life-support system we need to engineer around*” and understanding the importance of “*the quality of life that human communities in connection with a diverse, flourishing natural world can achieve*” (Mariri Jun 11, 2005). The qualities of richness and diversity, complexity and symbiosis in the global evolutionary cycle are represented through a view that, “*the earth is teeming with life and in being part of it-we are of earth-to go with earth*” (oneoverzero Nov 25, 2001). Deep ecological principles therefore stem from celebrating and honouring our place and role as biological beings, manifesting as inclusive of that which appears ‘un-living’ in the vein of Spinozian panpsychism³⁶ as it is expressed that “*this ‘life’ stuff seems to extend at least from the outer fringes of the atmosphere down to through the thin layer*” (gnrm23 Oct 01, 2004). An understanding of richness and diversity is notably presented in ‘World Healing’ in terms of permaculture,³⁷ as representing holistic integration with the complexity and interconnectedness of ecosystems³⁸ and it said, “*the only survivable systems are diverse systems, and we need that diversity of vision*” (Anonymous Mon Oct 27, 2008). Permaculture systems subsequently exemplify the second deep ecology principle since “*what is important is the complexity of the functional relationships that exist between elements not the number of elements*” (sachahambi Dec 25, 2004).

³⁵ “Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realisation of these values and are also values in themselves’ (Naess & Sessions 1984, p. 5).

³⁶ As another root in the tree of deep ecology’s influences, Devall and Session (1985, p. 238) explain that Spinozian metaphysics is designed to reveal humanity’s place in Nature as temporary expressions or modes of modification in the continual flux of God/Nature/Substance and is “a modern version of perennial philosophy”.

³⁷ <Permaculture> posted by sachahambi (Dec 24, 2005), ‘World Healing’ forum, 6 replies, 342 views.

³⁸ McLaughlin (1995, p. 48) explains this valuing of diversity as involving “freeing large areas of the earth from domination by industrial economy and culture” and the social construct of ‘wilderness’ and its relationship with Indigenous cultures is extensively discussed through posts about ‘wilderness’ and ‘re-wilding’ such as <Wilderness Wisdom> posted by Napoleon Blownapart (Dec 27, 2003), ‘Gaia’ forum, 6 replies, 355 views.

The third principle of deep ecology³⁹ invokes the very social construction of ‘rights’ similarly perceived by members as hegemonically reserved “*to the thinking dimension of the human world...nothing about non humans and their rights*” (dithyramb Jan 15, 2013). While asserting that “our vital needs do not amount to a license to plunder and exterminate” (Curry 2011, p. 22), the instrumentalist ‘value’ of nonhuman existence is reflected in the forum as mediated by socially constructed ‘capital’ or ‘exchange’ worth to nature (Demeritt, 1998). As Jolt (Oct 20, 2009) expresses it, “*we’ve been hoodwinked into placing the value in the IOU rather than the goods. We’ve misplaced value and lost our sense of real value*”. The vision of living according to the deep ecological principle of ‘vital needs’⁴⁰ over superficial ‘wants’ is a salient theme in both forums and a general consensus that, “*maybe it is possible to survive consuming a lot less?*” (dithyramb Jul 01, 2011). Part of this vision of living less materialistically for borys (Dec 21, 2003), involves a reassessment that “*compels a reduction in consumption...when we take what we need, it becomes more reasonable to sustainably generate what we take*”. The way our cultural values have come to distort our concept of ‘vital needs’ is expressed as bound to a dominant discourse of being “*constantly told that wanting more and more ‘stuff’ is just human nature*” (sachahambi (May 14, 2010).

Our wants are a distraction from our suffering and therefore an inhibition to growth...I would say that what we really need is spiritual connection to the world at large, once that is established we can find the right balance of other needs (oxacachaka Jan 07, 2010).

*You Monkeys Only Think you’re Running Things*⁴¹

While denoting a Gaian conception of larger ‘organisation’ or even ‘sentience’ discursively underlying both forums, extensive discussion of McKenna’s

³⁹ “Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs” (Naess & Sessions 1984, p. 5).

⁴⁰ Naess and Sessions (1984, p. 5) left the term ‘vital needs’ deliberately vague “to allow for considerable latitude in judgment” as the determination of ‘vital needs’ is inevitably individually and culturally subjective

⁴¹ McKenna’s (2005, p. 232) phrase conveys the “profound and humbling” revelation imparted by ayahuasca which advocates the “need to wake up to what is happening to us and to the planet” and for human’s to realise is that; “you monkeys only think you’re running things.”

(2005) phrase “you monkeys only think you’re running things” denotes humanity’s “*one way dominator communication wherein we just don't listen to what 'nature' has to say to us*” (carpedmt Jan 02, 2006). This critique of anthropocentric domination yields the fourth and fifth principles of deep ecology that the worsening state of ecological affairs is intrinsically tied to industrialisation, capitalism and overpopulation. These aspects of humanity are discussed and understood by members as interrelated, that for all life and cultures to flourish “*we must come to the realization that the present human interference with the non-human world is coercive and excessive*” (Shoemaker, Jan 12, 2008).

Humans feel we're above things and can manage the planet, the climate and its resources; 'running things'...you can't alter a strand in the web without everything being affected. Therefore, taking this very dominator brute style with global ecology is insane (Mariri Apr 18, 2006).

The fourth⁴² and perhaps most ethically fraught and contentious principle,⁴³ was found embedded in extensive provocative discussion in the ‘World Healing’ forum.⁴⁴ The assertion that a reduction in human population is necessary or even inevitable in the forum, revealed significant concern that “*over population is perhaps the most basic and destructive infraction of all*” (Napolean Blownapart Jan 14, 2003). Deep ecology’s recognition that “*excessive pressures on planetary life stem from the human population explosion*” (Naess 1986a, p. 73) is encapsulated by Plerr (Feb 10, 2012) as inescapable and necessary, we “*will be reduced one way or the other...there's*

⁴² “The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of nonhuman life requires such a decrease” (Naess & Sessions 1984, p. 5).

