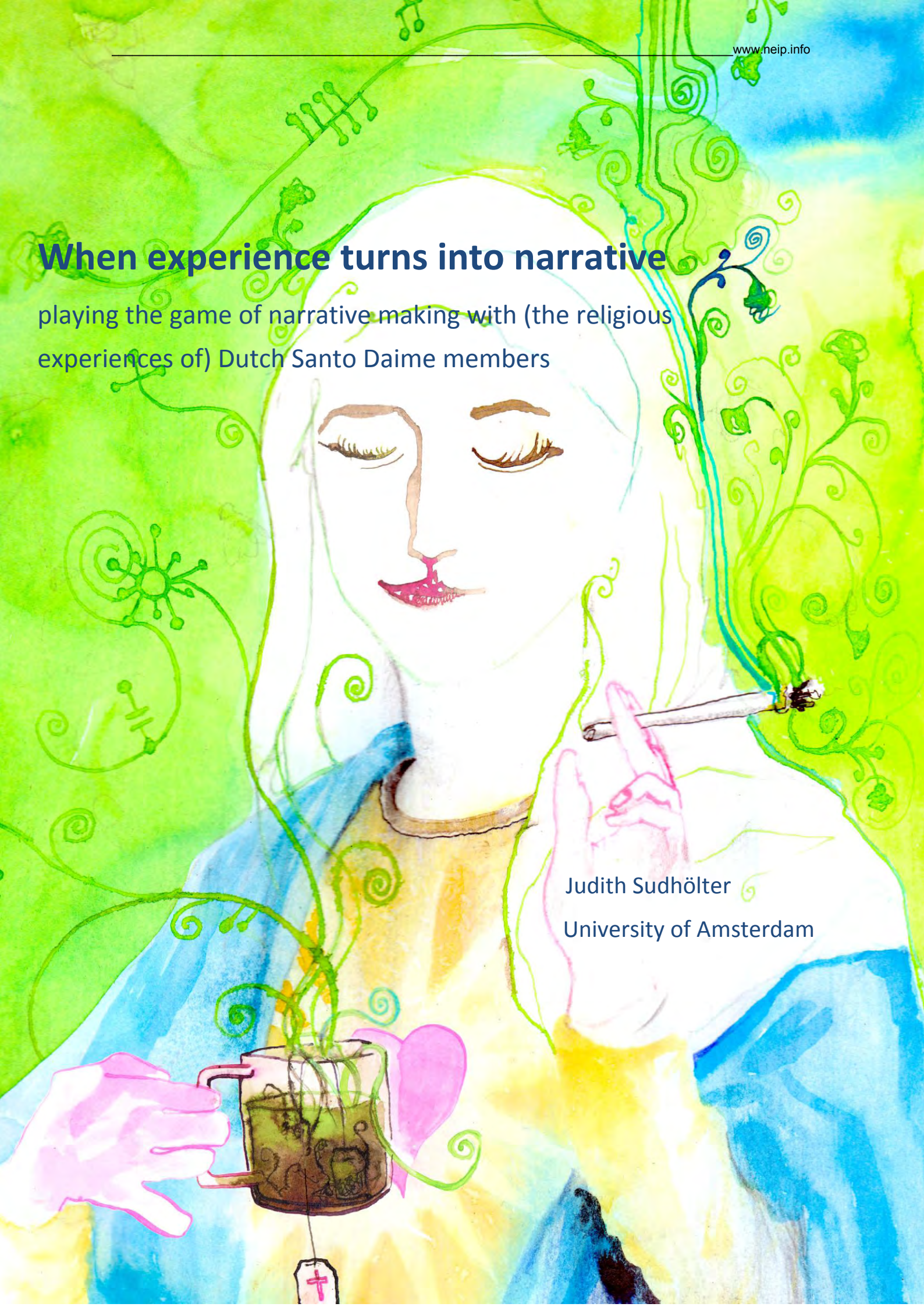


When experience turns into narrative

playing the game of narrative making with (the religious experiences of) Dutch Santo Daime members

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“Our mind is capable of passing beyond the dividing line we have drawn for it. Beyond the pairs of opposites of which the world consists, other, new insights begin.”

Hermann Hesse (1877-1962)

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Introduction: Eu tomo Daime

Eu tomo Daime
Que é para conhecer
Conhecer a beleza de viver
Dentro desta luz
Do meu eu superior

I drink Daime
To get to know
To know the beauty of living
Inside this light
Of my superior I

Eu tomo Daime
Que é para aprender
Aprender a ter amor no coração
Andar pela Estrada da vida
Com toda a liberdade

I drink Daime
To get to learn
To learn to have love in the heart
To walk on the road of life
With total freedom

Eu tomo Daime
É para renascer
Renascer no cominho da verdade
Para encontrar a paz
Vós me livre dos enganós

I drink Daime
To get to be reborn
To be reborn on the way of truth
To find the peace
You deliver me from deceit

About a hundred persons have gathered in a small rural church in the vicinity of Amsterdam. They are all dressed in white or white/blue uniforms and seated around a six-pointed, star-shaped table; men and women are separated. While singing the hymn presented above,¹ people stand up to form two lines towards the large table in front of the church. Many emotions can be distinguished from their faces: some look happy and full of expectations, others subdued or neutral. It is clear that all of the participants are taking the ritual very seriously. One by one they are handed out a small glass with a brown, muddy liquid. Some make a sign of the cross before they drink, head faced to the cup-bearer. Despite the devotional atmosphere, most of the participants cannot avoid a grimace of disgust after they swallowed the bitter-tasting liquid.

These people are members or visitors of the Céu da Santa Maria, one of the two Santo Daime churches in the Netherlands. The Santo Daime movement originated in Brazil in the 1930s, and is a fairly new phenomenon in the Dutch religious landscape. In the 1990s three churches were established in the Netherlands, of which two remain to the present day.² What makes the movement interesting for scholars of religion is its main focus on religious experience. The *daimistas* - as the adherents are called – use a remarkable method to evoke religious experiences: during their rituals they drink the Amazonian brew ayahuasca, which contains psycho-active ingredients.

The main psychoactive ingredient of ayahuasca is DMT (N,N-dimethyltryptamine). The leaves of one of the ayahuasca plants, *Chacruna (Psychotria Viridis)* contain large amounts of DMT; a substance which would ordinarily be neutralised by the human body. This is however prevented by a MAO-inhibitor, derived from the second ingredient of the brew; the vine *Banisteriopsis Caapi*, which is also known as ‘the vine of the soul’ and is generally seen as the main ayahuasca plant.³ The mixture,

¹ Hinos Do Daime, 11 Eu tomo Daime, Received by Vera Gall.

² These two are the Céu da Santa Maria in Amsterdam, where I conducted my research, and the Céu dos Ventos in The Hague. The third church, established in Alkmaar, later on merged with the church of Amsterdam.

³ Schulgin and Shulgin 1997: 289-290; Schultes and Raffauf 2004: 21-31; Groisman 2000: 28-32.

when properly prepared following Santo Daime requirements, is turned into *Daime*, and accordingly it is treated as a sacrament.⁴

Ayahuasca is known to provoke a wide variety of both physical and psychical effects.⁵ The most notable effect is that it brings about ‘altered states of consciousness’.⁶ In the Santo Daime church these altered states are generally interpreted in a religious way. Daime can therefore be classified as an *entheogen*: a substance that “generates, or brings about unusual states of consciousness in which those who use them are believed to be ‘filled’, ‘possessed’, or ‘inspired’ by some kind of divine entity, presence or force.”⁷ In the hymn quoted above, it becomes clear that Santo Daime members not only drink Daime to experience this ‘divine entity, presence or force’, but that they also connect this experience to the way they live their lives. The song claims that its drinkers ‘learn to know the beauty of living’; ‘to have love in the heart’; ‘to walk on the road of life in total freedom’; ‘to be reborn on the way of truth’; ‘to find peace’; and ‘to be delivered from deceit’.

The Santo Daime movement was founded by Raymundo Irineu Serra, a Brazilian rubber tapper of African descent who in the 1920s migrated to the Amazonian state of Acre.⁸ Irineu learned how to prepare ayahuasca from the indigenous population. Under intoxication he received a vision of the Rainha da Floresta, the Queen of the Forest, whom he considered to be a manifestation of Virgin Mary. According to the story the Rainha da Floresta instructed him to found a new religion based on the drinking of ayahuasca, which he did.⁹ Santo Daime is one of three known ayahuasca religions,¹⁰ which all were founded in the first half of the twentieth century in Brazil. Santo Daime is the largest one, and until now, the only one that expanded internationally. Following some leadership struggles and divisions the largest line is now upheld by the branch organisation CEFLURIS,¹¹ of which the Dutch churches are also part.

The Santo Daime movement has its own ritual calendar that organises the rituals throughout the year. The rituals are called ‘works’ within the movement, and there are five specific types of works that are regularly held. The two most common works are the Cura and the Concentration, which are

⁴ Next to Daime, cannabis is used as a second psycho-active sacrament in the Santo Daime church. This sacrament is known as Santa Maria and as such equated with the Virgin Mary. Santa Maria plays a less central role in the services, as the consecration of this sacrament is not obligatory and not all daimistas take part in it. In this thesis I will mainly discuss the Daime experience. In some instances the experiences of my respondents might have taken place under a combined influence of both sacraments. However, the difference between both kinds of experiences was not the focus of this study. For the sake of convenience all experiences will be discussed as Daime experiences.

⁵ Most elaborately described by Benny Shanon in his *Antipodes of the Mind*. (Shanon, 2002). His attempt to compose a phenomenology of the ayahuasca experience provides an extensive overview of the possible experiences that one might have under the influence of ayahuasca/Daime.

⁶ Tart defines an altered state of consciousness as “a qualitative alteration in the overall pattern of mental functioning”. Tart 1969 1-2. Both Tart and Barušs (2003) provide a good overview of the study of Altered States of Consciousness.

⁷ Hanegraaff 2012: 1. As Hanegraaff already notes; the altered state of consciousness is pharmacologically induced; however, the belief that these alterations give access to, or establish contact with an external, supernatural agency is of course a product of culture.

⁸ MacRae 2006: E-book, chapter 3.

⁹ Idem. The most elaborate history of the Santo Daime movement is written by a practitioner: Alex Polari de Alverga, who mainly covers the developments surrounding the second leader of the Santo Daime, Padre Sebastião, whom Alverga has known personally. [Alverga 1999].

¹⁰ Wright, 2006: 183. The other ayahuasca religions are Barquinha and União do Vegeta.

¹¹ CEFLURIS stands for: Centro Eclético De Fluente Luz Universal Raimundo Irineu Serra, i.e. Ecclectic Centre of the Fluent Universal Light of Raimundo Irineu Serra.

both usually organised once to three times a month and take about five to six hours. Curas are mainly aimed at healing, while Concentrations have a more meditative character. Next to that, there are festive works for special occasions: these rituals take generally twice as long as the ordinary works and the participants dance instead of sitting down. Once every month a Santa Missa is held, the main focus of this work is to care for the souls of the deceased. The fifth work consists of the making of Daime, and is called the Feitio. This ritual is the only one that is not carried out in the Netherlands.¹²

The movement has no founding text on which their doctrine is based; the only written account of doctrine is a still growing collection of *hinarios*.¹³ *Hinarios* are collections of hymns that members of the movement received while they were under the influence of Daime. The singing of hymns constitutes the largest part of a Santo Daime work, which shows their relative importance, both in guiding the experiences of the participants through the ritual, and in assisting the adherents in putting their experiences into words.¹⁴ The most widely used hymns are the ones received by the founder of the movement, Mestre Irineu, and his successors; but hymns continue to be received, so the corpus keeps changing. Santo Daime is therefore a living and changing religion.

Until the beginning of the 1960s, research on ayahuasca was mainly psycho-pharmaceutical. Anthropological research on the relations between cosmology, social life and the use of ayahuasca started in the 1960s with the work of Michael Harner and Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff.¹⁵ They investigated the influence of psycho-active substances on native cultures, and they analysed indigenous cosmologies that were based on the experience of ayahuasca. In the 1970s the first researches on ayahuasca-users in urban setting were carried out.¹⁶ Dobkin de Rios studied urban healers who used ayahuasca in their treatments from a medical-anthropological perspective.¹⁷ Luna pointed out how urban ayahuasca was used in a context of 'transitional' shamanism, where more traditional forms of shamanism were mixed with modern elements, like European esoteric traditions – such as spiritualism and Rosicrucianism - that were introduced to the Amazonian regions during the 19th and 20th centuries.¹⁸ Santo Daime also originated in this urban context, and interacted from the beginning with European esoteric influences.¹⁹

The existing scholarly literature on Santo Daime deals mainly with the Brazilian churches.²⁰ However, not many authors focus on the religious experiences that are produced by the brew.²¹ Santo Daime first reached European shores in the 1980s. As the movement is fairly new to European countries, not much is known about Santo Daime churches in the European setting. Only a few studies have

¹² The Daime for the Dutch churches is directly imported from Brazil. Santo Daime 2010.

¹³ Cemin 2006: 260.

¹⁴ MacRae 2006: E-book, chapter 4.

¹⁵ Harner 1973; Reichel-Dolmatoff 1975.

¹⁶ Dobkin de Rios 1970, 1972. Luna 1986.

¹⁷ Dobkin de Rios 1972.

¹⁸ Luna 1986.

¹⁹ Groisman 2000: 80-82.

²⁰ For an overview of the Brazilian literature on ayahuasca religions (including Barquinha and União do Vegetal) see: Labate, 2006. For an overview of developments within the academic study of ayahuasca religions, see: Wright, 2006.

²¹ However, some articles are published on the religious experiences in other ayahuasca religions, e.g. Brissac 2008.

been conducted on the Santo Daime in the Netherlands, of which the most notable is Groisman's dissertation.²² Groisman did, however, not focus on the (religious) *experience* of drinking Daime.²³

As Groisman already pointed out, the Dutch members of Santo Daime do not necessarily experience the drinking of Daime in a similar way as their Brazilian counterparts.²⁴ To the contrary: it might be more in line with expectations that their experiences will be different, as the set and setting of their experiences are largely different.²⁵ Dutch members inevitably bring their own (religious) background and history to the experience, and although they conduct their rituals mainly in the same fashion as their Brazilian counterparts - even singing the hymns in Portuguese - one might expect the experience to be different in a church in a Brazilian forest that was specifically built for the Santo Daime, compared to a service in a local protestant church in the Dutch polders.

In this study I will investigate the religious experiences of Dutch members of the Santo Daime church: How do they experience the influence of Daime and how do they put these experiences into words? The main focus of this thesis is the interrelation between experience and narrative: how do my respondents transform their experiences into a narrative, and to what extent do their narratives inform us about the experiences?

The first chapter contains a summary of the academic debate on the relation between narrative and experience, and my position herein. In the second chapter I explain why the method of participant observation contributes to my understanding of the interaction between narrative and experience. Based on these theoretical reflections, I present the specific method I used in chapter 3. In the following chapters the fieldwork data are presented. Chapters 4 and 5 respectively discuss the impact of the ritual and the brew on the experiences. The interaction between the specific cosmologies of my respondents and their experiences is investigated in chapter 6. In chapter 7 theory and data are combined, as the transformative process by which the Daime experience turns into a narrative is run through one more time again. The conclusion contains reflections on the study as a whole and a small glimpse beyond the scope of this thesis.

²² Groisman, 2000. Groisman studied the forms and processes of the local adoption of the 'exotic' Brazilian religion in a Dutch context, thereby locating the Santo Daime in a context of postmodern forms of religiosity. Other publications on Santo Daime in the Netherlands are Wuytz 2008; and Braak 2009. Wuytz focuses on the popularity of the Santo Daime church in the urban setting, and compares the Brazilian context with the Dutch one. Braak studied the insights that Dutch daimistas gained after drinking ayahuasca, and how they integrated these in their daily lives.

²³ As far as I know, the only available study that deals with Western European interpretations of the experience is the forthcoming dissertation of anthropologist Marc Blainey. He studies the ways in which Santo Daime members believe in the presence of 'spirits' in the Daime, and how these spirits are supposed to teach them 'lessons'.

²⁴ According to Groisman: "Dutch members were not just converting the meanings of the hymns from Portuguese to Dutch, but also interpreted them theologically, cosmologically and practically, thereby incorporating them into their own lives." Groisman 2000: 21.

²⁵ Set and setting are generally used concepts to explain the wide variety of experiences that might be evoked by the use of psycho-active substances. Timothy Leary was the first one to coin these terms in the introduction of *LSD: The Consciousness-Expanding Drug* by Solomon 1966 [1964].

1. Constructing narratives out of experience

My respondents claim they have the most extraordinary experiences during Santo Daime works. Some told me they go up to heaven or descend into hell; others travel through a wide range of 'other realities'. Many of my respondents report visions of, or communication with supernatural beings: from religious figures like Jesus and Mary to aliens and 'beings of darkness'. My respondents tell me that through these experiences they learn 'lessons' about themes that are relevant for their ordinary lives. Furthermore they receive revelations about the nature of reality and God: one respondent reports to have seen "the start of creation" personally, another "saw" with his own eyes that the wholeness of 'reality' actually consists of 'consciousness'.

How should we deal with 'religious' experiences of this kind? Or actually: how should we deal with these narrative accounts of experiences? How do narratives and experience relate to each other? To what extent can the one inform us about the other? In this chapter the relation between experience and narrative is discussed from an academic perspective. First I make clear why it makes sense to apply theories on ordinary experiencing to the extraordinary Daime experiences. Then some ideas and concepts from the narrative approach are introduced to clarify how narratives relate to the process of experiencing. Finally a proposition is made to view the transformation of the first hand Daime experiences into narratives as a dynamic process.

The specific nature of the Daime experience

The experiences that are the subject of this research happen in a religious context and are often interpreted in a religious way by the Santo Daime members themselves;²⁶ therefore it makes sense to distinguish them as 'religious experiences' from ordinary experiences. However, it is wise to keep in mind that any designation of any experience as 'religious' ultimately is a product of culture. As Proudfoot shows, the setting apart of 'religious experiences' as a special category is the consequence of a specific cultural-historical process that started in the 18th century, and that was meant to save 'religion' from scientific reductionism.²⁷ As there is no essential element in the experience itself that makes it religious, my choice to call the experiences of my respondents 'religious' must be seen as purely pragmatic: in order to be consistent with the discourse of most of my respondents I choose to stick with the denotation 'religious'. This however does *not* imply that

²⁶ I asked all my respondents whether or not they would call the experiences 'religious' and most of them did, for various reasons. One respondent pointed at the etymological meaning of religion, 'religare' which means 'to bind'; according to her the experiences have a binding effect, 'with everyone', and therefore are 'religious.' Another respondent argued that every experience in which ordinary consciousness expands could be called religious. Another respondent defined religion as that what inspires or recharges him. According to him 'a religious experience is a sudden flash of insight: suddenly you realise the meaning or truth of something. And you don't only think about it, you experience it with your entire being.' According to him these kind of experiences always go together with feelings of gratitude. Only two of my respondents did not agree with the denotation 'religious' to classify their experiences: one argued that all experiences could be qualified as religious, and therefore that the concept was useless. Another respondent explained that his personal religious background made him associate 'religion' with coercion, and according to him 'there are no obligations in the Daime'. He preferred to call the experiences of Daime 'a way of life'.

²⁷ Proudfoot 1985. Some scholars of religion, like Taves, have therefore shifted their focus and now try to trace the processes by which certain experiences become classified as 'religious'. Taves 2009; Stausberg 2010.

the nature of religious experiences should be seen, in any way as different from the nature of ordinary experiences, nor does it mean they should be studied in a different way.²⁸

The experiences of my respondents are provoked by drinking Daime. Some would argue that experiences of altered states of consciousness should be treated differently from ordinary experiences.²⁹ With this, I do not agree. I state that although the continuous flow of perceptions, emotions and the like, that make up ordinary experiencing might be altered while under the influence of Daime, this does not disqualify them as experiences. Neither does the fact that these experiences are classified as 'entheogenic',³⁰ or the fact that they are pharmacologically induced. For these reasons, it makes perfect sense to treat entheogenic experiences, and the experience of Daime in specific, as any other form of experiencing. In the following I will therefore apply general theories on experiencing to the religious experiences that are subject of this research.

Experiencing and 'an experience'

Experiencing in general can be seen as a continuous flow of perceptions, emotions, actions, thoughts, and bodily sensations. Whether or not we call an experience 'religious' or 'entheogenic', every experience can be seen as a process.³¹ The process of experiencing is dynamic: our experiences change constantly. Some scholars therefore propose to make a distinction between 'experiencing' and 'an experience'.³² Experiencing refers to "the ongoing temporal flow of reality, as it is received by consciousness", whereas 'an experience' is the "intersubjective articulation of experience".³³ Experiencing does not only involve cognition, but also feelings, expectations, and bodily states. It consists not only of language, but also of images and impressions.³⁴

According to Bruner experiencing is ultimately an individual process; we are only able to share the *expressions* of experiences.³⁵ He argues that expressions of experiences can never cover the whole range of experiencing, because "either the experiences are not storyable, or because we lack the performative and narrative resources, or because the vocabulary is lacking".³⁶ According to Bruner, pure experience is unobservable, and 'an experience' involves always language, and therefore interpretation.

Building on Dilthey and Bruner, Yamane concludes that the ongoing stream of experience can not be empirically studied "for it is a wholly private, individual affair inaccessible to any currently known

28 Of course many would argue that the experiences described in this study are to a large extent extraordinary, as they do not sound familiar to most of us. I am not arguing against that. The only thing I want to make clear is that general theories on experiencing do apply on these extraordinary experiences too.

29 Both Tart and Barušs, for example, plead for establishing 'state specific sciences'; separate scientific disciplines for studying specific altered states of consciousness. Tart 1972; Barušs 2003.

30 See my discussion of Daime as an entheogen in the introduction. 'Entheogenic' refers to the belief that these experiences give access to or establish contact with an external supernatural agency, presence or force. Beliefs about the inducement of specific experiences do not question them as being 'experiences'.

31 Gadamer 1999: 353

32 Dilthey 1976. Later on, when I will relate these theories on experience to the narrative approach, I will exchange Dilthey's concept of 'an experience' for the more widely used concept 'narrative'.

33 Bruner 1986: 6.

34 Yamane 2000: 174.

35 Bruner 1986: 6.

36 Idem: 6-7.

methods of social scientific research.”³⁷ To him, the implication for the study of religious experiences is that it “shifts our focus from the experiences themselves to their expressions in language”.³⁸ According to Yamane scholars of religion must stick to the study of “*retrospective accounts of experiences*”.³⁹

Following Yamane, it would suffice to collect and analyze narrative accounts of Santo Daime members’ Daime experiences, in order to learn about their interpretations of these experiences. Their narrative accounts would provide the only accessible information to answer my research question: as I can never have the same experience as my subjects, it would make no sense to have a Daime experience myself.

Although I agree with Bruner and Yamane that it is useful to make a distinction between experiencing and ‘an experience’, I contest their stance that experiencing is an individual process, and can therefore not be shared. To the contrary: in the next chapter I will argue that it is possible to engage in similar – although never exactly the same - processes of experiencing as someone else. Furthermore I will show that it is useful and maybe even inevitable to participate in the process of experiencing and narrative making, in order to be able to understand it. However, first I will say somewhat more about narratives.

The narrative approach

The narrative approach is a relatively new approach towards qualitative research data; it developed in the late 1980s in the social sciences.⁴⁰ The narrative approach takes as its central starting point the idea that human beings make sense of their lives by ordering it in narrative patterns. Narrative is understood as “a meaningful temporal configuration of states and events”.⁴¹ In a narrative, knowledge, memories, intentions, life histories and personal identities are both organised and developed.⁴²

Storytelling can be seen as “a way of recounting and creating order out of experience.”⁴³ As I discussed before, experiencing is a complex and diffuse process, which can never be fully grasped in words. A narrative inevitably is a limited selection out of this diffuse reality; only parts of its dynamics are put into a meaningful narrative structure.⁴⁴

A narrative is in the first sense an *utterance*,⁴⁵ something that is spoken, written, or thought. An utterance however cannot exist in isolation; it always implies both an *addressee* and a *voice*.⁴⁶ The

³⁷ Yamane 2000: 174.

³⁸ Idem: 175.

³⁹ Idem: 175.

⁴⁰ Belzen 1996: 189. Coffey and Atkinson 1996: 55; Popp-Baier 2012: 1.

⁴¹ Popp-Baier 2012: 1.

⁴² Idem.

⁴³ Moen 2006: 2.

⁴⁴ Moen 2006: 2.

⁴⁵ Utterance is a concept Bakhtin (1895-1975) first introduced in *The Dialogic Imagination* which he wrote in the 1930s (first published in 1975). He used the concept to gain insight in the way how, in every speech act, the words of others are appropriated and given a new meaning/intention. According to him language and texts are inherently dialogical. In *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (published in 1985) he develops his thoughts further on the dialogical nature of utterances, and the specific ways how texts relate to their contexts.

creation of meaning therefore is always a social process. Narrative researchers hold that persons are inherently *dialogical* and that everything a person says is said *discursively*: in terms of engagement with another being.⁴⁷ According to Day & Naedts the *voice* of the speaker not only reflects the voice of the addressee (a dialogue between two participants); any utterance reflects multiple other voices that have been experienced previously in life. Any narrative is thus embedded in a cultural historical context.

Narratives about an experience thus not only reflect the flux of experiencing, but also the wider cultural historical context and the specific context in which the narrative is told. Furthermore, the fact that narratives inevitably involve a limitation of the complexity of any experience implies that the narratives of my respondents will never coincide with their Daime experience per se. A useful question thus is: to what extent can the narratives of my respondents inform us about the 'reality' of the Daime experience?

Narratives and their relation to 'reality'

The idea that experiencing is a process of continuously changing input, embedded in an also changing tradition, has implications for our view of 'reality'. Narrative researcher Moen states: "There is no single, dominant, or static reality but, rather, a number of realities that are constructed in the process of interactions and dialogues. Human knowledge of the world is thus relative. It is dependent on the individual's past and present experiences, her or his values, the people the stories are being told to (the addressees), and when and where they are being told."⁴⁸

Narrative psychologists Coffey & Atkinson also state that: "there is no static and everlasting truth: instead there are different subjective positions from which we experience the world".⁴⁹ Narratives then, are the producers and transmitters of this dynamic reality.⁵⁰ Human beings use narrative structures to order and make sense of the dynamic process of experiencing.⁵¹ These ordered stories obviously never fully coincide with the diffuse reality of the experience. However, they do provide meaning to the unsorted flux of experiencing: "By selecting from an unobservable range of experiences the event has already been interpreted and infused with meaning."⁵²

Denzin points out that narratives are therefore *fictional* statements – as they never abide to 'reality'. These fictional statements are: "to a varying degree about real lived lives".⁵³ Anthropologist Van de Port agrees that every story about 'reality' is ultimately inadequate. He uses the concept of *The Real*⁵⁴ to refer to all aspects of the process of experiencing that are not captured in the story.

⁴⁶ Bakhtin 1986, as represented by Moen 2006: 3.

⁴⁷ Day & Naedts 1997: 174.

⁴⁸ Moen 2006: 5.

⁴⁹ Coffey & Atkinson 1996: 56.

⁵⁰ Moen 2006: 2.

⁵¹ Idem: 4.

⁵² Idem: 7.

⁵³ Denzin 1989, as quoted in Moen 2006: 7.

⁵⁴ Port 2010: 5. A concept he borrowed from the French psycho-analytic Jacques Lacan. Lacan developed his concept in a psycho-analytic context, as a construct to refer to 'that which is undifferentiated'. *The Real* in Lacans' thought is outside of language and resists symbolisation absolutely. My use of the concept should however merely be understood in the same way as Van de Port uses the concept. In contrast to Lacan, Van de Port sees *the Real* not as something unmediated, but as something that can be interacted with; even more:

According to Van de Port, every story tries to capture 'reality' in a symbolic system. These symbolic systems, however, are always inadequate. Their attempt to capture the flux of experiencing only holds temporarily: stories only function in a specific context and for a specific moment in time, but inevitably "*The Real* always interferes".⁵⁵ According to Van de Port scholars should always approach stories about (religious) experience in the light of these dynamics.⁵⁶ They are ultimately stories that try to deal with the *Real* reality of experiencing, and that after their construction stay in continuous interaction with the (also changeable) *Real*: both 'reality' and 'narratives' are therefore always on the move.

Following these arguments I maintain that a narrative should never be taken too literally. Any narrative always refers to and interacts with '*The Real*'. Any narrative account implies a selection (and therefore an interpretation) out of the complex and diffuse reality of experiencing. A narrative can never coincide with an experience as the experience is far more multilayered.

The idea that the narrative reality is a reality in itself does lead some researchers to the conviction that it is not necessarily connected to a 'real' reality. According to Harding: "a story is not a system of clues to extranarrative realities but a generative moment in which the event, characters, narrator, feelings, motives, and moral and theological meanings are brought into existence through language".⁵⁷ I do not agree with this radically relative statement. The narrative is in continuous interplay with the reality of experiencing, and therefore the narrative must, at least to a certain amount, reflect this 'reality'. Narratives can therefore be pictured as forming a bridge between the experiencing realities of different persons and between the experiencing realities of the same person in different moments.

In my opinion, both experience and narrative are always embedded in a social context. This also holds for the experiences that are subject of this study. At first the experiences themselves take place in a social context: they happen during a collective ritual of the Santo Daime church.⁵⁸ Secondly, the conversations during which I collected the narratives of my respondents are social situations: an interview can be viewed as a dialectical creation of reality between the researcher and the respondent. Both voices use words that are embedded in their personal backgrounds, and with these words they try to develop a joint, intersubjective understanding. Both parties reflect a part of the other's view in their own voice.

Third, both respondent and researcher use ideas and formulations from a wider cultural context. In order to frame the Daime experiences, both pull from different existing (religious and spiritual) traditions. By doing so they are engaged in a dialectical relationship with these traditions. As formulated by Spickard: "each individual constructs his or her own world, but does so out of the building blocks presented by others."⁵⁹ A narrative is thus more than just a reality in itself: it is embedded in, and in continuous interaction with, different larger and smaller 'traditions' and moments of 'real-life' experience. The researcher and the respondent are thus both engaged in a process of meaning making that is inherently social.

that unsolicited always interacts with any narrative we construct. In this sense I propose to see the whole process of 'experiencing' as *The Real* that any narrative is in a dialogical relationship with.

⁵⁵ Port 2010: 7.

⁵⁶ Idem: 12.

⁵⁷ Harding 1992: 62.

⁵⁸ In chapter 4 I will discuss the effects of the ritual on the experiences of my respondents.

⁵⁹ Spickard 1991: 2.

From interview narrative to scholarly narrative

The interview narratives that I collected thus can be seen as the result of a dialogical creation of reality between researcher and respondent in the interview context. The narrative of the respondent partly reflects the experience reality, and thus informs us about the experiences. However, it will never fully coincide with the experience reality: it inevitably is a pale derivation of the complexity and richness of the original experience, and furthermore it also reflects other aspects than just the experience, like the voices of the interviewer and the larger social context.

In this thesis I zoom in on the narratives that my respondents constructed out of the complex and diffuse reality of the Santo Daime experience. In doing so, they evoke part of the Daime experience in the interview reality. The interview reality can in its own terms be seen as a 'moment of experiencing', of which the researcher now has to make sense by constructing her own narrative. This thesis can therefore be seen as a narrative account in which both the experience realities of the Santo Daime rituals and the interviews are reflected. The narratives that my respondents constructed in the interview reality are transformed again by incorporating them in the scholarly narrative: in this thesis a new *voice* gained prominence, namely the voice of the researcher. My voice, that was already present in the interview context as the *addressee* reflecting the voice of the respondent, now becomes the main story teller.

Day and Naedts state that scholars are "engaged in a process of conversation with a text that is dialogical, and which forms an account of some of the kinds of dialogues in terms of which the research subject operates in the world."⁶⁰ The narrative of the scholar's voice is not only dialogical towards the voices of the respondents, but also to that of the scholarly community. My utterances are embedded within contemporary scholarly debates on the Santo Daime church, and on religious experiences. And the process continues: when fixed in a written text, a narrative is no longer tied to the moment of occurrence, it becomes a work open for reinterpretation in other contexts, and thereby influences future moments of experiencing.⁶¹

The dynamic between experiencing and narrative is visualised in figure 1. Out of each respondent's firsthand experience – under influence of Daime – a narrative is constructed during the interview reality. The interview reality at least partly overlaps with the Daime experience. The interview reality in itself forms a new a moment of experiencing, out of which the researcher constructs a new narrative. Narratives - also the scholarly ones - can be seen as temporary constructions: ways to meaningfully order the complex and blurred reality of experience. However, we should keep in mind that these stories are never fully adequate. Furthermore, brought to a new context every story inevitably starts to interact with a new context of 'experiencing' and changes.

⁶⁰ Day & Naedts 1997: 174.

⁶¹ Moen 2006: 6.

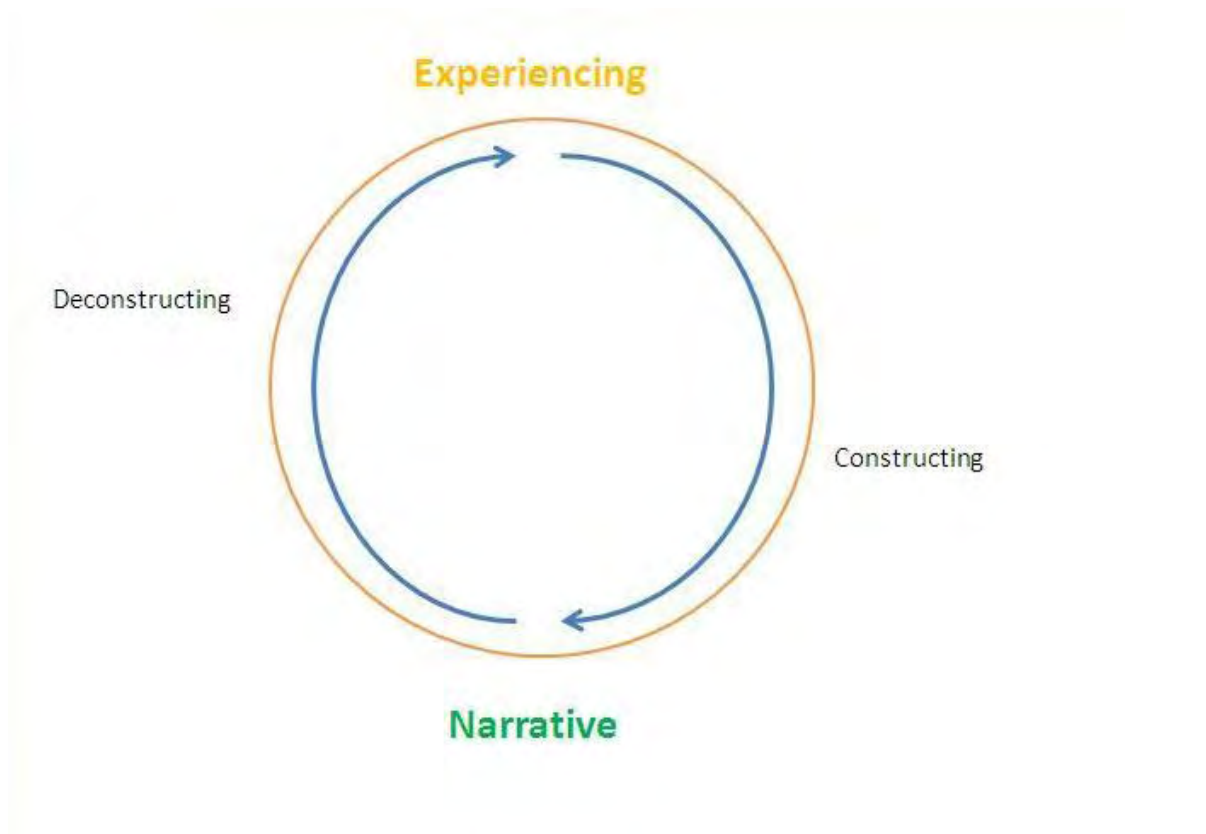


figure 1: Narrative and Experiencing as products of the cycle of construction and deconstruction

2. Participating in experience and narrative making

In order to understand the dynamics of experiencing and narrative making in my research subjects, I argue that it is useful to participate in both sides of the process. In this chapter the possibility of participating in someone else's experiences is discussed. I will argue that, because of the social nature of the process, it is possible to 'tap in' to the experiences of others, at least to a certain extent. Based on this idea, I will furthermore argue that it is possible to come closer to the experiential realities of other individuals by a process of social learning. The concept of *methodological ludism* - developed by the Dutch anthropologist André Droogers – is used to illustrate this idea.⁶²

Experiencing is accessible

In the previous chapter I referred to the distinction that Bruner made between 'experiencing' and 'an experience'.⁶³ I already explained how I will approach the narratives of my respondents, which I equate with Bruner's concept of 'an experience'. Now I will turn to the 'experiencing' itself. Like Yamane,⁶⁴ I agree with Dilthey and Bruner that the continuous stream of experience is ungraspable in words, and that every effort to translate it into words always involves reduction of the complexity and multilayeredness of the process of experiencing. However, I do not agree with Yamane that the process of experiencing is therefore *inaccessible* to investigation, nor with his statement that scholars should restrict themselves to the analysis of narrative accounts of experience.