⁴³ As an ontological formulation, the principle of reducing current human population and/or stabilising it to a sustainable minimum level focuses principally on the larger issue of ecological equilibrium and intentionally avoids virtue ethics and the problematic specificities underlying the issue (Devall & Session, 1985). Concerns regarding how to control or reduce overpopulation are nonetheless embedded in sociocultural factors of gender, racial and class inequalities and exploitation under the capitalist system and inextricably tied to the disparity of resource consumption by developed/developing nations (Salleh, 1993).

⁴⁴ <Overpopulation and sterilization... - ...what is the best option????> posted by Narsimdiva (May 27, 2004), ‘World Healing’, 20 replies, 668 views.

no way to get-around a reduction- we're past carrying-capacity".⁴⁵ That planet Earth would inevitably 'manage' such an imbalance of human species, reflects a general forum consensus that *"if we do it, it would most likely have to be gradual, if Nature does it, it could be swift"* (Napoleon Blownapart Jan 24, 2003).⁴⁶ The ethical dilemma of population reduction, limitation or smart redistribution is widely understood by forum members and Plerr (Feb 10, 2012) echoes the reality that *"there are no good choices"*. Reflecting the variances in Gaian spirituality within both forums, minx (Jan 07, 2010) asserts *"it is very self-hating to assume that 'we are just a virus' and 'the Earth will purge us'"* while ashku (May 29, 2004) asks, *"shouldn't it also be considered that Mother Nature provides her own methods of population control?"*

While overpopulation attracts significant forum dialogue, it is expressed as tied to the excessive interference of the fifth principle⁴⁷ as unavoidably interrelated with the ecological crisis being *"attributed either directly or indirectly to the overwhelming growth of the human species and our impact on resources"* (Narsimdiva May 27, 2004). Members consequently believe that adopting alternative models to the systemic illusion of progress perpetuated by an unsustainable model of industrial culture⁴⁸ may be the only way to ensure that *"a human population crash is neither necessary nor inevitable"* (Anonymous Feb 10, 2012).

If global capitalism did not collapse of its own weight (which is in fact happening) human population growth, consumption and ecological degradation would continue their exponential growth (sachahambi Feb 10, 2012).

⁴⁵ This notion of 'critical mass' and consequent 'collapse' further denotes the self-regulating aspect of the Gaian discourse throughout both discussion forums.

⁴⁶ Naess (1986a, p. 60) acknowledges that we cannot expect "people in the materially richest countries" to reduce their excessive interference overnight and that "the stabilisation and reduction of the human population will take time".

⁴⁷ "Present human interference with the nonhuman world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening" (Naess & Sessions 1984, p. 5)

⁴⁸ Deep ecology's principle of curbing population growth is similarly directed towards 'developed' industrial societies and their disproportionate production of waste, consumption of resources and per capita impact on the biosphere (Devall & Session, 1985).

There is clear disillusionment with the hegemonic belief that nature is an external world and unlimited source of resources freely available for exploitation (Katz, 1997)⁴⁹ within the ‘World Healing’ forum as moonspirit (Feb 15, 2010) reveals, “*capitalism is doomed by its very premise...it values nature less than the products extracted from her*”. In the acknowledgement of a rapidly deteriorating planet human ‘interference’ is not however synonymous with modification,⁵⁰ what is at stake however “is the nature and extent of such interference” (Naess 1984, p. 69). Embodying the ontological nature of deep ecology principles in general, Napoleon Blownapart (Feb 21, 2010) declares that; “*if we were driven a lot more by values, from the bottom up, and we simply cut out a lot of excess from our lives, we could do a lot to shrink our footprint, and still have a simpler, basic modern life*”.

*We are the ones we've been waiting for*⁵¹

In line with the sixth, seventh and eighth deep ecology principles, the popular phrase ‘We are the ones we've been waiting for’⁵² denotes the ‘grass roots’ call to action advanced by deep ecology’s economic, political, technological and ideological challenge to current models of unmitigated growth and unsustainable living. In line with the sixth principle⁵³ of deep ecology, forum discussion and proposal of policy and radical social change broadly manifests

⁴⁹ While Naess (1986a) admits the formulation of excessive and worsening human interference is mild, this aspect of the platform by extent implies that the solution lies in letting nature be. As Mathews (2005, p. 44) explains “our reason for letting things be is that they are imbued with a *conativity* of their own; left to themselves they take care of themselves and in taking care of themselves they promote the self-realisation of the systems that constitute them”.

⁵⁰ Deep ecology’s slogan of ‘non-interference’ does not completely negate humans modifying their surroundings, as many species inherently do and will continue to (Naess, 1986a).

⁵¹ <We are the ones we've been waiting for> posted by Emergence (Nov 07, 2004), ‘Gaia’ forum, 4 replies, 400 views.

⁵² While this phrase is been variously attributed to President Obama and is the title of a book on American politics by Peter Levine (2013), it is officially credited to June Jordan’s (1978) ‘Poem for South African Women’ set to music by the African-American a-cappella ensemble, Sweet Honey in the Rock. Within the Ayahuasca.com forum however, it is most likely used in the context of the Hopi Elder saying accredited to an unnamed elder and reflects the many instances of Hopi Wisdom found throughout the ‘Gaia’ forum.

⁵³ “Policies must therefore be changed. The changes in policies affect basic economic, technological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present” (Naess & Sessions 1984, p. 5)

the disparity between “ideal sustainable forms of economic growth and present policies of the industrial societies” (Naess 1986a, p. 70). Occurrences of specific strategies for change occurred in ‘World Healing’ were expressed as, “*push for sustainability laws, working in small local politics*” TIHKAL (Mar 08, 2006) and “*working to reform the countryside planning act*” (Mariri Mar 08, 2006). Advocacy of integrated policy change is more notably voiced as tied to “*a more environmentally responsible business model...we all know that idea is already there; the willingness of the corporations to comply is a completely different issue*” jikuhchagi (Jan 24, 2003).

The perception of global food shortage is asserted as being more “*a combination of policy and distribution*” (art Jan 28, 2003) and even the proposal of “*policies like the Chinese (never thought I'd be saying that) regarding our self-replication*” is put forward (zart Mar 29, 2008). In regard to environmental destruction, hazle-ra (May 16 2010) advocates a “*Crime against Nature/the Planet/Ecosystem*” Bill that can “*define the crime and be used by prosecutors to put people in jail, not a statement that says ‘Don't hurt the planet!’*”. While members variously advocate “*alternative means of sustaining ourselves*” (quarrior Jan 07, 2010), “*a renewable energy economy...using high technology*” (ashku Apr 29, 2004) and even to “*monkey wrench the death merchants*” (DrStrange Sep 20, 2003), it is agreed, “*that man (sic) will never move ahead until he deeply processes what he has done on this planet*” (Napolean Blownapart Jan 02, 2006).

The ‘World Healing’ forum significantly reflects deep ecology’s seventh principle⁵⁴ that existing structures and patterns of labour and consumption are “*a particular cultural form fuelled by dissatisfied overconsumption*” that indeed dominant sociocultural modes of being “are not in fact satisfying” (McLaughlin 1993, p. 90). Numerous threads throughout ‘World Healing’ discuss the

⁵⁴ “The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating life quality (dwelling in situations of inherent worth) rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great” (Naess & Sessions 1984, p. 5)

ideology of paradigmatic change as is proposed by deep ecology and it is widely acknowledged in forums that, *“there needs to happen, a shift to different mode of living and existing on the planet”* (jayadaga Mar 13, 2010) which *“won't likely be effectively implemented without a shift in consciousness at the individual and collective levels”* (quarrior Jan 07, 2010).

Deep ecology's notion of dwelling in nature seems wholly understood as a fundamental appreciation for wildness and wilderness and advancement of bioregionalism is reflected across both the 'Gaia' and 'World Healing' forums.⁵⁵ Members commonly express appreciation for *“vibrant, aesthetically pleasing, non-despoiled environments”* (Anonymous Jun 12, 2005) that *“to stay in mostly 'natural' settings”* (oxacachaka Feb 07, 2009) is avowed to be *“very nourishing to my body and soul...like being close to 'source”* (ronaramma Jan 13, 2013). The emphasis on quality of life⁵⁶ over quantity of material goods through voluntary simplicity is a common sentiment among forum members, that it is desirable, feasible and entirely possible *“to break free from the downward spiral of the current consumptive lifestyles we are stuck living”* (UlcerPentacid Dec 16, 2003). This seventh principle is implicitly conveyed by Anonymous (Jun 12, 2005) maintaining that *“if people spent more time in touch with the aesthetics of their immediate experience and less time enmeshed in cultural desires, their hearts would guide them to a more balanced way of living”*.

The eighth⁵⁷ principle indicates that full conception of deep ecology's philosophy and preceding principles compels individuals and groups to implement change by enacting these tenets in everyday life and to participate in an attempt *“to implement the necessary changes”* (Naess 1986a, p.68). Many

⁵⁵ <Bioregionalism - a step to Planetary Healing> posted by sachahambi (Apr 08, 2005), 'World Healing' forum, 0 replies, 115 views.

⁵⁶ Naess (1986a, p. 70) acknowledges any vagueness here as due to the non-quantifiable nature of the term 'quality' but implies an essence to human life that is ecologically beneficial not merely the substance of culturally constructed function.

⁵⁷ *“Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to participate in the attempt to implement the necessary changes”* (Naess & Sessions 1984, p. 5).

threads in ‘World Healing’ converge around the practice of “*sustainable technology, permaculture, bioremediation, bioregionalism...and practice in personal life, healing, the arts and community*” (TIHKAL May 13, 2005). There is also evidence in the forum of both direct and indirect action in the forms of self-sustainable or off-grid living, eco-housing and even environmentally friendly ways to be interred after death.⁵⁸ Exemplifying this principle and the underlying norms of deep ecology, it is commonly expressed in the both forums that “*so much can be achieved through collective action, if we just put our small selves aside temporarily*” (Mariri Apr 26, 2003).

A notable position occurring in the ‘World Healing’ forum reveals an understanding that “*actually demonstrating and living out your beliefs in your immediate world is more effective than worrying about, complaining about and arguing about that which you cannot effectively influence*” (jikuhchagi Sep 17, 2003). While Naess (1986a, p. 70) notes “there is ample room for different opinions about priorities”,⁵⁹ it is sometimes raised in ‘World Healing’ that to assess “*what constitutes responsible action is immensely difficult, and the consequences of our actions are often difficult to know in advance*” (Bricoleur Jul 21, 2005). Exemplifying Naess’ (1973) imperative of ecological activism informed by a fundamental philosophic/religious standpoint, sachahambi (Feb 18, 2005) explains that, “*the essence of Earth spirituality, Gaian spirituality...is participation*”.