To the contrary: if we admit that 'an experience' is no more than a pale shadow of the process of experiencing, this implies that we throw away a lot of its richness by limiting our attention only to its derivation. Although I agree that my process of experiencing will not be completely graspable in words either, engaging in it might still help me in understanding other people's experiences.

By engaging in the process of experiencing myself I might collect some essential information that I otherwise would not have found. I might come to a better knowledge of the relation between experience and interpretation in this specific situation. First, by observation of a Santo Daime ritual I would come to learn something about the performative aspects that might play an important role in the Daime experience. By only listening to narrative accounts I would easily overlook the ways in which ritual elements contribute to the experience and therefore to the interpretation.

Second, by participating in the rituals themselves I would gain knowledge about the physical, bodily effects that seem to play an important role in the Daime experience. To know how it feels to be in such a state would give me a better understanding of the interpretations that my subjects make. I would be able to observe the interplay of thoughts, emotions, and other sensory modalities that make up the complete experience.

Anthropologist Tanya Luhmann, who studied ritual magic in contemporary England, also actively engaged in witchcraft rituals herself.⁶⁵ These rituals often implied techniques to alter states of consciousness (e.g. meditation, visualization). According to her, participation in these rituals was

⁶² Droogers 1996.

⁶³ Bruner 1986: 6.

⁶⁴ Yamane 2000: 174.

⁶⁵ Luhmann 1991.

essential for her understanding of her subject. She explains: “Much of human experience is not verbalized. [...] someone who only converses will lose the richness of her interlocutor’s life. And often human experience is stimulated in similar ways by similar activity. Being deprived of food in an initiation ceremony, undergoing group-led imaginative ‘journeys’, dancing until exhausted in a group ritual, all these have a significant subjective impact upon the participants.”⁶⁶ I think the same holds for participating in a Daime experience.

Third, and most important, I argue that participating in the experience will help me to adapt my own experiences in the direction of those of my respondents. Although I know my experience will never be the same as my respondent’s experience, they at least might become similar enough to build a common ground for understanding. This ‘common ground’ is possible, because experiences are to a large extent socially learned.

The social aspect of experiencing

In the previous chapter I already showed that every narrative is embedded in a social context. The same holds for experiences. According to Katz, every experience is coloured by the background of both the specific situation and the individual who experiences it, according to him there are no ‘unmediated’ experiences.⁶⁷ I agree with his reasoning that every experience is therefore unique and irreproducible. However, this does not imply that we therefore are unable to have similar experiences as someone else. In Katz’ argument is implied that experiences are partly dependent on the social background and the specific situation the individual is in. Gadamer also maintained that every experience is embedded in a social context. According to him, experience is always *dialectical*: it relates the experiencer to a tradition. According to Gadamer, tradition is in a relationship with us; we are engaged in a dialogue with it, it is a ‘Thou’.

According to Gadamer: “One’s experience changes one’s whole knowledge: strictly speaking we cannot have the same experience twice.”⁶⁸ As every experience both interacts with and changes one’s whole being, this means that I would never be able to have *exactly* the same experience as a Santo Daime member. However, it also implies that there is room for learning. If every experience makes us see the world from a new perspective, and that perspective is to a large extent socially conditioned, this means that we are able to adapt our way of experiencing to a new social context. We can learn from others how they select specific sensations out of the complex and diffuse experience reality. We can also learn how we should value these sensations, how we should name and interpret them, and how we should relate ourselves to them and place them in the broader fabric of our lives.

Based on this idea about experiencing, I argue that it is possible for me to learn to experience the world (or at least the Daime experience) in a similar manner as my respondents do. Similar is not the

⁶⁶ Idem: 14-15.

⁶⁷ Katz 1978: 26. In contrast with Dilthey and Bruner, Katz argues that the distinction between experience and interpretation is artificial, as each experience contains interpretation. Not only the expression of an experience is based on linguistic concepts, and therefore dependent on the context/background, but also the process of experiencing itself is not free from this background influence. Although I agree with Katz that in reality interpretation and experience overlap to a great extent, I think that for analytical purposes the differentiation between the two still is useful.

⁶⁸ Gadamer 1999: 353.

same: for reasons already discussed, my experiences will never completely coincide with those of my respondents. However, I do think the process of experiencing is flexible and mouldable enough to make it possible to come closer to my respondents' experiences by changing my own. I argue that I in doing so will be able to better understand the process of narrative making, than I would be when I would only listen to their narratives.

Methodological ludism

The fact that experiences are socially learned implies that it is possible to learn to experience in similar ways as my respondents do. However, as many would fear: how would this affect my own worldview, or my scholarly perspective? To deal with these questions I use the concept of 'methodological ludism', developed by the anthropologist Droogers.⁶⁹

A conventional approach in the study of religion is to adopt a stance of methodological agnosticism. Methodological agnosticism is the stance that the scholar of religion should not engage in making truth claims about the religious reality he or she is studying. Instead the scholar should put his/her own view 'between brackets'.⁷⁰ However, Droogers and his colleague Knibbe argue that a stance of methodological agnosticism is too passive in situations where religious truth claims play a central role. Merely suspending one's own beliefs would be a difficult position to hold for the investigator in these situations, as it would imply putting 'between brackets' the core elements of interest.⁷¹ In such situations, Knibbe and Droogers propose to go beyond methodological agnosticism and replace it with what they call 'methodological ludism'.⁷²

They propose the notion of play (*ludus*) to explain the task of the scholar. Play is viewed as 'the capacity to deal simultaneously and subjunctively with two or more ways of classifying reality'.⁷³ According to Droogers: '[T]he special attractiveness of the ludic is the possibility to look at things from another angle, without abandoning a prior way of classifying that is considered preferable and even exclusive.'⁷⁴ The scholar thus should develop a flexibility by which she is able to actively engage in different ways of reality making. She 'must study and *learn* the 'new' alternate frame of reality quite seriously.'⁷⁵ Furthermore she should be able to switch back and forth between the religious frame under consideration, and her own (academic) perspective.

In the case of my research project, this means that I will learn to temporarily adopt the believer's point of view, only to switch back to my scholarly perspective later on. As the Daime experience is

⁶⁹ Droogers 1996.

⁷⁰ Porpora 2006: 71. Note that I am not concerned with the *truth* of the reality that my respondents believe in/construct. I am only interested in the dynamics of reality making, and how experience and narrative interrelate in this. My main question is what my respondents experience and how they interpret these experiences, in the following I will of course discuss to what extent my respondents themselves think their experiences and narratives to be true, but this study is explicitly not aimed at making statements about the 'true' nature of the experiences.

⁷¹ Knibbe investigated the Dutch medium Jomanda, and argues that claims about the truth of her worldview were central to her practice. *Idem*: 290. As I will show later on (the rejection to make) religious truth claims also proved to be a central aspect in Dutch Santo Daime members' talking about their experiences.

⁷² Knibbe and Droogers 2011: 285.

⁷³ Droogers 1996, 53.

⁷⁴ *Idem*: 63.

⁷⁵ *Idem*: 291.

the central focus of my study, I should try to have this experience myself.⁷⁶ Droogers compares the process of getting involved with watching a movie: ‘it is possible to enjoy a movie and at the same time be conscious of how actors and director have done their job.’⁷⁷ Likewise, I state that it is possible to participate in Daime experiences, and simultaneously be aware of the implications and the different elements of that experience.⁷⁸

Based on the forgoing discussion I still hold that I would never be able to have exactly the same experience as my respondents. However, I am convinced that adopting an approach of methodological ludism will help me to experience in a similar manner as my respondents. Following Luhmann: “The anthropologist cannot have access to the inner reaches of those to whom one talks; one can have partial access to one’s own, and through involvement at least begin to understand what some of the others may have been experiencing.”⁷⁹

Other reasons to participate

Next to these there might be more pragmatic reasons for participating in the rituals. First, Santo Daime works are not easily accessible for non-participating outsiders. One of the rules of the Céu da Santa Maria is that only those who participate in the drinking of Daime are allowed to be present during the rituals. Not drinking Daime would thus largely restrict my access to the research setting. Galina Lindquist who studied urban shamanism in contemporary Sweden encountered a similar problem:⁸⁰ “Neo-shamanic performances are not open to disengaged spectators. To observe, one must participate on the same conditions as all the others.”⁸¹

Second, participating in rituals seems to be the most fruitful way to meet Santo Daime members and gain access to a network of informants. A third reason to participate in the rituals is that by doing so I hope to win the indispensable trust of the population under study.⁸² Santo Daime members might argue that an inexperienced investigator would not understand at all what they are talking about, and therefore relating experiences to her would be ultimately useless. Furthermore they might be afraid that research could lead to the spread of prejudices and wrong information about the Santo

⁷⁶ Hanegraaff also argues that the entheogenic experience itself should be studied by scholars of ayahuasca religions like Santo Daime, as the experiential dimension is a central aspect of these religions. According to him, the common scholarly conviction that access to the (religious) experience is not required in order to study religion, does not hold in the case of ‘entheogenic religion’. “[I]n the case of religion grounded in the deliberate induction of altered states, the situation is different because the experiential dimension is not peripheral but central, and hence a different methodological stance is required: otherwise, the implication would be that scholars may study everything about such religion, but are allowed to ignore precisely what is most central to the religion in question.” Hanegraaff 2011: 97.

⁷⁷ Droogers 1996: 53.

⁷⁸ It should be noted that I was not a member of the Santo Daime church, nor did I become one. In this sense my engagement in the ‘religious reality’ might be considered limited. Nevertheless, I argue that it is useful to observe the process of experiencing and interpretation in myself, to get some idea about *similar* processes in my informants.

⁷⁹ Luhmann 1991: 15.

⁸⁰ Lindquist 1997.

⁸¹ Idem: 16.

⁸² However, Dawson, who did research in a Brazilian Santo Daime church, argues that actively participating as an insider does not necessarily mean the practitioners will treat you as an insider. For an overview of the problems he encountered and the specific role of the participant observer, see: Dawson 2010.

Daime church to the general public. In general people would be more willing to participate in a study if the investigator herself 'knows what it is all about'.

In this chapter I explained why it is useful for the researcher to participate in the processes of experiencing and narrative making herself. The fact that experiencing is to a large extent socially learned implies that the researcher can align her own experiences with those of her respondents. Droogers' approach of methodological ludism allows for diving deep into the experiential realities of Dutch Santo Daime members, without giving up on scholarly distance. In the following chapter I will more thoroughly discuss the methodological implications of taking a methodological ludist approach.

3. Method

From January to September 2012 I conducted fieldwork in the Céu da Santa Maria in Amsterdam. I participated in seven works; two Concentrations, three Curas, and two Dance works. The rituals mainly took place in the evenings, starting around 6 pm and lasting till about midnight. After the formal ritual there always was a period of transition and informal socializing, which I took as an important part of the ritual as well, and which I included in my analysis. The same holds for the period of preparation before the ritual officially starts. As the rituals were held in different locations in the province of Noord-Holland, I usually got a ride home with some church members living in the same city as I do. These moments yielded a rich source of additional information for my research: they provided opportunities for me to ‘play’ with taking in different stances on the Daime experience, and to learn from a wider range of members how they approached it.

Initially, I interviewed seven member of the church in depth about the relation between their experiences and worldviews.⁸³ Near the end of my fieldwork period I interviewed one more member, in order to validate the patterns that I discerned in the data. With one of my respondents I developed an email exchange, in which we discussed different ways of looking at the world. This contact greatly supported me in learning to approach the world in the same way as my respondents, and thus in understanding the narratives of my respondents. Another respondent shared several ‘trip reports’ with me, whom he wrote down directly after the works.⁸⁴ These reports gave me a more in-depth understanding of the way other people experience the influence of Daime. Both provided nice supplements to the information I gathered during the interviews.⁸⁵

Methodological ludism applied

In the previous chapter I discussed the concept of methodological ludism.⁸⁶ How did I apply this concept more specifically during my fieldwork? First, I read about Santo Daime and ayahuasca in both academic and practitioners’ sources. This gave me insight in the variety of viewpoints regarding the brew and the experiences it provokes. I realised it was difficult to remain neutral in this field, because of intense personal involvement of almost all participants in it. Methodological ludism offered a nice solution: I could move between the different perspectives without pinning myself down on any standpoint, which would inevitably have restricted my view. I tried to empathise with all the different viewpoints first and understand them as far as possible. Only in a second stage I retook my critical scholarly perspective to indicate potential weak spots and hidden motives in the accounts, before moving on to the next view. Thus, already in this stage, taking a methodological ludist approach offered me a large sense of freedom and flexibility.

While doing participant observation, I experimented with the extent to which I would immerse myself in the ritual. In a few rituals I tried to balance participation and observation in an equal manner, and in some other services I decided to immerse myself completely in the ritual, only to

⁸³ Transcriptions may be obtained from the author for further research purposes.

⁸⁴ These trip reports can be found in appendix B.

⁸⁵ In consultation with my respondents I anonymised the transcriptions and gave the respondents who preferred so fictitious names. Furthermore all names of other persons that came up for discussion during the interviews are anonymised as well.

⁸⁶ Droogers 1996; Knibbe & Droogers 2011.

reflect on it afterwards. During these works I decided to put aside all my critical judgement and just observe and participate in an open-minded way. I did not make any notes during the rituals, as there was no convenient possibility to do so. However, I did write down the most important observations - especially names of persons I spoke to, and details of my own experiences - immediately afterwards.

During and surrounding the rituals I tried to participate in the process of meaning making as far as possible in the way the church members themselves do. This I learned from a combination of a) imitation: during the rituals I tried to imitate the behaviour of the church members. b) By asking specific questions about ritual behaviour and attitudes during the interviews. And c) from informal talking with other church members and visitors surrounding the services.

In these conversations I mainly adopted the 'listeners' point of view, in order to understand the process of meaning making that my conversation partner was engaged in - but I experimented with framing my own experiences in words as well. The latter was not only useful for me myself, to make sense of the sometimes intense experiences I had during the rituals; but also to get a better understanding of the possibilities and impossibilities of this process in general. In this way I gained first-hand experience of the transformative process that is required in order to put a sometimes extraordinary experience into words. This made me better appreciate, and able to contextualise similar endeavours of my respondents.

I often explained I was conducting research during these conversations, and all members of the church were at least aware of the presence of a researcher in their church, as I informed them – after getting permission from the church leaders – by email of my research project. However, not everyone I spoke to knew that my face belonged to the message, which provided some opportunities for me to introduce myself as a practitioner as well. In doing so I could experiment with taking different practitioners' points of view, which helped me learn to participate in the discourse. This might seem unethical to some, however, I think it was not. I never lied about my intentions, and especially the people with whom I exchanged more than a few sentences were aware of my variable identity. I often literally said that I was playing with adopting different perspectives, and that I was eager to learn the 'language' of the other participants.

Being your own research tool

As an anthropologist you are your own measurement tool.⁸⁷ Therefore I will explain my own role in the data collection when necessary. For example: I first scrutinized my own being before going to any fieldwork situation. I asked myself: what state am I in at the present moment? What are my scholarly motives for doing this? What are my personal motives? I wrote these down as uncensoredly as possible in my fieldwork diary.

As the experiences were often of a quite intense and overwhelming character, the day after the rituals I often still was very much involved in the experiences, and not able to take proper academic distance. Therefore I used these days to write down my experiences extensively in my fieldwork diary. These diary entries proved very useful in three ways. First, by writing down I got to understand more about the nature of these experiences in general, and how different sensory modalities, thoughts, emotions and previous worldviews interact in creating the specific experience. Second, I

⁸⁷ Creswell 2003: 182; Spradley 1980: 63-72.

was able to directly observe the process of meaning making from the complex and diffuse experience reality in myself, which helped me to better understand this process in my respondents. Third, these diary entries helped me to disentangle my own worldviews and experiences from those of my respondents: as often with intense, personal experiences, there is a large tendency to 'project' your own experiences on those of others, trying to find recognition in their stories. By writing down my own story, I could better distinguish my own story from the stories of my respondents, and make sure not to mix them up.

I consider it important to note here (again) that I did *not* analyse my own experiences directly for the purpose of this research, as the research is clearly focused on how Dutch Santo Daime members experience and interpret their experiences. I am not a Santo Daime member myself, thus my own experiences do not qualify as research data. I used my own experiences only indirectly, in order to gain a better understanding of the processes that my respondents were taking part in. I am convinced that my attempt to learn to experience in similar ways as my respondents – although I only succeeded to a certain extent - gained me a far richer understanding of both the process of experiencing and the process of transforming experiences into narratives, than I would have gotten if I only would have had the narrative accounts of my respondents.

In subsequent stages of my research I took a gradually more distant approach towards both my own and my respondents' experiences. In analysing both my interview data and my field notes I continuously moved back and forth between the stance of the open-minded participator and the critical-detached observer.⁸⁸

Interviews

Based on the theoretical reflections described in the previous chapters, I approached the interviews as a collaboration in meaning-making between the researcher and the respondent.⁸⁹ During the interviews I aimed at developing what Moen calls a 'caring situation' in which both conversation partners felt comfortable.⁹⁰ I cultivated a non-judgmental attitude and tried to instil a sense of equality, in order to reach a joint, intersubjective understanding with my respondents.⁹¹

Although both conversation partners have their share in the creation of the interview narrative, it must be noted that the dialogues I had with my respondents were largely asymmetrical. As a researcher I tended to take a passive role in the process of reality making, whereas I assigned an active role to my respondent: I tried to intervene as little as possible in my respondents' constructions of their narrative on their experiences. In accordance with my attitude during the fieldwork (as described in the previous chapter) I tried to establish a pupil-teacher relationship with my respondents, in which I was the one learning to approach the world in a similar manner as they did.⁹²

⁸⁸ Creswell 2003: 182-183.

⁸⁹ Hammersley & Atkinson 1995: 139-151.

⁹⁰ Moen 2006: 6.

⁹¹ *Idem.*

⁹² Note that the pupil-teacher metaphor does not apply fully, as I maintained the task-oriented leadership during the interview (e.g. leading/directing the conversation).

My aim as a scholar is not to prove or disprove the truth of my respondents' experiences; it is to reflect on the processes of meaning-making that they are engaged in. I investigated how my respondents make sense of their experiences: how do they order them and relate them to their ordinary life? How do these religious experiences orient them in the complex reality of existence? How do the experiences interact with and potentially transform their cosmologies?⁹³ My aim was to dive into the complex experience-narrative dynamics and clarify what was going on.