The presence of deep ecological, ecopsychology and related texts in the two forums evidences an understanding of the practices and ideas that signify notable connections between the discourse of contemporary ayahuasca drinkers and deep ecology. Deep ecology’s recognition of the centrality of ritual process in achieving self-realisation and constructing an ecological-self

⁵⁸ <most environmentally conscious way to die> posted by oxacachaka (May 28, 2008) ‘World Healing’ forum, 28 replies, 857 views.

⁵⁹ With much discussion of the ‘self-determination’, ‘local community’ and the ‘think globally, act locally’ tenets of deep ecology as a key factor in the future ecology of human societies, the implementation of deep change is nonetheless said to require increasingly global action (Naess, 1986a).

is embodied by members indicating a change in their behaviour when they “*recognise that everyone's experience (including nonhuman beings' experience) is their own*” (sachahambi Tue Jan 31, 2012). A common refrain running through both deep ecology and ayahuasca discourse is a perennial organicistic worldview with the message or messengers of ‘ultimate truth’ seen as taking “*an infinite variety of forms, one of which is the very body of the Earth itself*” (hurqalya222 Mar 31, 2010).

The presence of deep ecology principles in the Gaia forum reveals how “*ayahuasca drinkers understand humans as existing within a matrix of relational reciprocity of living things*” (Agave Oct 24, 2013) and therefore “*appreciate and acknowledge the value in the richness and diversity of life*” (Shoemaker Jan 12, 2008). The principles of deep ecology in World Healing further reveal an understanding of humanity’s implication in the ecological crisis as brought about by “*overpopulation and environmental degradation, brought about by destructive technologies and wasteful, greedy use of resources is something unprecedented in historical memory*” (SOMOS Mar 05, 2007). The notion of paradigmatic change is a salient one in the ‘World Healing’ forum and exemplifies the value-laden nature of deep ecological principles, and reflect an understanding that “*the problem isn't our economic/political system it's the metaphysical underpinnings of our entire conception of the universe*” (health Mar 29, 2008). In response to the escalating ecological crisis, the discourse of World Healing thus comes to signify the spiritually informed political activism of deep ecology,⁶⁰ which is articulated as “*a fusion of deep mystical awareness, practice and intensity with radical commitment to radical action in the real world on every level*” (gelfer Feb 20, 2005).

⁶⁰ <Spiritually Informed Political Activism> posted by sachahambi (Feb 20, 2005), ‘World Healing’ forum, 18 replies, 1540 views.

An additional inductive theme emerged across both ‘Gaia’ and ‘World Healing’ entangling nature and culture as part of “*a sort of cosmic internet web... the world wide web, and the web of life in nature*” (wasankopi Dec 23, 2006), connexions that undoubtedly arise from the propensity of psychedelics’ to enhance awareness of systems and networks, biologies, ecologies and cosmologies (Martin, 2010).⁶² In reference to being an intrinsic part of “*the environmental matrix that makes human existence possible*” (Horton Oct 19, 2011), members employ terms such as *avatar*⁶³ *transmission*,⁶⁴ *direct line*,⁶⁵ *download*,⁶⁶ *interface*,⁶⁷ *hologram*,⁶⁸ *logged in*⁶⁹ and *matrix*⁷⁰ to articulate ayahuasca’s technological complexity. Commonly articulated as a plant ‘tool’ (Tupper, 2009a), ayahuasca is additionally expressed as a technology that “*allows an intimate dialogue and also a becomingness which is the hallmark of the deep mergingness, which is the mystic experience...the aliveness and spontaneity, which can provide beyond what we can conceive or think!*” (carpedmt Jan 02, 2006). For the most part the internet itself is embraced as enabling the propagation of “*previously hidden plant knowledge at a level that nothing short of global telepathy could have matched*” (zart Jan 12, 2008), although member’s responses to technology also view these systems as far

⁶¹ <Gaya Net-ING.> posted by Jovinda (Sep 24, 2006), ‘Gaia’ forum, 2 replies, 175 views.

⁶² For an exemplary cinematic analogy, Davis (2012) and Ball’s (2011) consideration of James Cameron’s (2009) *Avatar* and the film’s allegorical and metaphorical allusions to ayahuasca serve to elucidate an analogous Gaian holism and sacrality of nature through the trope of digital-ecological network interconnectedness. Additionally the film is referenced by forum member’s to discuss the themes of environmental destruction, Indigenous displacement and native activism. <AVATAR is real> posted by sachahambi (Mar 08, 2010), World Healing’ forum, 8 replies, 353 views.

⁶³ “*I want to start using the word ‘avatar’ instead of ‘ego’ because I think it's more appropriate*” (entheogenic gardener Jul 31, 2014).

⁶⁴ “*communication by means of direct visual-and-emotional transmission through intelligent infinity and the realization that we are One*” (beko Dec 05, 2010).

⁶⁵ “*I really feel we have a direct line to the whole story of ayahuasca and related compounds*” (carpedmt Jan 02, 2006).

⁶⁶ “*sometimes suddenly the simple words trigger a download about their deeper meanings*” (sachahambi Jan 07, 2010).

⁶⁷ “*Aya teachings that came out of that initial interfacing with the medicine*” (Guest Jan 02, 2005).

⁶⁸ “*the recognition that the whole human group-soul is within each of us, like pieces of a hologram*” (sachahambi Jan 24, 2004).

⁶⁹ “*It felt like logging in into EArth, or gaya... when logged in, I experience an aspekt of surrounding Nature...*” (Jovinda Sep 24, 2006).

⁷⁰ “*The Earth is our Universal Matrix*” (Napolean Blownapart Apr 26, 2003).

from neutral (Rowe, 1990).⁷¹ While the internet facilitates the very situated nature of discussion forum discourse, deep ecology's ambiguity and antipathy toward New Age transhumanism and technotopianism is also reflected as "*an alienated, mediated, and distorted reality, for everyone involved...the values and goals of those who produce and control technology are always embedded in it*" (shoemaker Jan 12, 2008).