The composition of my interviews reflects this purpose. As I am mainly interested in the interaction between experiences and worldviews, my questions were mainly aimed at eliciting as much details on the *experiences* of my respondents as possible. I asked them for as many aspects of the process of experiencing as they could remember: which senses were involved in the process, and to what extent did they contribute to the overall experience? Which emotions did they perceive? How did those interrelate with their thoughts and their bodily behaviour? How did the ritual shape their experiences? To what extent do they feel the experiences were either shared, or did involve interaction with others?

A second focus in my interviews was on the cosmologies of my respondents: I asked them to connect their direct and specific experiences to their belief system. In this way I tried to gain insight in the way they attach meaning to their experiences. I asked them both for the meaning of specific experiences and for the meaning of their religious experiences in general. Furthermore I asked some questions about their religious and spiritual background and affiliations. In this way I hoped to gain insight in the way their processes of meaning making were or were not embedded in larger social contexts.

In appendix A the interview scheme (in Dutch) is recorded. I conducted semi-structured interviews with open ended questions. The questions were grouped in 7 main themes, which reflect the above considerations. The themes were A) First time experience, B) Experience of Daime in general, C) Cosmology in general, D) Cosmology specific, E) Recent experience, F) Most impressive experience, and G) General questions.

The themes reflect the strong focus on the experiences themselves. I tried to create as many opportunities as possible in which the respondents could talk about their experiences. The purpose was to collect a large range of examples, and use them as starting point from which to speak about cosmologies. Previous experience told me that people tend to start interpreting their experiences immediately while speaking about them: as already stated, only the effort of putting any experience into words already implies selection and therefore interpretation. In order to get a balanced account which reflects both the direct visions, thoughts, emotions, physical sensations and the meanings my respondents connected to them, I chose to return to the direct experiences explicitly many times during the interview.

I interviewed eight members of the church: two women and six men. The eighth interview was mainly used to validate the findings from the first seven interviews. The interviews took between 1,5 and 2,5 hours. All interviews were recorded using a voice recorder and afterwards literally transcribed. From memory non-verbal expressions like hesitations, bodily gestures, and displays of emotion were included in the reports. My respondents were all members of the Céu da Santa Maria,

⁹³ Other aspects of the Daime experience, e.g. their effect on attitudes, values or behaviour were not the focus of my research, but they have been studied by others. e.g. Mabit, Giove, & Vega, 1996. Dobkin de Rios, 1984.

but for a variable amount of time: two of them only became official member nine months before the interview; the other extreme was a woman who has been visiting the church for 20 years.

Data analysis

Qualitative data-analysis can be seen as an ongoing process, involving continual reflection about the data, asking analytical questions and writing memos throughout the study.⁹⁴ The interview transcriptions were coded using a top-down and bottom up approach simultaneously. At first I conducted a general coding, reflecting on the overall meaning of the data, general ideas and the general impression they provided.⁹⁵ In the first round of coding I searched for answers to my main questions, namely: what did they experience (Experience) and how did they make sense of these experiences (Worldview). Furthermore I distinguished several types of more practical information; like statements on the Santo Daime church and its organisation and biographical information about my respondents. However, as the focus of my research is on the interplay between worldview and experience, the organisational and biographical information was merely used to provide some contextualisation of the former.

After the first global analysis I continued with a second round, in which I noticed all the things that stood out and that took my particular attention. I made comments of these in the sidelines. Furthermore I noted those aspects that both confirmed my previous expectations and those that went against them. This in particular was a great incentive to my own process of scholarly meaning making.

In conducting this first global analysis of the interviews, I already came across many smaller scale themes that I jotted down in the sidelines. In a third round of analysis I worked them out more specifically and organised them in a new document in which I grouped quotes of different respondents thematically.⁹⁶

Out of this document I again made a selection of themes that I will present in the following chapters of my thesis. Decisions on what to include and what not were based on two conditions. First I considered which elements were most central to my respondents themselves. Most of them told me elaborately about many aspects of their experiences and worldviews. However, themes that came back in all the conversations were the effects of the ritual and the Daime (brew); the nature of God/reality; the nature of supernatural beings; my respondents' views on the relation between 'dark' and 'light'; and the integration of the experiences in daily life. These therefore were taken as main themes in the following chapters.⁹⁷ A second consideration in deciding which elements to present and which not, was the extent to which they helped me to answer my research question. The same conditions also informed my organisation of the topics in the following chapters.

⁹⁴ Creswell 2003: 182-183.

⁹⁵ Idem: 191.

⁹⁶ Idem: 192-193.

⁹⁷ Other minor themes will be discussed in relation to the main themes where possible. Thereby the desire of being exhaustive is continuously balanced against the desire to present a clear and straightforward argument.

Validation

In qualitative research, validity does not carry the same connotations as it does in quantitative research.⁹⁸ In general the qualitative researcher is not aiming at stability or consistency in the responses of her respondents (reliability), nor does she search for generalisability; the external validity of applying results to new settings, people or samples.⁹⁹ Validity mainly is aimed at determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of an account.¹⁰⁰ Creswell suggests eight strategies to check the accuracy of findings in qualitative research.¹⁰¹

First, he proposes to triangulate different data sources of information by examining evidence from different sources. In this research project I combined data from my own fieldwork, from the interviews, and from a wider range of academic literature to come to a better understanding of the relation between narratives and experience. A second strategy is member-checking; to take back the final report or specific descriptions to respondents. As I already noted; in a later stage of my research, I conducted an extra interview with a new respondent to check the validity of my theorizing. This conversation largely confirmed that I was on the right track. However, it forced me to make a few adjustments, and furthermore to clarify some of my ideas to a larger extent.

The third strategy is to use rich, thick description to convey the findings. In this way the reader is able to check my theoretical reflections on the data for him or herself. In the following chapters I attempted to find the right balance between presenting the data and reflecting on it. A fourth strategy is to clarify the bias the researcher brings to the study. In this chapter I already discussed my own role in the research project extensively. The fifth strategy is to present negative or discrepant information too. As is usual with making an argument, the data never fits completely or perfectly. In the following chapters I pointed at minor exceptions and discrepancies where possible.

Sixth, Creswell proposes to spend prolonged time in the field, in order to develop more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. Unfortunately, this research project was limited due to time-constraints: following the master program I am in, I had only half a year to conduct my research. However, I think I can honestly say I utilised it to the fullest. A seventh strategy is to use peer debriefing. Throughout the process I discussed my ongoing findings and thoughts regularly with my peers in a thesis workgroup, and in informal conversations. A last strategy is to use an external auditor to review the entire project. In this case, my supervisors will take that role.

Presentation of the data

What I will present are the *narratives* my respondents constructed about their experiences. However, by focusing on different aspects of the narratives separately I will show how they reflect different aspects of the experience.

First I will zoom in on the ritual context in which the experiences take place. I will explain how my respondents understand the function of the ritual and how it interacts with their experiences. Second, I will discuss the effects of the Daime brew itself; again, as it is related to me by my

⁹⁸ Creswell 2003: 195.

⁹⁹ Creswell 2003: 195.

¹⁰⁰ Idem: 195-6.

¹⁰¹ Idem: 196-7.

respondents. Third, I will show how they relate their experiences to the broader fabric of their lives, by embedding them in their cosmologies.

Note that in these chapters I will stay close to the narratives of my respondents.¹⁰² These chapters are not meant to make any truth claims or academically justified statements about what the Daime is or how the ritual exactly functions. My work as an anthropologist is to order their stories in a meaningful way, and to reflect upon them. I will present how my respondents think about these issues, in order to analyse the process of narrative making that they are engaged in. Therefore I will not only present their ideas but also the narrative strategies they use to connect their stories to their first hand experiences.

¹⁰² With one exception: in order to give the reader an impression of the context in which the experiences took place, I will start the following chapter with a description of the ritual that is based on my own fieldwork accounts.

4. The Works: Be firm and surrender

The religious experiences that are the subject of this study take place during the religious rituals of the Santo Daime church. In the first part of this chapter I will give an impression of these rituals, called 'works' by the daimistas. Based on my fieldwork, I will present a 'grand tour' description of a single work in the Céu da Santa Maria. In the second part of the chapter I will show how my respondents describe the functions of the ritual. In their stories the concepts of 'firmeza' and 'surrender' play a central role. I will show how my respondents relate the cultivation of these attitudes with two seemingly paradoxical aims of the works.

Entrance at the church and the special position of hymns

It is a relatively large church for this small rural village in the vicinity of Amsterdam. The last light of the day shines upon the colourful stained glass windows as I enter the new red-brick building. Some people in white and dark blue clothes already gathered in the entrance hall. Several tables have been re-arranged to form two counters: one on the left side, where you can buy songbooks (called hinarios), and one on the right side where you can register and pay for the coming 'work'.

Two friendly women deal with my registration and show me the way to the dressing room. I decide to first purchase the hinarios that are needed for this specific work. As I am fairly new to the customs of the Santo Daime, I ask the man behind the table for advice, but it does not become completely clear which books I need. As the work of today is a 'cura', a 'healing' ritual, we need a hinario that belongs specifically to cura works. However, there are many.

When I ask for the use of all these different books, the man behind the table explains to me: 'every song book has its own energy; it is like listening to different cd's; for every different mood you have different music', therefore different hinarios are sung every time. Someone else explains to me: 'Every hinario tells its own story, because every hinario has its own author.' An hinario basically is a collection of hymns received by one specific individual.

The reception of hymns generally occurs to people while they are under influence of Daime, but it might as well come to them suddenly during the day or in a dream. The hymns are explicitly not invented by the members themselves, they are 'received'. There exist different explanations of how this is happening; some argue the hymns are 'channelled': they are sent by some entity or supernatural being on a 'higher' level or 'astral' dimension. Others have a more abstract idea of the occurrence of reception; Miriam, one of my respondents, for example once told me how she during a work 'travelled' to the place where hymns were received:

In Mapiá¹⁰³ I received the first hymn. It was on a night, and I was processing that whole night. And the people from that house were worried about me; they thought I was not going well, so they came to watch me. But everything was alright, and I was laughing, and immensely drunk [of the Daime, red.]. And I went all the way to the starting point of creation. And, it started with... I saw all those thoughts in my head, and first I thought: now I believe I am really going crazy! (...)

¹⁰³ Mapiá is the place in Brazil where the mother church of the Santo Daime is located. Almost all my respondents went on pilgrimage to Mapiá or were planning to do so in the future.

Ok. So, I thought: stay calm, just look, just watch... And I did. And then I saw how all those thoughts collided with each other... woosh... and I saw how they developed into complete universes: the start of creation! That is how galaxies come into being: by colliding thoughts. These are thoughts of God. Pffoo, pfoo... pfoo... Enormous explosions! That was amazing... And subsequently I came in a sort of... not really a vacuum, because there still was something... but something like that. (...)

And then I said: Now I am at the place where the hymns are received! So I was just standing there, yes, I just stood there! And then, and I was completely open to it, and then that hymn just came through! Two hymns actually, both about fiscals.¹⁰⁴ And then I just sang them, there, at that moment, in Dutch. And I never repeated it afterwards, so I don't remember them anymore, but they rhymed. And they were about my love for two fiscals. I just sang about those fiscals, in Dutch. I sang about my love, it was wonderful! So I sang and sang and sang! And then I laughed again! Really, I looked like a complete drunk!

According to Miriam hymns thus originate in a specific location in the 'astral planes'; by 'travelling' there you are able to receive them. Thom also experienced receiving hymns; the first time it occurred to him he was driving in his car home after a work:

I came back from church, I drove back home, and suddenly there was this text, it just appeared in my head, complete with a melody to it. So I went home, and immediately wrote it all down. And the funny thing was: I had no idea what it was about, as I did not speak Portuguese! It was really in Portuguese! So I went to GoogleTranslate, and... this is no joke! So, I studied the whole thing, and no spelling mistakes whatsoever! It fitted exactly!

Although Thom did not directly experience contact with a supernatural being, he does believe there must be some entity that sent this song to him: 'It would be stupid, well, maybe not stupid, but it would be foolish to think there exists nothing beyond this. Because, you know, we can't see bacteria either, but we know they exist. In the same way there also exist higher dimensional beings that are surrounding us.' The exact nature of these beings is however not relevant for Thom: 'I just received the songs and I feel that it is a good thing. It is just good, and it brings me a lot of happiness, love and wisdom.'

Hymns can be received by all members,¹⁰⁵ and they continue to be channelled up to the present day. As the hymns are the only written accounts of the Santo Daime church, they are the sole bearers of something that could be called the 'Santo Daime doctrine'.¹⁰⁶ The 'doctrine' is therefore fundamentally open and changeable.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Fiscals are the Santo Daime members entrusted with the role of guardian during the works.

¹⁰⁵ Although not everyone does so, and not everyone chooses to make them public.

¹⁰⁶ Cemin 2006: 260.

¹⁰⁷ There is however, some notion of control on the corpus of hymns. Miriam told me that if you want to have your hymns included in the Santo Daime corpus, they have to be sent to the mother church in Mapia, Brazil, where one woman has the specific task of checking the 'realness' of the hymns. According to Miriam some people tend to mix up already existing hymns: in that case they won't be approved. All the other hymns go in press. If you received a lot of hymns, as some leaders of the church did, you will get your own hinario, a complete hymn book, but it is also possible to get loose hymns printed. In fact, during my fieldwork, I did see people walk around with a whole range of hymn books, sometimes with loose papers put between them.

There are some standard hymn books, which are used on recurrent occasions every year. The Céu da Santa Maria furthermore uses one standard book in every work. This book contains the first hymns that Mestre Irineu, the founder of the movement, received. Furthermore there are basic hymns about Daime, Santa Maria, and several other topics. This book also provides translations into English, although the hymns are always sung in Portuguese. Furthermore it contains a range of prayers and invocations that are generally pronounced during the works.

I decide to buy the basic book, next to that I buy the hinario of Roberval Raulinho Da Silva; a young guitar playing man who stares intensely at you from the cover. The book is called 'Verbo Amar': Words of Love. If I understood it correctly this is the book we will be singing completely tonight.

Preparing for the ritual

I head for the women's dressing room. Several women of different ages change their normal, daily clothes for the white with blue uniform for the fardadas, - or a completely white outfit for the visitors. As I later discover visitors are jokingly called 'witjurken' (white dresses) or 'witjes' (white persons) by the fardado¹⁰⁸s.

Among the attendees I recognize a fragile elderly woman with long grey hair. A plaster is covering one of her eyes, but it does not seem to hinder her as she goes by everyone to ask how they feel and hug them. She is the founder of the Amsterdam church, and I've never met her before. She approaches me to give me a hug too. I introduce myself. "Nice you are here," she says dreamily, before she continues her round of welcomes.

Once I am dressed I go downstairs again. More people are arriving now; it's getting busy. The atmosphere is relaxed. People are talking to each other in small groups of two or three persons, some are hugging each other. Other people run around preparing for the ritual: cans of water, flowers, buckets and blankets are brought in. There is a large pile of lost property, mainly clothes that are left behind in previous works.

Then I enter the church itself. It is a local protestant church, recognisable because of the simple interior. The Céu da Santa Maria rents different regular church buildings for their rituals. At the pulpit a Bible lays closed, on it a cloth with embroidered letters. Some fardados are busy hanging large pictures on the walls; some of them in frames, others printed on banners. These represent the founders and leaders of the Santo Daime church. One of the most impressing is Mestre Irineu; a tall, negroid man, standing straight up with a staff in his right hand. From the banner he is looking directly in to your eyes with a stern expression on his face.

In the middle of the stone church floor a small white, star-shaped table is put down. On it stand a double-armed cross,¹⁰⁹ draped by a rosary, four white candles, a small vase with flowers and some more pictures. Corresponding with the six points of the star-shaped table, the chairs are arranged in six areas, all facing the altar. The three areas on the left side are for the women, and opposite of

¹⁰⁸ *Fardado* (masculine) and *fardada* (feminine) is Santo Daime terminology to indicate membership. Fardados are those that 'did their fardamento', literally: 'received their costume'. Membership is thus marked by dress.

¹⁰⁹ The double-armed cross is the standard Christian cross with an extra horizontal arm. It is called 'Caravaca cross' after the Spanish town where the symbol originated, or 'cruzeiro'. [Cemin 2006: 263.] Within the Santo Daime church the second arm is often interpreted as representing the second coming of the Christ, which according to Alex Polari de Alverga is supposed to be internal. [Alverga 1999: xxv.]

them on the right side of the church are the areas for the men. In the front of the church, on a small platform, a table is furnished for 'the Eucharist': endless rows of small glasses are lined up, and on both sides of the table – again: left for the women, right for the man – a place for the jug containing the Daime. In the back of the church some buckets are placed for people who need to vomit. Furthermore some spaces are established where people can lie down, and there are some tables with cans and glasses of water.

More and more people are entering the church; approximately hundred people are joining the Cura of tonight. People are still informally talking to each other. The first-timers are getting their instructions in a separate space in the back of the church. Slowly people are moving to their places. Visitors are not allowed to pick a place for themselves; one of the fiscals – the fardados that are in service that specific evening – will assign everyone a place.

There are some practical rules for the seating arrangement. The musicians and the leaders of the church are in the inner circle. The fardados are placed behind them, and the visitors are always on the back rows. Allocation depends partly on length: 'it is better for the energy flow if people sit next to each other in order of length'. The same reason explains why you are not allowed to cross your legs during the ritual: 'that will block the free flow of energy.' However, people are also assigned to a specific place on basis of an intuitive feeling of fit, and the fiscal might re-arrange you several times before the best fit is found. Standing behind the chairs are the serving fiscals. They will keep an eye on the attendees during the ritual, and provide when necessary for blankets, water, buckets, and help in general.

Drinking Daime

When almost everyone is seated the 'commandre'¹¹⁰ asks for silence. After a few minutes of silence some prayers are said out loud: the whole church speaks in one voice. Among the prayers are the well-known Hail Mary and Our Father, rehearsed in English, Portuguese and Dutch. Then a man from the inner circle announces that the first round of Daime is opened. People queue in two rows in front of the table, reminiscent of the Eucharist in a Christian church. The fardados go first, the visitors last. The whole process goes very smooth and fast. Everyone gets a small glass of the bitter 'tea' and returns to his place.

The singing starts. First some hymns of the basic book are sung: the songs are simple, and can roughly be divided into three types: waltzes, mazurkas and marches. Each hymn contains several choruses, and every chorus contains four lines (with some exceptions). Every pair of lines – or sometimes every chorus – is repeated twice. Which is clever, as the non-Portuguese speaking (most of the attendees) can first listen to the pronunciation and then immediately apply what they have learned.

The songs contain some religious references: for example, religious figures are invoked, praised and asked for health and strength. These religious figures come often from the Christian tradition: Jesus, Mary and figures like John the Baptist are regularly mentioned. However, as Rommert explains, they are not restricted to the Christian tradition: 'the content of the hymns is free. Mestre Irineu, for example, never referred to the Buddha in his hymns, but Alex Polari did.'

¹¹⁰ One of the emic terms used to denote the leader of the church.

Although the hymn texts are said to bear the Santo Daime 'doctrine', they do not convey any complete or consistent cosmology. According to Miriam, the hymns function in another way. She explains: 'they bring you to the worlds behind the words: if you listen closely, the worlds that are sung about open up and become real'. Other respondents also told me that they are able to relive the 'stories' that the hymns are about. Often these stories contain 'lessons' that the daimista can for example apply to daily life situations. Thus, according to my respondents the stories conveyed by the hymns become alive under the influence of Daime.

Related to this, the hymns might also function as a 'road map' for the experiences. Rommert: 'they describe specific locations or beings that you might encounter during the Daime experience.' He has for example often been in a place that in the hymns is called 'the golden chamber', a place which, according to him 'overlaps with the space of the church, a shared place, which is completely filled with light, gold and love.' In this way the hymn singing directs their experiences.

Furthermore the hymns can be seen as tools that help the daimistas in their concentration during the rituals. The practice of keeping your attention to the singing, and let yourself not be overwhelmed by the experiences is highly valued in the church. In general it is assumed that 'staying focused' is very important in order to get the most out of the experiences. As the experiences can be intense and overwhelming, the singing of hymns is the main technique to hold grip on them.

The singing of hymns is accompanied by live music: there is a violin, two guitars, another Brazilian string instrument, and several people that indicate the rhythm with their maracas (a Brazilian shaking instrument). After approximately half an hour the 'Consecration of the space' is read out loud in English.¹¹¹

Some of my respondents mark this as the point where the Daime starts to work and where they begin to have their 'religious' experiences. The onset of this phase is not always externally distinguishable. Some daimistas look seemingly unaffected during the whole ritual; others display their emotions – ranging from agony to ecstasy – more outwardly. The daimistas that seem to have a hard time are taken care of by the fiscals, who take them to a mattress or chair in the back of the church and provide them with water and blankets. Some have to make use of the vomit baskets. Nevertheless, the general atmosphere is relaxed, and although the fiscals encourage everyone to keep on participating in the ritual, several daimistas temporarily leave their places to take a rest, drink water or visit the toilet.

The experiences my respondents have in this part of the ritual are the central focus of my thesis, and I will discuss them elaborately in the following chapters.¹¹² Generally speaking, the experiences can

¹¹¹ This invocation is derived from a Brazilian esoteric group, called 'O Circulo Esoterico da comunhão do Pensamento', which can be translated as 'The Esoteric Circle of the Communion of Thought'. The text, and other standard prayers and invocations are recorded in appendix B.

¹¹² I deliberately chose not to discuss my own experiences during this part of the 'work', as this might bias the stories of my respondents. As made clear before, I aim to study the religious experiences of Dutch Santo Daime members, and I am not a member of the Santo Daime church myself. For a more elaborate discussion on the methodological issues concerning the distinction between my own experiences and those of the Santo Daime members I refer to chapter 3.

However, to still give the reader a first impression of what these experiences might look like, I decided to include the trip reports of one of my respondents, Rommert, in appendix C. I am grateful to Rommert for sharing these experiences with me and for letting me use them in this context. The reader should keep in mind that Rommert's report is personal, and that other people might have completely different experiences. In the

be divided into 'lessons' and 'mirações'. The learning of lessons is perceived as the 'hard' part of the work: this is where the 'working' really takes place. The daimistas are confronted with 'blockages', fears and desires; sometimes in a symbolical fashion, sometimes more concrete. The 'mirações' are the more beautiful and harmonious parts of the experience where the daimistas arrive after working through their hardships.

Santa Maria

Approximately two hours after the first round, a second round of Daime is served. People again queue in lines, and there is the feeling of an informal 'break'. Some daimistas continue singing, many take the opportunity to walk around or visit the toilet. Soon after the second round of Daime, Santa Maria is served. Santa Maria is the Santo Daime connotation of the cannabis-containing cigarettes, which are smoked during the ritual. Like the Daime, Santa Maria is also treated as a sacrament. One fiscal explained to me that: 'She is a very powerful teacher too'. During the smoking of Santa Maria the daimistas stay seated where they are. The fiscals distribute ashtrays and Santa Maria's throughout the church. Not everyone participates in 'the consecration of the second sacrament'. There is approximately one joint for a row of four to five persons. When a sign is given someone on the outer side of the row lights the Santa Maria. Suddenly the whole church is filled with smoke; many people start to cough. The atmosphere becomes even more relaxed; it feels like a collective sigh is going through the church.

The smoking of Santa Maria is taken very seriously by the attendants. Many explained to me the importance of holding your fingers in the right position – approximately how one would hold a pencil – and smoking with the eyes closed. A lot of daimistas first make a sign of the cross, with the Santa Maria between their fingers, before inhaling. They breathe in and out in full concentration for a few times, before they inhale again. Even tapping off the ash has to be done in a particular, careful way. Ilona later on explained to me that this was to clearly distinguish the 'sacred' ritual of smoking Santa Maria from the 'profane' habit of smoking weed outside the ritual context. The passing on of the Santa Maria also follows a strict protocol; first Santa Maria is given to the neighbour on the left, who has to pass it on at his or her neighbour to the far left. This person is to smoke first, and the people in between only smoke afterwards. The Santa Maria is passed on again and again, until all members of the specific row are saturated.

Many respondents explained to me that they have more 'miração' experiences after the smoking of Santa Maria. However, the division between the two kinds of experiences – 'learning lessons' and 'having mirações' - is not that straightforward. My respondents related variable patterns of what they also called 'going up', and 'going down'. Sometimes they report going 'up' and 'down' several times during a ritual, sometimes the 'going down' or 'going up' stretches out for several rituals in a row. Despite these irregularities in frequency and timing, all the persons I spoke to so far mentioned those two aspects of the experience, and gave me plenty examples of both of them.

Around midnight – approximately five hours after the start – the ritual is closed. The music stops, people stand up, and some prayers are read out loud collectively.¹¹³ A man from the inner circle

coming chapters I will oppose different experience narratives against each other, which will give a more nuanced impression of the Santo Daime experience.

¹¹³ As already noted, the standard prayers and invocations can be found in appendix B.

shouts 'Viva Santo Daime', and everybody responds: 'Viva'. He follows with 'Viva Santa Maria', and the church responds: 'Viva'. Some other particularities get blessed as well, and then the official part is over. The formality of the ritual gets suddenly completely transformed into an informal social gathering. People leave their seats and start socializing with each other. Many search for their friends and acquaintances and hug them. Others, clearly not 'back in ordinary reality' yet, stay seated, and gaze blankly in the distance. Some daimistas immediately start to re-arrange the church, and tidy up the ritual gear. A table is prepared, and tea and food is shared. People chitchat with each other and make jokes, some walk outside to get some fresh air or a smoke. The gathering after the ritual continuous for over an hour: slowly people re-dress to their ordinary clothes, grab their belongings, and prepare to go home.

Learning lessons and reaching união

When I asked around about the ritual customs, several persons explained to me that all the aspects of the work, from seating arrangement to the sequence of the hymns, are aimed at fostering the attainment of a state of união. As I will show more elaborately in the chapter on the nature of reality, many church members believe that it is possible to get a kind of 'mystical' experience, which they equate with a 'union with the divine' or 'becoming one with the life force'.¹¹⁴ The achievement of such a state is the main reason for most of my respondents to drink Daime.

Reinier explained to me: 'In every work we succeed to a greater or lesser extent to reach união. He translates união with 'Oneness'. His statement is based on the assumption that the nature of reality is ultimately One. According to Reinier: 'there is just one Source'. However, he believes that this Source is split up in the 'trillion parts that make up our reality'. During the rituals it is possible see through the illusion of splitting up and perceive the ultimate, underlying Oneness again.'¹¹⁵

One of the things that Reinier experiences when he is proceeding towards this state of união during the rituals, is the fading out of borders between people: 'when I look at my neighbour, I suddenly realise there is nothing between us: I accept the other fully as my friend or brother. In a further stage, there is nothing left to separate us at all: I lost my sense of 'self' and I completely become Love. In that state it is impossible to have thoughts about the other.'

According to my respondents the ritual is organised in such a way as to encourage the attendants to reach this state of união. This is a long and elaborate process, and the Santo Daime members proceed by cultivating specific attitudes that help them 'navigate' during the experience.¹¹⁶ In order to navigate two kinds of behaviour are of central importance: first, the daimistas learn to have

¹¹⁴ Strikingly there is no universal term within the Santo Daime church to denote this 'life force'. E.g. some respondents spoke about attaining 'enlightenment', others about becoming 'one with God', 'coinciding with the Creative Force', etc. In order to reflect the variability of the way people speak about it, I will use a variety of terms myself in this thesis - following where possible the terminology of my respondents. It is important to note that the variety of denotations already implies that my respondents are not all talking about exactly the same thing. They approach this 'life force' from a range of different perspectives, and all slightly differ in their understanding of it. However, according to me, there was enough similarity in their thinking about the ritual's relation to this life force, to describe their thoughts over here in an aggregated manner.

¹¹⁵ As will become clear later on, according to some of my respondents this is not only the purpose of the Santo Daime works, but also the purpose of life.

¹¹⁶ Ilona explained to me: 'What it is ultimately all about is to learn to navigate, to become master over your own consciousness.'

firmeza: a Portuguese term which can be translated as firmness, fortitude or steadfastness. Second, the daimistas have to learn how to *surrender* themselves to the 'life force'.

These two types of behaviour correspond roughly, but not completely, with the distinction I previously made between 'working' and 'having *mirações*'. Cultivating *firmeza* means that you don't look away from things you don't like; you confront each and everything with an equal open-minded attitude. Maarten explained to me that when he 'goes down, to the underworlds', the most important thing he should do is to stay in the 'role of the observer'. This means he should not judge anything or respond to anything that is happening around him; he just has to perceive what is going on. If he does so, he explained to me, nothing will happen to him, and he can deal with all the struggles that arise in front of him.

Strikingly, Maarten explained that this attitude of *firmeza* is not required when 'going up'. 'When I am going up I don't have to protect myself, I can completely surrender.' Reinier describes a similar process of surrender as 'allowing the Love to enter', and also as 'coinciding with the Creative Force'. According to Reinier, the rituals are aimed at training to become one with this Force more and more. According to him, the more you manage to do so, the more you will coincide with the Creative Force, and ultimately you will reach *união*.¹¹⁷

According to my respondents the ritual has thus two seemingly paradoxical aims. On the one hand they state the ritual is arranged in such a way as to provide for the learning of 'lessons', with the underlying this-worldly purpose of stimulating personal development.¹¹⁸ On the other hand they claim that the ritual has the other-worldly purpose of reaching a state of *união*. However, both are related. Harry states: 'the ultimate aim is to bring the heavens down to earth.' Thus: to not only move towards a state of *união* during the rituals, but also during daily life. By applying the lessons learned in daily life you will reach 'higher vibrational levels', according to Harry. Reinier claims that the lessons help you 'to allow the Life Force to enter', and thus in general will bring you closer to the state of *união*.

Through the cultivation of *firmeza* and surrender my respondents claim to develop the ability to navigate through their experiences. Furthermore they believe they are supposed to transpose the learned attitudes to their daily lives. Their Daime experiences provide a training ground, an opportunity to practice, in order to apply the learned skills to all of their experiences and to life in general.

The composition of the ritual stimulates the participants to develop the attitudes of *firmeza* and surrender. The highly structured liturgy provides a stable grip where the daimista can rely on: The systematic singing of hymns, the repetitive character of the music and dancing steps, and the orderly room lay-out, all contribute to an attitude of *firmeza*. Next to that, the ritual also provides a safe context for letting go. The bright, clean room, and the attendance of fiscals that take care of the daimistas stimulate an attitude of surrender. The ritual can be seen as a tool that helps the daimistas in practicing these attitudes, and thus ultimately helps them in attaining their goals.

¹¹⁷ *Firmeza* and surrender both paradoxically require an attitude of acceptance, of not willing to change the situation you are in, but either by looking it directly into the eyes, or immersing yourself in it completely. Although they can be roughly related to the distinction I previously made between 'going up' and 'going down' they can also be approached as two sides of the same coin.

¹¹⁸ In the next chapter I will explain how the Daime is believed to provoke these lessons.

In order to understand these goals better, I will now turn to the second ingredient of the Daime experience: in the next chapter I will discuss my respondents' narratives about the brew itself. I will show how their views about the brew are related to their experiences of its effects. Furthermore, I will argue that two seemingly paradoxical effects of the brew are that it induces both a 'feeling of truth' and a 'feeling of relativity' on the experiences of my respondents.

5. Daime: Shaking up appearances

The Daime: tool, teacher, therapist

In the literature on Santo Daime many descriptions of the brew are known. There exists no unified view on the nature and meaning of Daime, instead there is a cluster of ideas surrounding the brew. Ayahuasca or Daime is often seen as the 'vine of the soul', being able to bridge the upper and the lower worlds.¹¹⁹ Daime is often considered a therapist, as consumption of the brew is supposed to facilitate various healing processes.¹²⁰ Furthermore, the brew is seen as a teacher that guides the daimista through the experience.¹²¹ This can be understood in a symbolical way, but it is also often understood in a realistic way. Many daimistas either believe there are spirits hiding in the brew,¹²² or they see the Daime itself as a spiritual entity.¹²³ Once they drunk the brew they are able to talk to it, make agreements with it, or negotiate on their experiences.

In the hymns, Daime is often addressed as an independent being that could be communicated with. More symbolically, the Daime is referred to as a tool that could bring about the experience of união. This becomes clear when we look at the play on words that is inherent in the name 'Daime': which is Portuguese for 'give me'. In one of the hymns is sung: "Dai-me, dai-me, dai-me Luz/ Dai-me, dai-me o Seu Amor/ (...)/Dai-me força, dai-me amor/ Dai-me, dai-me união." Which means: 'give me, give me Light/ Give me, give me Your love/ (...)/ Give me strength, give me love/ Give me, give me union.'¹²⁴ These lines can be read in both ways: either the Daime itself is asked upon to bring the daimista light and love, or an unspecified 'God' is addressed, which would relocate the Daime as a vessel that brings about the experience of light and love.

When I ask my respondents what Daime is to them, they give a similar variety of answers. The idea that the Daime is a 'teacher' I encounter in most of my respondents' stories. Rommert, for example, describes the Daime as a 'personal teacher'. According to him the Daime is: 'an independent entity, with his own agenda, with whom you can have a relationship as like you would have a relationship with a teacher or instructor.' In a similar vein, Thom says: 'For me Santo Daime is going to school: I go there, take my lessons, and apply them in daily life.' Harry also states that 'you can ask anything to the Daime, it will always give you an answer.'

Reinier praises the brew's therapeutic effects: 'the Daime helps me to disentangle myself'. More respondents claim that the Daime induces an increased awareness of the topics they are mentally dealing with. According to Harry the Daime brings up 'the things that you are unconsciously working on'. This can happen in a variety of ways, depending on individual constitution: 'if you are more visually oriented these things might come up in visions, whereas other people tend to hear or feel things.' To illustrate his point, Harry brings up one of his own experiences in which he saw Escher-like images in front of his eyes: 'I suddenly saw likewise shapes, and at first I was completely immersed in looking at them. In one way or the other those images made so much clear to me! They

¹¹⁹ Labate 2006: 201. Krippner & Sulla 2000: 60. Groisman 2000: 28. Wuytz 2008: 46.

¹²⁰ Frenopoulo 2006.

¹²¹ Araújo 2006: 353.

¹²² Groisman 2000: 28. Furthermore, this particular idea is currently studied by the anthropologist Marc Blainey. Blainey 2013, forthcoming.

¹²³ Wuytz 2008: 48.

¹²⁴ Wright, 2006: 182.

kind of showed me my life at that specific moment: they showed me how I wanted to be in control of everything.’ According to Harry these ‘representations’ of the unconsciousness can be interpreted as messages: ‘they show you where there is still work to be done.’

In the previous chapter I already showed that ‘working on yourself’ covers an important part of the ritual. The ritual provides the proper environment and stimulates an attitude of firmeza, with which the teachings of the Daime can be fully imbibed. According to Harry the Daime helps you ‘to confront those things in yourself, the parts you keep running into; the parts that you are sad about or mad’. By doing so, you ‘gain insights, which you can apply in daily life’. He states that Daime therefore increases the speed of personal development: ‘every time you clean up something in yourself, you jump to another state of consciousness.’ If you drink Daime you learn how to jump from the one state of consciousness to the other more easily; and thus you will become more flexible.

Thom describes a similar ‘dissolution’ of personal ‘patterns’. He explains to me that every human being develops a lot of emotional and behavioural patterns, which together make up a character. According to him, these patterns determine how we react to specific situations. However: ‘at a certain moment Daime shows you that your whole self-image is a fantasy you created yourself. Daime helps you to dissolve that fantasy, and if you do so, you come closer to the core of who you really are and who you really want to be.’ Daime thus is believed to have a transformative effect on the lives of my respondents. Thom says: ‘I sometimes call the Daime my mother, because she gave me a new life.’

Alteration of consciousness: altered perception...

My respondents thus picture the general long-term effect of drinking Daime as a process of personal transformation. When I asked about the direct short-term effects of drinking the brew during the rituals, their answers can be roughly divided in three categories: 1) Daime is said to provoke a gradual expansion of consciousness; 2) to provide access to other realities or other levels of reality; and ultimately it is said to 3) bring about a state of união.

In chapter 1 I already explained that Daime, like other entheogens, is known to bring about ‘altered states of consciousness’; states that are characterised by a ‘qualitative alteration in the overall pattern of mental functioning’.¹²⁵ According to Maarten this alteration can be seen as a ‘gradual expansion’ of ordinary consciousness. When he drinks Daime, he experiences that ‘normal’ aspects of perception, like taste or vision, first only intensify and later on also gradually change. Maarten relates seeing brightness and radiation around other people, and he generally perceives colours more intense. Next to that his auditory sensations strengthen: ‘I perceive the sounds in the church very intensely, like they penetrate my being.’

When Maarten closes his eyes the singing of hymns often evokes images: ‘then I see enormous buildings, like cathedrals, being built up right in front of me.’ The visions go hand in hand with emotions: ‘When the music goes up, the buildings do so too, and I feel myself opening up completely. It is like I stick to the voices: I can surf on top of them, or ride on them like you would ride a horse. I let myself go completely with the music.’ A similar thing happens when the voices go

¹²⁵ Tart 1969 1-2.

down: then his emotions go down too. Maarten's emotions thus overlap with those in the music. Furthermore Maarten also describes an intensification of taste and smell and an increased bodily sensitivity. He says: 'actually, everything intensifies: the images you see, the things you hear and feel, the things you smell.'