From my hypothesis that the philosophy of deep ecology is an embedded part of contemporary ayahuasca discourse, the Level two platform principles that articulate the philosophy are revealed as both overtly and tacitly understood by members of the two Ayahuasca.com forums. At the same time, inductive analysis of Ayahuasca texts revealed underlying philosophical ideals unequivocally reflecting Level one ultimate norms and values of deep ecology. From expressions of ayahuasca as facilitating a great awakening of the self and conscious awareness of the voice of Earth, a consequent understanding of intrinsic interconnectedness between all living things evidences a common conception of spiritually informed ecology. As Level one ultimate norms are expected to show considerable diversity (Naess 1986), within ayahuasca discourse a comprehension of ecosophical wisdom draws on a variety of traditions that represent the perennial philosophy advocated by deep ecology. An ayahuasca specific ecosophia is exemplified by the textual presence of a Gaian discourse that represents a conception of metaphysical holism that is expressed in a spiritual and scientific dialectic. Articulations echoing deep ecology's platform principles reveal an ecocentric understanding of life's inherent worth and right to flourish without human interference. A general sentiment prevails that the present tangent of humanity's anthropocentric domination of the planet can only be overcome by a paradigmatic shift in consciousness which consequently demands a call to action in order to implement necessary changes. From experiences of unitary or 'source' consciousness and long range perceptions of the evolutionary process, the sophisticated technologies of both nature and culture invoke mystical parallels

⁷¹ Rowe (1990, p. 63) offers up an inclusive definition of technology as any "reproducible and publicly communicable way of doing things".

that re-join humanity's dichotomous entanglement in both. The manner in which members articulate ayahuasca and their entheogenic experiences therefore confirm both the philosophy and praxis of deep ecology to be a salient feature of contemporary ayahuasca discourse.

Discussion/Conclusion

This research set out to explore the extent to which the philosophy of deep ecology was present as a key feature of the discourse brought to light by the contemporary ayahuasca phenomenon. The initial deductive analysis of deep ecology's Level two discourse revealed the platform principles of deep ecology as evident across both 'Gaia' and 'World Healing' discussion forums though predominantly in the latter. Inductive analysis consequently uncovered the Level one discourse of deep ecology's underlying norms and premises in both discussion forums, though more so in 'Gaia'. The presence of ultimate views analogous to deep ecology signify ayahuasca discourse as an expression of engagement in the deep questioning process and reveals the articulation of individual ecosophies brought about through the nature-centric ritual process. While there are limitations to the generalisability of this study, it nonetheless appears that from this small example the deep ecology of contemporary ayahuasca discourse is potentially broader and deeper than this project was able to encompass. The broader objective of examining the way members discuss the ecospiritual aspects of ayahuasca ritual practices therefore vindicates a postmodern re-sacralisation of nature that inevitably leads to expressions, engagements and practices that exemplify deep ecology.

Through discussion of the ayahuasca ritual's ecocentricism as facilitating self-realisation for both humans and nonhumans, a discourse of healing emerges as concern for nature is fostered through participant's implication in its wellbeing. From discourse regarding the ecological-self, the theme of perceiving all of life as interconnected emerges as counteracting the illusion of culturally constructed boundaries of self and other. An experiential and dialogical engagement with the plant spirit of ayahuasca is revealed which embodies the concept of biocentric equality manifesting an animistic discourse that trans-species communication is entirely possible. The metaphysical holism of contemporary ayahuasca discourse is embedded in a Gaian belief system that also serves as a new opportunity to speak of and consider 'everything' differently through a reinvigorated cosmopolitics brought about by an "amazing

deepening in the intimacy of the connections between humans and non-humans” (Latour 2011, p. 79).

By deconstructing the heterogeneous network that is the online discussion the forum to its inevitably source as a natural object implicated in human evolution, ayahuasca discourse is situated within a ‘middle kingdom’ proliferation of hybridity, an assemblage of natural, cultural and technological actors and actants (Latour 1993). Contemporary ayahuasca discourse’s deeply ecological non-anthropocentrism further embodies a mode of resistance and countercultural ethos which challenges the dominant ecological paradigm. Drawing on the perennial philosophies of multiple belief systems and wisdom gained through self-purification, introspection and harmony of being (Devall & Sessions, 1985), ayahuasca’s hybrid ecospiritual orientations are further enacted into everyday life as a means of informing personal deep ecological praxis. The aspects of contemporary ayahuasca discourse examined in this thesis exemplify the self-confrontation, self-examination and deep-questioning fundamentals of deep ecology with ayahuasca drinkers expressing personal-social and ecologically salutatory effects through revived relationships to nature and enlivened Earth wisdom.

As the right to self-realisation is not limited just to humans, through contemporary ayahuasca discourse’s elucidation of the unique human-plant neurochemical synergy the spirit of the biosphere itself is seen as made manifest, realised through an evolutionary mind-spirit-Earth connection. Contemporary ayahuasca practices are reflected as a mode of healing that is “*systemic, acausal, and ecological, treating the Whole Person, the transpersonal self*” and as a deep active engagement with a “*transpersonal or ecosystemic self-identification through ego/language boundary dissolution*” (Mariri Apr 26, 2003). Ayahuasca discourse in the ‘Gaia’ and ‘World Healing’ forums not only indicates a re-configuration of the self in relationship to nature, but reroutes the inculcated mutual exclusivity of personal identification toward that of an inherently relational but individual being (Plumwood, 2003).

Through ayahuasca drinker's self-actualisation, place in the world is brought about by engaging communicatively with nonhuman beings who in turn "reach their own individual forms of unfolding...within the larger self-realisation" (Devall & Sessions 1985, p. 68).