Maarten's experiences of 'an opening up of the senses' are directly related to his view on reality. According to him 'consciousness' is more encompassing than we usually experience it: 'Usually your consciousness is focused on things you have to accomplish and other ego-related things like your identity, your body, and your feelings. However, in reality your consciousness is infinitely larger than your daily occupations, and the Daime helps you to open it up. Then everything becomes more multilayered, more intense, and more colourful.'

...and altered thinking

Next to altered perceptions my respondents also report alterations in their thinking as a consequence of drinking Daime. They told me their thinking becomes clearer and therefore they are able to gain insights on a wide variety of topics. Furthermore, my respondents also note an increased ability to think symbolically. Rommert: 'when you are under influence of Daime, everything fits exactly: a bird that sings, a sigh, a glance: everything has a meaning'. He claims that: 'when you drink Daime you are able to understand the meaning of all these seemingly trivial things.'

Harry had similar experiences, and from them he deduces that the whole universe must be meaningful. 'In an ordinary state of consciousness you might not be able to understand, but all seemingly trivial happenings contain in fact hidden messages'. He says: 'Even when you hear a candle crackling, it has a reason. There might be many more people in the room, but if you are the one who hears it crackling, than it contains a message for you.'¹²⁶ Other respondents state similar ideas. Ilona for example says: 'contingencies are for those who cannot accept synchronicity yet.' And Miriam regularly pointed at a bird or bee flying by during our conversation, stating that: 'those are little messengers too'. According to her, everything in the ordinary world is meaningful, as it can function as a 'portal' through which you can 'reach God'.

Harry, Miriam and Ilona thus believe that the meaningfulness they perceive under the influence of Daime holds true for daily reality. Rommert is not sure he can transpose the meaningfulness he experiences under influence of Daime to daily life, although he tends to believe so: 'I know that I have been in states of consciousness in which it was the truth. Furthermore Daime got me convinced that reality is far more miraculous than we can imagine.' However, he maintains that he has no ways to verify this idea in ordinary reality, so he decided to take it as a 'working hypothesis': 'The idea that everything relates to each other, and therefore has a meaning, sounds plausible to me, so I take it as an assumption.'

Reinier and Maarten did not mention anything that I would classify as the belief in a 'meaningful universe', this does not necessarily mean they did not have those experiences of meaningfulness, but I think I can safely state that they do not qualify them as important parameters for their belief system. Thom stands on the other end of the spectrum; he relates the meaningfulness he perceives under influence of Daime to the belief that the universe is a direct reflection of the individual. He

¹²⁶ Shanon also notes 'meaningfulness' as a characteristic of the ayahuasca experience. Shanon 2002: 60.

says: 'People are dreamers; they dream their lives without knowing it. A religious experience is recognition: suddenly you see through the dream or illusion.' According to Thom everyone dreams his own reality. The environment is thus a 'mirror of the self': everything in it contains messages that can help you learn about yourself. Thom states that it is possible to learn to become 'a master of the dream'; a thing he is working on by drinking Daime.

Experience of other realities

Miriam also describes the Daime as a device that 'opens up'. In the previous chapter I already recorded how she experiences that the singing of hymns 'brings you to the world behind the hymns'. She says the Daime has a similar 'opening up' effect on other matters: 'anything that I direct my intention to starts to reveal itself: when I look for example to a flower, or to a human being, I suddenly see the beauty of it shining through.' She explains this with the theory that reality is composed of multiple levels: the ordinary reality is just one of the many levels we can perceive and under influence of Daime she claims to be able to see the other levels too: 'when I drink Daime and I look at my leg, I do not only see just my leg, but I see all the other worlds that lie behind it.'

Other respondents also describe the ability to perceive or travel to 'other levels of reality'. They do not completely agree how these other levels relate to 'ordinary reality': some believe there are many levels - a specific number like seven or eight, or infinite - that exist at the same time and you can 'switch' between the levels by using your attention. Others just talk about 'the other world' in general, without distinguishing it into different layers. My respondents claim that they are sometimes able to perceive the different levels simultaneously, while at other times they are totally immersed in 'the other world' and 'have left the ordinary reality of the church.' The latter experience is often perceived as a shock.

Rommert for example describes his first experience: 'I still remember they read out loud the Consecration of the Space, and suddenly - that was so amazing - suddenly I really WAS somewhere else. And I was welcomed there by, well... a kind of entities, and at once I got the feeling I was home. They said: "Hey!" They didn't literally say it, but it felt like, or I understood them to be saying something like: "Welcome, good to have you over!" And I thought: "I know it here, but how is that possible?" ' In the 'other world', Rommert tells me, he got explanations about personal issues, but also about more metaphysical questions. According to him it was "like being in a reality where time and space do not exist". At one moment the 'beings' explain to him that "time only begins through intention". This confused him very much, and he became afraid he had to stay forever in the other reality: "when the ritual finally stopped I felt very relieved."

Rommert perceived his experience as that shocking that he invented a new word to describe it: 'onto-seismic'. He explains: 'it is a combination of *ontology* and *seismic*, and it refers to an earthquake in your ontology.' According to him the experience was almost traumatic, as it completely broke open his belief system. He was not able to explain his experiences from the dominant western perspective on reality in which he was raised, and this caused a conflict within him. He felt: "Either the experience was total nonsense - however, during it I really felt it was true. It felt as true as we are now sitting here: and with all the parameters at my disposal I do feel this is true too." Or, he had to accept the truth of the experience, which would imply giving up the complete belief system upon which he until that moment had built his reality. The idea scared him

so much that he did not dare to visit the church again for three months. After that his curiosity won from his fear. However, up till the present day he struggles with how to reconcile his Daime experiences with the prevalent western worldview.

Maarten also describes how his first experience appeared as a shock: “It felt like a sledge hammer that broke open my consciousness.” However, usually he experiences “the expansion of consciousness” as a gradual process. He explains his experiences as such: “imagine your consciousness as an enormous palace. You can go either upwards, to the nice and splendid chambers; there you will get wonderful experiences. Likewise, you can also go to the basement, where the dungeons are, where people are held captive.” He explains that, during the experiences, he is able to navigate in the palace of his consciousness: by looking down he first gets into the deeper layers of himself, the dark sides, “where I stuffed away all kinds of feelings, like anger and sadness.” Even deeper the border between his individual consciousness and a larger ‘collective’ unconsciousness fades: if he goes there, he is able to “tap into the darkness of other persons, or explore archetypal kinds of darkness, which are not bound to the individual.”

The relation between the individual and the collective parts of the ‘All consciousness’ is thus gradual according to Maarten: “I strongly feel that when your consciousness expands, it starts to coincide more and more with a total consciousness. When the individual consciousness opens up, it gradually overlaps with the cosmic consciousness.” According to him the ego forms the barrier between the individual and the collective consciousness: “When you tear down your ego, you slowly become part of the All.”

In general my respondents valued the instances in which they were able to experience different levels of reality simultaneously as higher than instances of being totally swept away in the ‘other world’. They explained to me that one of the consequences of training an attitude of firmeza is an increased ability to participate in the ritual, while having experiences in ‘the other world’. Harry says: “I think the purpose of Daime is that you don’t let yourself be carried away, but that you stay with your feet firmly on the ground. In that way you are able to bring the heavens down to the earth.”

Reaching união

In general the ‘other reality’ is seen as a transitory stage between the ordinary reality and the state of união, which I already started to describe in the previous chapter. Most of my respondents considered the experiences in the other realities to be meaningful, as they provided opportunities to learn ‘lessons’; which they both could apply to daily life situations and that helped them to reach the state of união. Only Ilona considered her experiences in the other world as ‘irrelevant’. According to her ‘the God experience’ is what it is all about, and all the experiences you could have in the in-between worlds, only distract you from that. She therefore refused to tell me about her own experiences in the ‘other worlds’ or to make definite statements about their nature.

However, she did want to tell me more about the “God experience” itself: “The Daime brings me in teta, the dream state; you can compare it to the dream state of the Australian Aborigines. (...) Essentially, when you want to explain it physically, I always say: all mudras¹²⁷ vibrate. Thus, your

¹²⁷ The term ‘mudra’ is common within several Hinduistic and Buddhistic traditions, where they refer to specific body positions that are supposed to affect the energy flow in the body. In this case Ilona probably uses the term in order to refer to the smallest building blocks of her body.

whole body starts to tingle. And the one moment this is stronger than the other. So, if you see the Light, it feels tingling. (...) And I feel peace, because everything occurs to be in a different relation. So, actually, you don't need any emotions any more. The cosmos doesn't have emotions; it is just something that unwinds. (...) All thoughts have vanished too: the only thing I have to do is to sit comfortably in the Light." According to her this experience "recharges" her: it helps her to "live more harmoniously in daily life."

Another respondent describes the experience of união in a slightly different manner, Miriam says: "when I stay seated and centred despite all the overwhelming experiences, I manage to really dive deep in the here and now: then all those worlds cease to exist. Every single session I work through this (...) and in the end, we sit there all together, and then we sing ourselves into heaven. Then we stand there, in the Garden – I can feel that too at these moments – then we stand there all together, and we sing about it too! We sing: 'we are here in the Garden with our Heavenly Father and Mother,' and then we are Home again. That is what it is all about: to be Home again after all our wanderings. (...) It is joy, upper joy, heavenly joy."

A comparison between these two descriptions already makes clear that these two respondents have fairly different narratives about the experience of união. I have shown the same holds for experiences in the ordinary reality and for experiences in other levels of reality. In the next chapter I will explain how my respondents relate their experiences to their cosmologies. I will show there does not only exist a wide variety in experiences, but also in the worldviews that the daimistas use to make sense of them. In the remainder of this chapter I would like to highlight two characteristics that according to me are central in the Daime experience, and that are reflected in the narratives about Daime. These are the fact that my respondents describe Daime, seemingly paradoxical, as provoking both a 'feeling of truth' and a 'feeling of relativity'.

Feeling of truth

One of the first things that struck me while listening to my respondents' stories is that they usually talk about their experiences as one would talk about daily life experiences. They do not present them as 'dreams' or 'hallucinations': their Daime experiences are as real to them as the conversation we were having in the interview reality.

When Rommert for example told me that he met his present girlfriend for the first time in a vision, I did not immediately understand him correctly, as he just said: "We sat on a bench in the church and talked together for a while." Only later on, it became clear to me that this was no ordinary experience, but a vision he had during a Santo Daime work. In the ordinary reality the woman had not been present in the church. According to me, the vividness with which my respondents tell about their experiences illustrates the extent to which they are real to them.

As is the case with ordinary experience, in a Daime experience all different elements of experiencing, like bodily sensations, emotions, thoughts, and sensory perceptions interact in such a way that the experience "feels true". Rommert explains: "according to the parameters I have at my disposal this conversation - in the ordinary reality - feels true. The same holds for my experiences during the works: based on the parameters I have at my disposal at that moment, I judge it plausible that these experiences are true. However, there is no way to verify it."

In literature the Daime experience is known to go together with a feeling of truth.¹²⁸ Brissac, who studied the União do Vegetal, for example describes how in his research setting ‘feeling’ is used as a fundamental criterion to determine whether an experience is considered true or not.¹²⁹ Maarten confirms this by saying that his visions are “like in a dream, but then very real, so I have the feeling it is true.”

Another reason for me to claim that the daimistas generally hold their experiences to be true, is that they use them to build their worldviews upon. As already discussed in chapter 4, one of the main parts of the ritual consists of receiving ‘lessons’. These might contain insights about personal issues, but they might also be about large scale metaphysical questions. In general my respondents take the lessons they receive during the works very seriously; they try to apply them in daily life, and – as will be discussed in the next chapter – they form important ingredients of the ‘cosmologies’ in which they relate themselves to the broader fabric of life.

Feeling of relativity

On the other hand, my respondents are all very careful to not present their story as a ‘universal truth’. They were all stressing the fact that every daimista tells another story, because people generally do not have the same experiences under influence of Daime. This awareness made them relativise their own statements. I noticed my respondents were all very cautious in formulating any ‘truth claim’. And if they did so, they usually immediately undermined it by saying that ‘this is of course my view’. Harry for example tells me: ‘That is something that I once saw in the Daime: that it really *is* like that.’ Only to immediately follow with: ‘Well... for *me* it is.’ And Miriam, after explicating a complex vision on the nature of evil, laughingly remarks: ‘But this is *my* truth and doubtlessly it is true, although it is only a personal reality. At least this is my experience.’

Although the experiences thus go together with strong feelings of truth, my respondents paradoxically do not tend to make any truth claims based upon them. To the contrary: their statements tend to become more relative. According to me this has to do with one of the discussed qualities of the Daime experience, namely that it *breaks open* previously held belief systems. When one experiences things one previously held impossible – like meeting supernatural beings - with the vividness and the clarity of ordinary experience, this can be quite shocking; as was the case for Rommert and Maarten. These experiences impose doubt on any held beliefs about the nature of reality. Combined with the realisation that Daime experience varies widely among daimistas, my respondents generally came to the conclusion that it is impossible – and according to some also irrelevant - to make definite statements about the ‘realness’ of their experiences.

¹²⁸ Brissac 2006: 330. Shanon 2002: 70-71.

¹²⁹ Brissac 2006: 330.

6. Cosmologies: embedding the experience

In this chapter I will present the cosmologies that my respondents construct to embed their experiences in. These are the narratives that they use to both explain their experiences and to relate them to the broader fabric of their lives.¹³⁰ Giving a readable overview of the extensive belief systems that were related to me necessarily implies a selection out of an impressive amount of interview data.¹³¹ The main themes that I will discuss in this chapter are: the nature of reality and God; the nature of supernatural beings – with a special focus on Santa Maria; and views on good and evil. I will conclude with my respondents' views on how to integrate the experiences in daily life.¹³²

In discussing the most central aspects of my respondents' belief systems, I will focus on how they interact with the experiences. I will show how the daimistas use existing belief systems to embed their experiences in. The experiences not only make previously held beliefs more 'alive', they also make them more relative and dynamic.

The nature of reality and God

In order to explain their experiences, my respondents automatically came to speak about the nature of reality. Usually they started discussing their cosmologies when I asked them about Daime. One of the standard questions during the interviews was: what is Daime to you? And: what happens when you drink Daime? In the chapter on Daime I already gave a foretaste of their answers. I explained how all of my respondents, in a wide variety of ways, believed the Daime taught them lessons (amongst others about the nature of reality) and showed them the way towards a state of união. There I already explained that my respondents were by no means unanimous about the nature of união. Some equated it to a union with the divine, others with the attainment of non-duality, and so on. In this paragraph I will discuss their different positions at greater length.¹³³

Miriam told me that Daime both gave her an intensified experience of the ordinary reality and elevated her to other levels of reality. Her experiences on these other levels – in which she for example meets supernatural beings - are a direct incentive for her to believe in the existence of

¹³⁰ In the chapters on ritual and Daime I inevitably already touched upon some cosmological themes. However, over here I will discuss them in more depth.

¹³¹ For a methodological justification of the selection procedure, I refer to chapter 3.

¹³² Themes that I did not include, and that occurred quite frequently were reincarnation and apocalypticism. Five of my respondents were explicit about their belief in reincarnation, the other three did not exclude the possibility. Four of them also reported experiences of past lives themselves. However, these experiences did not occur during Santo Daime rituals, and therefore I chose to not discuss them here. Furthermore, their beliefs about reincarnation can be seen as an extension of their ideas about the nature of reality: their reincarnation stories did not particularly change them. In a very generalised way the respondents that believed in reincarnation were convinced that a particular part of the ego/identity would survive after death, but still would ultimately merge into the 'All'. The respondents who did not believe in reincarnation believed that the ego/identity would dissolve completely in the All immediately after death. Regarding apocalypticism: a couple of respondents mentioned their concerns about the future of the planet, and their belief in a new 'age' that was about to come. However, these ideas were generally very abstract and not directly linked to their experiences during the Santo Daime works, which was my reason not to include them in the present discussion.

¹³³ Note that the cosmologies of my respondents in reality were not that consistent or well-defined as they might appear here. These summaries should be taken as idealised, static reflections of their ideas. In the next chapter I will turn my attention to these inconsistencies in particular, and explain what they can teach us about the relation between narrative and experience.

these levels (and of these supernatural beings). According to her, reality consists of a certain amount of 'physical' levels, and a non-physical 'All', which she equates with 'God'. Paradoxically 'the All' simultaneously encompasses the physical levels of reality, and is a separate state one can be in. Miriam claims to have experienced 'being in the All' herself too, which she relates as 'an experience of total bliss'. Furthermore, according to Miriam, the All is the source from which all of existence is created, and continues to be created (as the process is endless). Simultaneously all of existence is involved in a process of 'going back to the All'. She thus sees the nature of reality as an endless cyclical movement between creation and the abolishment of creation. Movement, in both directions, is according to her the ultimate purpose of the Santo Daime rituals, and also of life in general.

Ilona has a comparable vision on the nature of reality; although she did not present it in a cyclical manner. Instead she uses the symbol of the cross to clarify her vision. According to her 'reality', or 'existence' is made up of two poles. The horizontal pole is the one that corresponds with Miriam's 'physical reality'. Strikingly Ilona also distinguishes different 'spheres' within the physical reality. However, the specific nature of these 'spheres' is irrelevant according to her, as they all still make up part of creation and they are therefore ultimately changeable. What really matters according to Ilona is the vertical pole: the pole through which one connects oneself with the Divine. According to Ilona, the Santo Daime rituals are aimed at establishing this connection. This leads to what she calls "the God-experience". Ilona explains that Daime can also be used to explore the other realities in the physical world, but dismisses this possibility. According to her connecting one-self to 'God' is most important, and one should live as much as possible from out of this connection during daily life on earth. According to her, earthly life becomes meaningful if you strive to live in the specific manifestation that you are accidentally in, to the fullest.

Thom equated 'God' with 'Consciousness'. According to him "God is the consciousness of the universe". He believes this consciousness is present in all of existence, from the tiniest one-cell organism to human beings. 'God' spreads himself deliberately out in all these parts of creation, and as we thus are one of these particles "we are the universe that beholds itself". That makes us as human beings co-creators of reality, and therefore Thom believes that we are ultimately responsible for the world we create around ourselves. According to Thom the ego separates us from the knowledge of our origin and of our creative powers, but by drinking Daime we start to realise that the ego is essentially an illusion. When the illusion dissolves, we start to realise our creative powers more and more. We come to understand that the whole world around us is a reflection of our own mind, and we learn how to affect it. According to Thom he purpose of life is to "cultivate your garden" in the most beautiful way you can imagine.