Deep ecological self-realisation is also articulated as intrinsically tied to a ritual process of personal healing which in turn is "*connected to the healing of the planet*" (Sachahambi Mar 31, 2007) and evidently analogous to Seed's et al. (1998, p. 6) phrase "I am part of the rainforest protecting myself". From a perceived personal implication in ecosystemic complexity, ayahuasca's genesis and nexus in the Amazonian rain forest and its threatened destruction crystallises the sentiment that "*Ayahuasca is the Amazon's secret weapon, she turns people into fanatical defenders of the forest*" (sachahambi Dec 31, 2006). As Reichel-Dolmatoff (1996, p. 168), observes, ayahuasca ritual indeed becomes "a lesson in ecology...it gives nature a chance to voice its complaints and demands in unmistakable terms".¹ As descriptions of personal engagement with the plant spirit of ayahuasca reveal, a sentient mandate of ecological concern emerges from intersubjective, dialogical contact with a reanimated world consequently respected for its own sake.

Ayahuasca discourse in the selected forums indicates deep ecology's biocentric egalitarianism via a means of human contact with the spirits of the plant world as a whole. This contact is brought about by ayahuasca's unique ability to facilitate the reception of plant intelligence via a resonance between nature and mind that allows for humans to form a commons with spirits of the plant assembly (Doyle 2011p. 120). This engagement therefore becomes a way of participating in the pluriverse of entities by entering into a *parlez* and engaging

¹ Forum members describe "*messages directly from the forest where these plants come from---sometimes a cry for help and other times an unmistakable DEMAND*" (mymagnet Mar 31, 2007).

with nonhuman beings that are normally denied representation (Latour, 2013).² The presence of complimentary deep ecological ritual practices are also revealed that “*allow other life forms to actually speak to humans*” expressing their “*consciousness, perspective, concerns and cares*” (silverbirch Dec 27, 2005) in a world where human concerns have come to dominant. These communicative practices of interacting with the world that involve the recognition of an assembly of beings both human and nonhuman also act in a way that grants “full agency to both parties” (Callicott 2013, p. 40).³ Through this experiential interconnection, member’s understanding of inherent worth becomes embedded in a wider set of sociotechnical relations in which “*the norm of reciprocity in all interactions is raised to the status of sacred*” (cedarman Feb 12, 2004). The biocentric equality of ayahuasca discourse consequently stems from dialogical encounters with “the larger-than-human world” of organic and inorganic life as having intent, purpose and therefore inherent value (Plumwood 2002, p. 186).

Deep ecology’s metaphysical holism is further revealed through the accepted use of Gaia as the prototypical analogy that vindicates the marrying of metaphysics and science in a united cosmovision (Hanegraaff, 1998). As silverbirch (Jan 03, 2006) explains, “*Ayahuasca awakens us to this ongoing connectivity with all life, this eternal Gaialogue within this home planet and beyond*” and reveals a mode of encounter that “opens the door to a world in which we can begin to negotiate life membership of an ecological community of kindred beings” (Plumwood 2002, p. 176). Latour (2013) proposes such an epistemological rendering of Gaia as a new way of conceiving agency distribution without the exclusive domains of religion or science. Ayahuasca is consequently representative of a new cosmopolitics of polyunity that enables conception of cosmos (far away) and access to psyche (close at hand).

² As Highpine (2012) notes, although “the vine carries the *content* of the message, the teaching, and the insight” among the entheogens ayahuasca is unique in the sense that it plays a vital role in “teaching humans about *other* plants besides herself”.

³ This engagement between human subjectivity and its cultural parameters does not “privilege human agency over that of the plants, nor does it relegate the product of their interaction to the sphere of the human imagination” (Callicott 2013, p. 40).

The message that “*Ayahuasca and the other plant teachers all make; a point that ‘all life is connected’*” (vaster than empires Oct 21, 2008) further exemplifies an experiential process of coming to understand deeply ecological metaphysical holism. Ayahuasca discourse reveals conceptions of functioning organicist relationality that views nonhuman and human life as having evolved and emerged together and “*inextricably enmeshed as part of Gaia and the mystery of being*” (ayalight Nov 25, 2013). While in many cases experientially informed, the Gaian trope is nonetheless “a rhetorical enterprise” and a locution that articulates precisely and heuristically “the informatic interconnection” of ecosystemic life (Doyle 2011, p. 214). Earthen life is therefore saliently understood in ayahuasca discourse as a “*flowing, interconnected system, continually responding to the moment and putting itself back into equilibrium, into functional balance*” and not simply “*a collection of separate unrelated entities*” (Napolean Blownapart Jan 07, 2010).

As humanity is also perceived as “*the flowering of this Gaian consciousness*” (carpedmt Jan 02, 2006) the utilising of ayahuasca to experience such global collective consciousness has been described as the “grokking of Gaia” (Doyle 2011, p. 21).⁴ From this perception of humanity as organic beings in an organic world, arises the notion of the internet as the ultimate extension of the preclusive Gaian vegetal network⁵ and another alteration and embodiment of human consciousness in the rise of networked society (Razam, 2009). Communications networks are perceived by some ayahuasca forum member’s as forming a global brain⁶ or noosphere⁷ understood as the evolutionary extension of underlying archetypal networked forms, “*like a human nervous system; and by analogy anything that*

⁴ The term ‘grok’ derives from Heinlein’s (1961) novel *Stranger in a Strange Land* and while literally meaning ‘to drink’ it also means ‘to understand’ and refers here to “the notion of experiencing a telepathic group mind or ‘tribal telepathic understanding’” (Luke 2012, p. 114).