Maarten also spoke about 'Consciousness', although in a different sense than Thom. According to Maarten individual based consciousness is connected to a larger all-encompassing collective consciousness. Based on his experiences he believes that by drinking Daime the awareness of this individual consciousness gradually expands and starts to encompass more and more of the non-individual, non-personal 'All', which according to him can be equated with 'non-duality'. Moving towards non-duality is according to him the ultimate aim of a Daime session, and of life itself. This can be done by the integration of the opposites that exist within the world of duality. Maarten's cosmology to a certain extent resembles Miriam's, who also distinguished the world of creation (in Maarten's words: the world of opposites) from the non-created All (non-duality, according to Maarten). Miriam's idea of the relation between the ego and the All is comparable to Maarten's idea

about individual and collective consciousness. However, Miriam implements an element of direction: the process is cyclical; whereas Maarten is less clear about the larger scale of the development. Furthermore Maarten indicates a method how to reach the state of 'non-duality', whereas this was less evident in Miriam's story.

Reinier also believes life originates from one universal source, this source he calls 'The Creative Force', or 'the Life Force'. As discussed in the chapter on ritual, Reinier believes that the Creative Force spread out 'in trillion particles', which now make up our existence. All beings contain a sparkle of the Life Force. In contrast to matter, these sparkles are immortal, and long to merge with the Life Force again. According to Reinier, this might temporarily happen at the moment we die, than: "the drop flows back into the ocean, and suddenly the whole ocean flows into the drop." Reinier believes that drinking Daime helps him to become more aware of himself being part of that 'ocean' or 'Life Force'. Furthermore, by drinking Daime he learns how to admit that Life Force more and more in his daily life.

Weinand believes something similar, according to him everyone once was 'with God'; however "we have separated ourselves from Him". Weinand: "The Daime shows you everything that you yourself have separated from God. Everything you thought outside of God. That includes the terrible things. Those things you want to, but cannot forget about, because they are buried somewhere deep in the caverns of your soul. The Daime shows you this, and learns you have to look at everything with love. Only then these things dissolve." Following Weinand, the Daime thus helps the daimista to come closer to God again.

According to Harry "we are all children of God", and he believes that "God wants the very best for his own children. Therefore He left behind a sparkle of Himself in us." Harry believes that this sparkle is the soul, which thus stands in direct connection with God. Drinking Daime helps one to "remember who you truly are: it leads you to your own heart, your own consciousness, where you are Creator." Thereby Daime helps one to progress towards the purpose of life, which according to Harry is: "to experience your own Love fully." Harry believes this development covers multiple lives, in which we gradually evolve to become closer to ourselves, and therefore closer to God.

Rommert also believes everything "evolves towards more light". According to him there are different levels of evolution or development, and even if it does not always feel that way, all these levels are essentially "well": they all "fit within the larger whole". Drinking Daime not only gives Rommert these insights into the nature of reality, he also experiences that "all is one" directly, which according to him is a religious experience. However, Rommert is very keen on relativising his claims about the nature of reality. He continuously stresses that his theory is no more than a mere "hypothesis", and his statements no more than "assumptions" based on "unverifiable experiences". According to him: "reality is so queer, so marvellous, there are so many things we have no idea of." In order to stress his point, he cites Terence McKenna who stated that "reality is much stranger than we can ever suppose."

From this short overview it becomes clear that my respondents vary widely in their descriptions of the nature of reality. There might be some commonalities, like the belief in different levels of reality, to which Daime provides access; the belief in one universal 'source of creation'; and the human ability to have a 'mystical' experience of merging into this 'All'. However, their opinions on how the

‘source’ or ‘life force’ relates itself to the individual identity or ego varies widely. Some believe human beings only carry one tiny spark of the divine within them – which makes it possible to connect ourselves to the Life Force. Whereas others believe that we can ultimately become one with this Life Force. My respondents furthermore differed in the development which they imposed on ‘reality’. Whereas Harry and Rommert propose a classical evolutionary perspective - the whole universe is developing towards an end goal, namely the merging into the All - others, like Miriam, have a more cyclical perspective, merging and spreading apart as two never-ending alternating sides of the same coin. Others don’t see any progress or development at all, as they believe the universe to be in this state continuously.

According to me, the diversity between the stories of my respondents illustrates two points already made in the theoretical chapters. At first my respondents are clearly engaged in a dialogical relationship with existing traditions in order to frame their own narrative. The already existing narrative structures of these traditions provide the building blocks which they use to compose their own story. Maarten, who has been interested in psychology for a long time, is for example more inclined to phrase his experience in terms of individual and collective consciousness; whereas Ilona, descendant from an orthodox Protestant milieu, prefers to talk about ‘God’. I think it not necessary to dive deep into the biographical background of my respondents to prove this point,¹³⁴ I rather turn it around: the fact that their cosmologies differ to such a large extent already shows that individual background plays a role in the interpretation of religious experiences. My respondents were inclined to relate their experiences to ideas they were already familiar with.

Secondly, the diversity between the collected stories illustrates the theoretical idea that not only the *narrative* is influenced by individual background, but that every *experience* is in interaction with the complete background of the person experiencing.¹³⁵ This implies that the religious or spiritual background of my respondents not only colours how they speak about their experiences, but also what they experience exactly. Taking it further, this means that there is no universal Daime experience. A person who believes in God not only frames his experience in other words than a person who does not believe in God: he also experiences something else.

The nature of supernatural beings

As described in chapter 5, the experiences of my respondents can be roughly divided into: experiences of intensified perception and thinking within the ordinary reality; experiences in other realities; and the more ‘mystical’ experiences related to the attainment of união. Although there was no unanimity on how these different levels of reality should be understood, and how they are related to each other exactly,¹³⁶ one common denominator of the second category seems to be the presence of supernatural beings.

¹³⁴ Furthermore, weighting it against the value of protecting the privacy of my respondents, I chose it not worth to do so.

¹³⁵ As noted in chapter 2, Gadamer states that every experience is dialectical towards a tradition. According to him every experience both interacts with and changes one’s whole being (see p. 16). Likewise, Katz argued that unmediated experiences are impossible.

¹³⁶ In most of the narratives, the boundaries between these three categories were not that clear-cut. Therefore it might be more truthful to the stories of my respondents to picture the transitions between them as gradual.

Almost all my respondents told me they had experienced the presence of supernatural beings.¹³⁷ To some it is a frequently occurring phenomenon during the Santo Daime works, and they are able to provide a systematically sketched hierarchy of supernatural beings - ranging from spirits of the deceased and general instructive spirits, to aliens, and higher 'beings of light'. Amongst the latter also belong the characters that figure prominently in the Santo Daime hymns, like the Virgin Mary, Jesus, and the archangel Michael. To others the appearance of supernatural beings is less frequent, and they therefore play a less central role in their stories.

How do my respondents themselves understand these experiences? As already pointed out in the previous chapter the Daime induces both a 'feeling of truth' and a 'feeling of relativity' on the experiences of my respondents. This paradoxical dynamic can be clearly discerned in the accounts of meeting supernatural beings.

On the one hand these beings are perceived as 'really real'. My respondents interact with them, as if they were 'ordinary beings', and they report that different sensory modalities are involved in the experience. The perceiver is not only able to see a particular being right in front of him; he is also able to communicate with it. Furthermore, the interaction might be accompanied with physical sensations. Rommert for example relates how a being came to him and "removed something from out of my stomach". He describes feeling a heavy load in that spot of his body, which according to him was the physical result of fear which he bottled up over there. After this 'operation' Rommert felt much better.

In a similar vein Maarten tells how an apparition of the Virgin Mary was accompanied by emotions of love and happiness. He relates how he: "saw Santa Maria appear in a column of light in the centre of the church". When Mary appeared, "in her heavenly shape: full of light and luminous", he: "felt her presence really strong". According to Maarten: "it felt like she opened up my heart completely, I felt incredibly happy, it was completely splendid." In other instances Maarten experienced that Mary gave him direct instructions relating to his personal life. He takes these instructions very seriously, and acts upon them when he returns from the church.

Although these characteristics make the experiences of my respondents very 'realistic', they do not necessarily use them to confirm truth claims about the nature of reality. As already discussed in the previous chapter, Rommert admits that he has no way to prove the existence of supernatural beings within the framework of Western mainstream culture. Ilona agrees that, especially the scientific paradigm is insufficient to prove the reality behind Daime experiences. However, according to her, trying to do so is also ultimately irrelevant. In this sense she is on one line with Thom, who – as noted before – does not care about the exact nature of supernatural beings. The hymns he received from "higher dimensional beings" make him happy, and "that is what counts," he says.

Sometimes the Daime experience provides the ground for new beliefs about the nature of reality, or about how to behave in daily life. In these cases the daimistas were more inclined to impose at least a certain level of truth upon them. Usually, in these cases, my respondents usually claim that although their experiences are true to them personally, they should in no means be seen as informing universally valid truths. For example, after elaborating extensively about a meeting with the archangel Michael, one of my respondents suddenly stated that although other daimistas might

¹³⁷ Only Ilona refrained from talking about supernatural beings. According to her experiences in the other realities are irrelevant, and talking about them would be distracting us from the essence of her story.

have visions of the same archangel Michael, they might experience him in a completely different way, and it might mean something else to them.

Next to stressing the individuality of every experience, the daimistas sometimes also recourse to 'symbolical' explanations of their experiences in order to circumvent the truth question. Harry for example explains his experiences from the perspective of learning lessons: when he tells me about his vision in which he attacked a female being with a spear, he does not emphasize the nature of this vision, but instead focuses on what this particular action means to him. In this case he learned that "attack in general is wrong, and he should be careful not to attack any being in the future".

Thus, symbolically interpreting their experiences; individualising them; and undermining or doubting their universal validation, are several strategies by which my respondents interweave a 'feeling of relativity' in their narratives.

Santa Maria

In the chapter on the ritual, I already related that the members of the Céu da Santa Maria use cannabis as a second sacrament in their services. In the church the sacrament is known as Santa Maria, as the church members generally associate the plant with the Virgin Mary, and more generally with the feminine aspects of the divine. My respondents told me that both "power plants" differ slightly in their working, but that they in general reinforce each other. Compared to Daime, the consecration of Santa Maria has a less central place in the works: whereas everyone participating is obliged to drink Daime, the consecration of Santa Maria is voluntary, and only part of the congregation participates in this part of the ritual.

During the interviews it became clear that Santa Maria played an important role in the lives of many of my respondents. They not only talked with great respect and reverence about the sacrament Santa Maria, they also came to see the Virgin Mary as an important supernatural being that they had actually experience with themselves. Maarten, Rommert, Thom, and Harry all related impressive Marian apparitions to me. One of those stories I want to explore a little deeper, as it nicely shows how the interplay between a 'feeling of truth' and a 'feeling of relativity', can become even more complex.

In one of the Santo Daime works several beings appeared to Rommert, according to him: "in order to transmit a lesson about the working of images". Here is how he related his story to me:

These beings told me: we have got a lesson for you. So I said: "well, that is ok, show me." They said: "the most important thing is that you don't mix up the image with the experience, do you get that?" I said: "yes I do."

They explained to me that many people stop at the image, and therefore miss out on the experience. Thus it was essential that I should release the image at the right time.

Then they showed me the image. And they showed me the image of the Mary statue that belonged to my grandmother. (Rommert interrupts his story to show me the specific statue he is talking about; a 30 cm high sculpture, picturing a cloaked Virgin Mary surrounded by a snake and a moon.)

So (he continues) this is what they showed me. They said: "look: Mary, moon, snake, coat, do you see it? Yes, you've seen it? Ok." And then they removed the image and told me: "now you can

see the real thing.” The image was gone and: wow! What is this? It is so beautiful! There is light everywhere! And...!

And then they stopped the experience, and they started all over again. They made me build up the image, step by step: “Do you see it: Mary?” “Yes.” “Snake?” “Yes.” “Moon at her feet?” “Yes.” “Coat?” “Yes.” “Ok, and then we remove the picture...”

And again! Oh, so beautiful! You know? It was feminine, but so comforting! And all the grief she takes away: how she comforts everyone, and sees all the pain, you know? Yes, but how does she look? (He points at the statue) This is the portal, but it is not Mary herself. You actually only see the portal, but you have to step through to experience Mary.¹³⁸

Here several aspects of what I called before a ‘feeling of truth’ and a ‘feeling of relativity’ become integrated in one single experience. First, from the story Rommert’s experience emerges to be a ‘realistic’ one: he does not talk about it as if it was a strange dream or fantasy, and he does not doubt the nature of the beings that came to teach him a lesson. Furthermore, it was not a one-way vision: Rommert interacts actively with the beings, and the vision is accompanied by strong emotions. These characteristics make the experience realistic. At last, the lesson taught is taken seriously by Rommert: it gave him new insights which he applied in his daily life.

However, if we move to the next level of the story: the lesson this experience contained – according to Rommert - is about the relativity of images. The beings explained to him that his picture of Mary is a limited one: his previously held conceptions about the Virgin Mary turn out to be clustered in the picture of the Mary statue he still knows from his youth: it is a socially conditioned idea about Mary.

Then, we see the paradox at work: under influence of Daime Rommert’s previously existing idea about Mary becomes literally ‘alive’: hereby it gains on meaningfulness, and becomes deeper ingrained in his being.¹³⁹ At the same time, however, this specific experience breaks open his previously held conceptions about Mary. The beings teach him that his ideas were just ‘constructions’; images he learned. He suddenly realises that his idealised picture of the Mary statue, based on his individual background, should only be understood as a portal to what – on a higher level - he conceives of as the ‘real’ Mary.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ This is how Rommert conveyed the story to me during the interview. Interestingly, Rommert wrote down another narrative of the same experience directly after its happening. A comparison between the two accounts nicely illustrates my claims about the context dependency of story-telling.

The written account forms part of the collection of trip reports that Rommert generously provided for publication as appendix of this thesis. (The stories are also recorded online in English translation and can be found on: <http://www.zoomdout.com/1/post/2012/09/ayahuasca-trip-report-teachings-from-hyperspace-1-of-3.html>.) The specific episode with the Mary statue can be found on p. 83-84. The picture over there is part of his original publication.

¹³⁹ Strikingly, Brissac recorded a comparable story when he investigated the União do Vegetal, another ayahuasca religion in Brazil. One of his respondents also saw a vision of Mary, in the form of a familiar statue. The difference was that he did not have the experience of the ‘real Mary’ behind the statue. However, the respondent related that this vision made his already passive belief in Mary now became more ‘alive’. Brissac names this event an example of “encompassment in the force of the burraqueira”. Through “an intense existential experience” an old element from the respondent’s life was “incorporated in the União do Vegetal universe of convictions.” Brissac 2006: 341-347.

¹⁴⁰ In a similar vein Jimmy Weiskopf compared the multilayeredness of the ayahuasca experience with watching a movie: “if we follow the metaphor of the cinema, we may be able to understand that the different images that we see on the movie screen are merely a tool that serves to transmit a story. (...) whose real significance is, at bottom, emotional or aesthetic, not strictly visual. The visions are (...) the reflection of a

Followed this line of reasoning, Rommert learned that the Daime vision itself should be understood as an intermediate, not as 'truth'. The lesson he learned through this specific experience was that images are necessary to be able to refer to transcendental experiences. However, this experience also made him realise that images ultimately do not coincide with the things they refer to.

Thus, although the experience has a high 'feeling of truth', it also has a high 'feeling of relativity'. Rommert learned that Mary's image actually stands for a range of qualities and feelings that transcend the image itself. Although the vision was very realistic, he actually learned not to take his – very realistic – visions (and images of/within visions) at face value. Instead he learned he should look beyond: at that what those images refer to. Rommert understood that the image of Mary actually refers to something that is transcending images. However, only *through* this vision – and through looking beyond the image - he was able to understand this.

Going down

In the chapter on ritual, I already discussed how the Santo Daime works are characterised by a dynamic interplay between 'going up' and 'going down'; between having *mirações* and learning lessons. This implies that the experiences of my respondents are not all pleasurable. In this paragraph I discuss how the experiences my respondents had during the 'working' parts of the ritual are explained from out of the cosmologies.

The Daime experience can be relatively harsh; in the literature Daime/ayahuasca is known as regularly provoking a shorter or longer period of physical illness, which can consist of sweating, trembling, vomiting, diarrhea and the like.¹⁴¹ These experiences are widely perceived as coinciding with a spiritual purification. Particularly, the vomiting is seen as cleansing the body and mind from all problems and obstacles that might prevent their connection with 'the divine' or 'the life force'. Often it is deemed necessary to go through the dark, to arrive at the light.

In some of the interviews this 'grand narrative' within the ayahuasca literature was reflected. Ilona, for example, claims that she "did nothing more than vomit" during the first twelve years of her membership. Even now, after twenty years of experience, she has to go through a period of illness every single work, in order to "get to the Light". The other respondents experienced the physical effects of drinking Daime to a lesser extent, although they all were very clear in stating that the experience is more than only beautiful.

During the fieldwork I observed that only a minority of the Santo Daime members made use of the vomit-baskets that were generously provided in the church every time. However, most of my respondents spontaneously reported one or more past experiences of physical illness during their membership of the church.

For most of them illness was related to a broader complex of 'dark' experiences, which were reported by all daimistas. The part of the ritual in which people 'go down' is often seen as the real 'working' part of the work. Generally more 'work is to be done' during the first part of the ritual, but this may vary from individual to individual, and from work to work. If we follow the narratives of my respondents, there does not seem to be a clear pattern in the distribution of *mirações* and 'lessons'

process of inner purification, that is traumatic, multifaceted and uniquely of an directed to the subject." Weiskopf 2004: 37-38.

¹⁴¹ Weiskopf 2004; Shanon: 2002. Taussig: 1987.

in the Daime experience. Weinand for example remembers: “My first work was mainly beautiful, although I already felt the darker sides”. Only later on this darkness became more dominant: at a specific moment Weinand even felt he couldn’t handle it anymore, and he temporarily quit drinking Daime. However, later on he returned to the church, and although he still sometimes feels he “prefers to walk away”, he now has learned that he has to accept both sides of the experience.

Like many other respondents, Weinand namely believes the only way to deal with the darker experiences is to accept them. Only in this way they can be transformed. Weinand: “you go as deep down into hell, until you realise it doesn’t exist.” As already noted, Weinand believes the universe was created by “separating it from God”; the less pleasant aspects are as much part of it, as the more pleasant ones. Rommert also states that “suffering and pain are part of the cosmos”. However, he believes that “everything is essentially well”. “Even though it not always looks like it, it all fits, even the darker or less pleasant experiences, or parts of life, make up part of the larger whole,” he says.