⁵ Gearin (2014, n.p) highlights that while the drawing of analogies between digital technology and ayahuasca may elicit some outrage “due to popular definitions of technologies as profane, inanimate...and ayahuasca understood as a spirit entity or person and sacred art”, such distinctions between sacred and profane are not however culturally universal constructs.

⁶ <Gaia Theory/Evolution of Consciousness - Vine Politics Sub-thread> posted by jikuhchagi (Jan 27, 2003), ‘Gaia’ forum, 57 replies, 1752 views.

⁷ <Birth of the Noosphere> posted by sachahambi (Apr 10, 2006), ‘World Healing’ forum, 14 replies, 678 views.

nervous system can create such as the internet” (mulga Jan 31, 2003).⁸ This dissolution of nature/culture binaries in many ways reflects Amerindian ontologies (Gearin, 2014) and perceptions of cyberspace are manifested in the ayahuasca forum as a “collective, cosmopolitan artefact crafted in stories with heterogeneous actants” (Haraway 2004, p. 105). The unique, artifactual and ‘social nature’ of the Ayahuasca.com forum is analogously seen as a relational, albeit discursive nexus of plant-spirit-human-social-technological interconnectedness and confirms the forum as a unique heterogeneous network or ‘assemblage’ (Latour, 1993).⁹

The digital analogies and metaphors commonly conveyed within ayahuasca discourse discursively merge nature and technology in order to express the translinguistic, “post McLuhan symbology” of ayahuasca’s sensory semantic process (Razam 2009, p. 83).¹⁰ The examined forums therefore evidence contemporary ayahuasca discourse as qualifying an ‘ontopoetics’, implying that the world is not only psycho-active in the panpsychic sense but also responsive to us, that we can choose to bring to it an experiential intercession that “calls it forth on a new expressive plane, a plane of meaning and not merely of causation” (Mathews 2009, p. 2). The ecosophical narrative of ‘growing awareness’ in ayahuasca discourse is further tied to a responsive ability to “*structurally couple with our environment, others and 'the inside of things' accessed through our own interiority*” (Mariri Apr 26, 2003).¹¹ As Haraway (2004, p. 142) points out, “nature is a technology” and as a particular sort of embodied social category ayahuasca is similarly framed as a

⁸ Such a bio-molecular network of nature is seen as operating on a level of complexity that integrates all ecological, computational and neurological architecture (Harrison, et al., 2006).

⁹ The digital context of contemporary ayahuasca discourse as representative of a nature-based spirituality, is also analogous to Aupers (2010) conception of technopaganism, whose convergence of magic and technology similarly aligns with Latour’s (1993) theoretical framework of the ‘modern divide’ between ‘rational’ technology and ‘irrational’ magic as being haunted by categories of the ‘in-between’.

¹⁰ Naess (1989) speaks of gestalt interactions that allow the ‘concrete contents’ of reality and the ‘abstract structures’ to be comprehended together that consequently allow for its intrinsic value to clearly emerge. It is in the neglecting of a gestalt character of natural world so that any quantitative abstract structure is no longer taken to be identical with its contents.

¹¹ The notion of ‘structurally coupling’ with interior and exterior worlds invites a further attendance to Guattari’s (2000) *Three ecologies* by extending ecosophy to the ecologies of mind, society and environment.

“*technology of pure consciousness*” (archetypsynd Nov 07, 2001) which as a counter-hegemonic practice can also be seen as a ‘technology of the self’.¹²

As the current ecological crisis is envisioned by deep ecology as ideologically rooted, ayahuasca discourse similarly refers to some manner of historical mistake or ‘fall’; “*that man (sic) stepped out of the self-regulating way of Nature. Man, as a part of the web of life*” (Napoleon Blownapart Jan 21, 2003), the theme of ‘returning to nature’¹³ is salient in ayahuasca discourse. Mathews (2005, p. 31) notes the important stance of letting nature be, “of acquiescence in the given and of working within its terms of reference” and pk.sage (Mar 16, 2009) reflects this desire “*to function with nature to the extent that we were in harmony with it*”. From the deep and pervasive split between nature and culture as two putatively irreconcilable realms maintained and mediated by the knowledge systems of both Abrahamic religions and scientific ideologies, the construct of nature is also understood in the ayahuasca forum as a discursive one. As sachahambi (Jan 24, 2004) exemplifies; “*the very word "environment" contains the split: the concept that the natural world is separate and secondary, that the nonhuman part of Creation is just a backdrop to the main event (humans) and defined only in relation to humans*”. The propagation of a new vernacular, new ways of knowing, being and doing are thus presented by ayahuasca discourse as countering the “*logos/language of mechanical separation and domination of our present ways of unconscious and unintegrated relating*” (carpedmt Jan 02, 2006). By undoing references to the world that distinguish and categorise hierarchies of lower and higher order beings and dominant apparatuses of knowing, the sentiment prevails, “*maybe the distinction should not be between human and natural but between sustainable and not sustainable*” (dubwise Mar 08, 2004). The ontological and epistemological non-duality of ayahuasca consequently informs

¹² In the Foucauldian sense that refers to the various operations that people create “on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and way of being” or achieve via the assistance of others with the aim of transforming themselves in order to reach a “state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality” (Foucault 1988, p 18).

¹³ Latour (2011, p. 75) explains, that as humans remain dumbfounded in the face of the current ecological crisis many are tempted to adopt “a retreat through ‘degrowth’ (*de croissance*), others claim that only religion can save us, still to others more technology is the only solution”.

member's utilisation of language in such a way that crystallises the very essence of deep ecology's non-anthropocentric discourse.

Amerindian knowledge systems inevitably inform the essence of ayahuasca discourse's deep ecology through the essence of 'perennial philosophy' and the adoption of aspects of "*Indigenous spirituality, Celtic spirituality, Taoism, Shinto, all forms of spirituality that would be described as 'animistic' or 'pantheistic' or 'shamanistic'*" (sachahambi Feb 18, 2005). A prevalent theme in contemporary ayahuasca discourse and implicit in deep ecology is thereby one of "*preserving and presenting the flickering light of Shamanic culture/history/states and ecological sustainability both locally and ultimately Globally*" (1 in 6 billion Apr 14, 2004). As such, the ultimate purpose of drawing on multiple traditions is to constitute a new vision of Earth wisdom, to "*develop a more symbiotic relationship with the Earth*" (minx Jan 07, 2010). Members consequently acknowledge that "*in a perfect world, the highest laws would be the actual Laws of Nature*" (jcldragon Apr 16, 2005). Deep ecology's regaining of a connection to the archetypal Earth Goddess absent from Western history is reflected in ayahuasca discourse as a 'remembering' or "gnosis of the vegetable mind" (McKenna 1989, p. 7) with the a message that "*the 'numinous' is and was always available...to remember our indigenous soul- that knows*" (Sespe Jan 31, 2003). At the core of an ayahuasca situated perennial philosophy is the notion of direct, experiential "access to universal archetypal truths that transcend the boundaries of culture" (Devall & Sessions 1985, p. 43) recognising that "*the primary connection is with the spirit...not with the substance of cultural mythology*" (Sync Jan 20, 2003).¹⁴ In addressing ecological detachment, it is further acknowledged that we could learn a great deal from Indigenous groups whose deep nature-centric spiritual knowledge exposes the deficiency of dominant anthropocentric values of 'Western' society:

¹⁴ The ayahuasca ritual setting is further said to act "as a means for mediating between the individual and the cultural systems" and has the additional function of assimilating a variety of "ancient traditions into current adaptations" (Winkelman 2001, p. 223).

Amazonian indigenous societies have an important contribution to make to the collective wisdom and knowledge of the human species; and their contribution is especially relevant now, at a turning point in the human species' existence (sachahambi Aug 09, 2010).

The discourse of the contemporary ayahuasca phenomenon reveals deep ecology's ultimate norms of self-realisation for all beings as heuristically brought about through a ritual process involving deep-questioning and dialogical exchange with nature leading to both personal and ecological healing. A sense of unitary ecological consciousness therefore facilitates biocentric equality through experiential engagement and phenomenological immersion in the nonhuman world. This interaction represents a postmodern philosophical animism that opens up as a site of resistance from which to consider more integrative and symbiotic modes of existence.

The Gaian spirituality of contemporary ayahuasca discourse exemplifies the metaphysical holism of deep ecology, additionally interlacing cyberspace in a situated embracement of the dynamic and inescapable intertwining of biospheric networked fields. Contemporary ayahuasca discourse reconfigures the role of technology in the social world, by represented the internet as an inevitable evolutionary extension of human consciousness and reflection of the complexity of the pre-eminent networked technologies of nature. Ayahuasca and other plant tools are also signified as sophisticated techniques for rejoining the culturally constructed divisions between nature and culture by dismantling illusory boundaries of self and other. The ayahuasca forums examined discursively reveal an emergent nature-centric ontology with diverse but unifying aspects, embracing postmodern shamanic techniques as offering a new ethical intervention in understanding human and other-than-human relationships.

While this research project has achieved the objective of revealing articulations of deep ecology as a significant aspect of contemporary ayahuasca discourse, limitations in sample size and scope do warrant further research. The sheer volume of data collected from just two of 27 discussion forums signals understandings of deep ecology expressed in contemporary ayahuasca discourse as potentially much broader and ingrained than reported here. Due to the highly intertextual nature of the two chosen discussion forums and numerous cross-fertilising discourses, a participant questionnaire may serve to more accurately ascertain ayahuasca drinker's deep ecological sentiments. A non-probability sampling technique or quantitative analysis across all Ayahuasca.com discussion forums could potentially yield a more accurate reflection of the significance and extent of deep ecology in this global ayahuasca community. As a result of the contemporary ayahuasca phenomenon's growing media presence, a textual analysis of more manifestly public sources may also reflect the significance of deep ecology in mainstream ayahuasca communications. As ayahuasca's transcultural appeal show no sign of abating, the implications of contemporary shamanic practices will expectantly render deeply ecological themes an increasingly salient feature given increased awareness of the deteriorating state of environmental affairs.

Challenging an underlying spiritual malaise and culturally constructed separation of anthropocentrism, ayahuasca discourse actively unknots hierarchical binaries of human and nonhuman, self and other, spirit and matter, nature and culture as counter hegemonic to a myriad of dominant epistemological claims. The use of ritual practices involving spiritual connections with nature coupled with the perennial philosophical traditions embodied by the philosophy of deep ecology are exemplified by contemporary ayahuasca discourse. The integration of extraordinary paradigms of perception with traditional modes of inquiry revealed by contemporary ayahuasca discourse further illustrates a way of engaging in deep ecological praxis that can facilitate more sustainable and harmonious relationships with a living Earth. The deep ecological discourse of the burgeoning ayahuasca phenomenon indicates cultural desires for experiential, spiritual reconnection

to the Earth and community that provide a counterpoint to dominant constructs of anthropocentric consciousness and behaviour.

When we gather ourselves up from modernity, when we retrieve our energies that have been directed into illusions, distractions, future dreams, and find ourselves standing here on this ground at this very moment, then we can look about and make a better assessment of where we humans really stand. When I gathered myself up I saw the most puerile power games being perpetrated upon Gaia for the most escapist and desperate reasons (Mariri Apr 26, 2003).

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