Other respondents have similar views. Miriam for example stated that “creation is essentially dualistic: both dark and light sides are part of it.” She believes that in order to attain the divine ‘Oneness’ again, this has to be acknowledged, because: “you cannot become One if you leave out half of creation.” Maarten agrees, in his words: “the only way to transcend duality is by a connection of opposites.”

My respondents differ in their views on how to get this connection of opposites done. In the chapter on ritual I already described that both an attitude of firmeza and surrender are hold valuable in the Santo Daime church in order to navigate through the ritual. The propositions of my respondents on how to counteract, dissolve, or abolish the suffering, all ranged between confronting it with an attitude of firmeza, to meeting it with an attitude of surrender.

Miriam, Rommert and Maarten for example claimed that it was necessary to “live through” the experience in order to “get healed”. Maarten told me that he was recently suffering from “pain in his solar plexus”, a location in his body where according to him much pain and sorrow were accumulated. At the moment of the interview he had to “pay much attention” to this area of his body – not only during the works, but also during daily life. In similar situations he experienced that “holding it in awareness usually resolves a specific pain or illness”.

Miriam and Rommert also report “living through” instances of suffering. Rommert for example once experienced an “intense fear of death” in his lower back, which stayed there during three rituals in a row. Miriam claims to “have experienced all facets of loneliness” during the Santo Daime works: “I definitely have screamed the whole church together”, she says. However, according to Miriam, confronting the suffering is not as bad as it would seem: “you never get more than you can stand. Only the fear itself is horrible,” she states: “when I think of that it really makes me cry.”

Miriam believes that “the integration of the dark and light sides of creation” starts with comprehension. According to Maarten it is first necessary to just perceive the suffering, before it is possible to ‘heal’. Harry takes a more neutral stand, according to him: “you don’t have to do anything with it, as everything – even the suffering - is allowed to be. It is just your own choice what to do with it.” However, according to him, it generally helps to “stay grounded in your own light” while you are confronting the darker sides of life.

According to Rommert the trick is also to allow the darkness to be: “Just by seeing the blackness, the darkness, and letting it be there, I can allow the light. And by shining light on it, it is healed.” During

a Santo Daime work, he believes “the darkness in the room gets transformed. The attendants take their darkness with them, and together we heal the darkness and the pain; by letting through the light.”

A more radical perspective is proposed by Weinand. According to him just awareness or acceptance is not enough. In order to let the darkness disappear it has to be confronted with its opposite: love. Weinand told me he once had a vision of a very realistic, man-sized demon which stood only one-and-a-half meters away from him in the same room. Weinand was shocked at first, but then realised he should not be afraid. He did not have to do anything more than look at the demon, accept his presence, and “send him love”. Weinand told me he knew this would be the only way to let the demon disappear in the end.

My respondents thus do not completely agree on the best method to counter suffering. Likewise they have different opinions about the exact relation between dark and light. Although they all believe that drinking Daime “helps you to move towards the light”, they do not agree on the direction of this development on a larger scale. Harry for example states: “when you become lighter yourself, you will also attract more darkness”. He explains: “without the dark you wouldn’t be able to see the light”. Thom argues in the opposite direction: according to him: “light attracts light, and dark attracts dark”, thus: “the more you move towards the light, the more pleasant your life becomes”.

Ambiguity also exists about the location of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ in the larger cosmologies of my respondents. They seem to simultaneously place it outside themselves in a larger ‘cosmic play’ between ‘dark and light entities’, and tend to psychologise it by stating that ‘good and bad are all in ourselves.’

To get some insight in how my respondents come to terms with these kinds of paradoxes, Thom’s grand narrative qualifies as a nice illustration. As already noted, Thom believes that the whole universe is a reflection of the Self. The good and bad entities that we perceive outside of ourselves are according to him just externalised projections of our mind. He believes that the individual mind is actually part of the larger Mind, or ‘God’: only through the ego we perceive it as separated, which essentially is an illusion. Therefore, he states that the things we usually perceive as ‘bad’ are all ego-related. “When we are able to let go of our ego,” he believes: “these ‘bad’ things will automatically dissolve.” And: “when it is all gone completely, then you only have the beautiful, the positive left. You become more and more love, which actually is God.”¹⁴²

Integration in daily life

From the narrative fragments discussed in this chapter, it becomes clear that my respondents all take the Daime experience very serious. They believe drinking Daime provides them with insights on cosmological questions, and teaches them how to apply this knowledge in daily life. As already noted in the previous chapters, my respondents therefore commonly picture the Santo Daime works as a ‘training ground’ or ‘school’.

First, my respondents claim to ‘learn lessons’ - the insights they gain from drinking Daime. Second, they claim to develop attitudes of firmeza and surrender. These two elements guide them in

¹⁴² Strikingly, on another level in his story, he undermines this whole theory on good and bad – and thereby also his own previously made claims building on it – by arguing that dark and light ‘do not really exist’. According to him ‘it is only a judgement from the observer’.

attaining the 'ultimate' state of união. However, my respondents all seemed to agree that this aim is actually not that 'ultimate'. "It wouldn't make sense to drink Daime if you don't change your life after it," was a phrase commonly heard. Ilona for example says: "it wouldn't make sense to only sit in the Light."

In line with this, my respondents all stressed that it is essential that daimistas practise the lessons learned and the attitudes they cultivated in their daily lives. Hereby the boundaries between the ritual and daily life become blurred. Thom for example stated that "every day is a work" to him. He tells me he consciously uses the learned techniques in order to "keep on dissolving parts of the ego" during his daily life. Other respondents similarly stated that they use the learned techniques not only during the Daime works, but also when they are confronting everyday situations.

Ilona explains that drinking Daime helps her to connect with the divine, by training how to do this during the Santo Daime works, she learns how to do this in daily life as well, and as such can be "a channel for the divine in the ordinary world." In order to make that connection, Harry tells me: "it is necessary to stay grounded during the ritual". In that way, he believes, you learn how to "bring the worlds together," thus: how to connect the união experience to the reality of everyday life.

7. When experience turns into narrative

The central focus of this thesis has been the interrelation between the Daime experience and the narratives that my respondents tell about it. In the present chapter I will one more time run through the entire process by which the Daime experience turns into a narrative. I will start with referring back to the theoretical chapters in order to investigate more in depth to what extent it is possible to answer my research question. I will also discuss how doing fieldwork helped me in the process of answering this question. Then I will give a brief summary of the narratives of my respondents, and I will determine what they actually tell us about the experience. I will furthermore discuss how my respondents themselves understand the relation between narrative and experience. Although they themselves stressed the inadequacy of their narratives, they did consider story-telling meaningful. This leads me to some final statements on approaching the Daime narrative.

What we know about the flow: experiencing

To what extent is it possible to answer the first part of my research question: what do Dutch members of the Santo Daime church *experience* when they are under the influence of Daime?

At first it must be said that the question misleadingly assumes that it is possible to give a general answer to what ‘the Daime experience’ might be like. In the second chapter I already argued that every experience is unique, as everyone experiences from his or her unique perspective and moment in time. This implies that every daimista necessarily must have a different Daime experience. Thus, that there could be no single answer to the question.

A second problem with answering the question is the realisation that every narrative always implies a reduction of the complexity and multilayeredness of the experience reality. This implies that any narrative would be inadequate in answering this question, the scholarly narrative not excepted. Even though the narratives might partly reflect the experience, we know the experience itself was more complex.

Taking these two limitations into account, I argue that it is still possible to say something about the experiences of my respondents. In chapter 1 I already argued that every narrative is in interaction with the experience reality, and therefore must reflect it at least partially. A narrative is not an isolated reality in itself; it is intrinsically connected to the original experience. However, this does not mean that it is possible to distract ‘pure experience’ elements from the narrative.

In the first chapter I already pointed out that the narratives of my respondents consist of more ingredients than just derivations of the experience. Any narrative is always in interaction with the individual background of the speaker and that of the addressee: both are involved in a dialogical creation of reality, and furthermore both use elements from the wider social, cultural historical context as building blocks for the narrative under construction.

At first sight it seems obvious that by distracting these specific elements from the stories, the elements that derive from the experience itself must necessarily be the ones left over. However, reasoning like this does not take into account that the experience itself is also dynamic, and in interaction with the daimista’s whole being and social context. Both during the experience and during the narrative making multiple interactions take place on multiple levels of the process. Therefore it is impossible to trace back the origin of the separate elements, simply because there are

no pure 'experience' elements. Instead, the different elements are irreducibly interwoven and analytically disentangling them is no more than an idealised dream of the researcher.

The only way to say something about the experiences is thus by showing their interrelation with all the other different elements in the narrative. This is what I tried to do in the previous three chapters. Before I will turn to a summary of the narratives, I will point out how doing fieldwork helped me to both understand and explicate the interrelation between experience and narrative.

Participating in Daime experience and narrative making

In chapter 2 I argued that in order to understand the experience-narrative dynamics that my respondents were going through, it was necessary to participate in the experience and narrative making process myself. First, without fieldwork, I would not have been able to write the chapter on ritual. My argument that through the ritual the attitudes of firmeza and surrender are cultivated is based on a combination of both interview data and fieldwork observations.

Second, by drinking Daime myself I was able to understand how physical effects contribute to the experience. My descriptions on the effects of the brew are all based on the interview data. Likewise is my claim that drinking Daime makes pre-existing beliefs more realistic and alive; while it at the same time breaks open previously held belief systems and makes them more relative. However, without having the experience myself I would probably not have focussed on the bodily dimension during the interviews; neither would I have been able to converse in depth about it. In the same vein, my own experiences made it easier to contextualise and categorise the daimistas' remarks on the effects of the brew

Third, the approach of methodological ludism helped me to come closer to the experiences of my respondents. Following this approach, discussed in chapter 2 and 3, I played freely with different ways of reality making during the research project. By listening carefully to the daimistas' stories, observing their behaviour and experimenting with my own experiences, I to a certain extent indeed learned new ways of experiencing. A striking example of this is that I to a certain extent learned how to 'perceive' supernatural beings.

During the research project, it soon became clear to me that the experience of supernatural beings made up an important part of my respondents' narratives. As my aim was to 'come closer' to their experiential world, and I myself did not recognise their accounts, I asked some of the daimistas in detail about these experiences: what kind of sensory modalities were involved? What emotions and bodily feelings? Did they perceive the beings with eyes open or eyes closed? Was the experience dream-like or more realistic?

Some of my respondents really went into detail in describing their experiences. Reinier for example stood up from the couch, asked me to close my eyes and went to stand right behind me. After a while he asked: 'did you *feel* my presence before I started talking?' According to him, the presence of supernatural beings can be felt in a similar way as we usually feel the presence of people surrounding us. Reinier told me, he also 'sees' supernatural beings in flashes that suddenly interfere with the ordinary reality: "it is a flash, and in that flash I only see that being. The other church members are still there in the background, but not in focus. I suddenly see a flash, and than, it's gone again." Another respondent, Rommert, compared his "views into other realities," with the switching of TV-channels: suddenly the other reality overlaps with the ordinary reality. Rommert told

me he usually can see both realities simultaneously; the ordinary reality of the church is still shining through during his vision.

I took these accounts seriously and experimented with them while participating in the works. One moment, as I stood in the church, watching the whole circle of daimistas surrounding me, I could suddenly picture many more persons standing in between us. These persons looked completely realistic to me. However, I realised I could switch them on and off if I wanted. Like Rommert, I could switch between the 'TV-channels': either I saw them, or not.

Although my experiences of supernatural beings became during the short period of my fieldwork in no way as spectacular as those of my respondents, I realised I could adapt my own experiences in the direction of those of my respondents. In order to have a specific experience I had to temporarily adopt a specific assumption about the nature of reality. In this case I had at least to assume that it is possible to experience a supernatural being. However, this assumption can be made temporarily, and as all my respondents made different assumptions about the nature of reality, understanding different stories implied playfully switching between different views on reality. Thus, I was able to dive deep into the experiential worlds of my respondents without judging them or losing my own. Trying to understand the daimistas' worlds 'from within' was according to me indispensable for the creation of the 'ethnographic' part of this thesis.

Fourth, by doing fieldwork I was able to observe the whole transformation from experience into narrative in myself. Obviously, I found myself in the same position as my respondents in trying to make sense of the experiences that I had under influence of Daime. And although I did not use these 'introspective' observations to answer my research question directly; living through the same process as my respondents did make me more sensitive to all the different aspects of the experience-narrative dynamics. Therefore I was more inclined to investigate and integrate these all in my analysis.

The narratives summarised

In the previous chapters I showed that the Santo Daime members claim to have three types of experiences while they are under the influence of Daime. First they perceive alterations in their perception and thinking while they still are in the ordinary reality. Second they experience travelling to other realities, or other levels of reality. And third, they claim to have experiences of what within the Santo Daime church is called 'união'.

In order to explain this wide range of experiences, the daimistas embed them in a wide range of 'cosmologies'. Although my respondents did not agree at all about the exact nature of reality or God, there were some commonalities in their narratives. They for example all believed it was possible to have a kind of 'mystical' experience, because they believed that the universe is essentially 'One'. In one way or another they all believed creation to have one universal source, and human beings being able – in different gradations – to merge with this source. Likewise, they all, in one way or another stated that the universe or 'creation' was dualistic. They argued that drinking Daime helped them to transcend this dualism, which was necessary to arrive at the fundamental Oneness (união) again.

Furthermore the belief in supernatural beings turned out to be widespread among the daimistas, and meeting these beings was one of the common denominators of their experiences. Another commonality within the collected narratives was a division between 'dark' and 'light'. In line with the

theory that the universe is dualistic, my respondents all divided their experiences into two categories. On the one hand they had the beatific experiences or *mirações*, which they explained as coming closer to the state of *união*. On the other hand they had less pleasant experiences, which they generally explained as ‘learning lessons’. These lessons were generally about how to deal with daily life situations. Furthermore, they all said to take these lessons seriously and apply them in daily life. In the long run, they claim this has a transformative effect on their lives. The transformation is generally pictured as ‘dissolution’ of the ego. In line with their larger cosmologies, my respondents equate this with coming closer to a state of *união* in daily life as well. In that sense the boundaries between the ritual and ordinary life become blurred. Because of this they picture the Daime as teacher or therapist, or more abstract: as a tool that enables this personal transformation.

Reflecting the experience dynamics

These narratives were intrinsically connected to the experiences themselves, in which related dynamics seem to emerge. Like every experience, the Daime experience can be perceived as a continuous flow of perceptions, emotions, actions, thoughts, and bodily sensations. In the chapter on ritual I described how this flow is generally perceived as an interplay between ‘going up’ and ‘going down’. ‘Going up’ correlates with ‘having *mirações*’, and the cultivated attitude of surrender; whereas ‘going down’ is related to ‘working’ and ‘learning lessons’, and, following my respondents, should be confronted with an attitude of *firmeza*.

In chapter 5 and 6 I described how the Daime experience is characterised by imposing both a feeling of truth and a feeling of relativity on previously existing worldviews of my respondents. These fragments of worldviews are then used as building blocks from which the daimistas construct their own individual cosmology. The feeling of truth and the feeling of relativity are reflected in their narratives, as the daimistas present their experiences as being realistic, and ‘true’; while at the same time stressing their subjectivity.

Dealing with the inadequacy of narrative making

The fact that my respondents all stressed that their experiences were only ‘true to them’ I consider to be an important indicator of my claim that the daimistas were to a large extent aware of the relativity of their stories. Not only did the Daime impose a ‘feeling of relativity’ on their experiences, they also consciously realised that their narratives, as they told them to me, were ‘inadequate’.

To a larger or lesser extent all of my respondents made clear that reality as they saw it might not be ‘real’ to others. They seemed to be aware of the limitations of narratives as I listed them in chapter 1. At first they stated that the experiences themselves are coloured by the personal background of the daimista. Reinier for example explained to me: “you have a different character than me, so you will have different experiences.” He continued: “How is that possible? Because no human being is the same. I also expected that the Daime would tell the same truth to everyone, but that is not the case. To the contrary.” In a similar vein Ilona remarks: “you must hear a lot of different stories, don’t you?”

Reinier furthermore realises that his own story might change over time. He says: “this is how I understood it until now, if you ask me again in ten years, I might have a different story.” Because he

realises the relativity of his present story, he is very cautious in making truth claims: “this is how I see it right now, but if you go to someone else, he will tell you a different story. It might be comparable to mine, it might be completely different.” In the same vein Rommert states: “what is true to me is that I have a range of experiences and those are true to me.”

As the daimistas were highly aware of the relativity of their own story-telling, they ensured to accompany their stories with a kind of ‘disclaimers’. Miriam for example - after elaborately explicating her views on good and evil – said: “it might of course be completely different, but this is my truth. And undoubtedly it is true, although it is a personal truth. But at least it is my experience.” Likewise Harry followed his remark that “the Daime showed me that this is *how it is* (...),” with the immediate addition: “for *me* of course.”

The narrative as a vessel

The fact that their stories are relative seems not to be problematic to my respondents. Even though they are aware of the limitations of their story telling, they do not refrain from it. Whereas the mystical experience is widely perceived as ‘ineffable’ in the academic literature,¹⁴³ I never met any resistance against telling about the Daime experiences during my fieldwork, based on this argument.¹⁴⁴ According to me, this can be seen as support for my claim that the daimistas consider story-telling meaningful.

Next to that my respondents sometimes stated themselves that stories must be perceived as ‘tools’. Miriam for example says: “they can help you understand, especially at the moments you are in another part of creation.” Following her logic, one might experience união during the Santo Daime works, but one will inevitably return to daily life afterwards. In order to take some of the wisdom of the Daime experience to the ordinary reality, the story is an indispensable tool. Thus, the fact that stories are always inadequate does not diminish their importance. To the contrary: telling a story is held essentially valuable by Miriam.

A similar way of thinking already appeared in the previous chapter, where I discussed Rommert’s experience of Santa Maria. As I pointed out, he explained to me how he learned how to understand the visions he has during Santo Daime works. Through his particular ‘Marian apparition’ he learned that images and visions themselves should be seen as tools that actually refer to something that transcends the image/vision. His ‘picture’ of Santa Maria turned out to be a socially conditioned one – the statue of his grandmother – but he had to look beyond to see the ‘real’ Santa Maria. Likewise a story can also be seen as a ‘picture of’ the Daime experience; it is a static and socially conditioned representation of it, but it does not coincide with the – far more dynamic and diffuse – flow that makes up the actual Daime experience.

My respondents did not all literally reflect upon their own storytelling in such an abstract way, so the extent to which they themselves were conscious of this dynamic is debatable.¹⁴⁵ Nevertheless, this

¹⁴³ One of the main instigators for this ‘academic narrative’ is psychologist William James who coined ‘ineffability’ as one of the four core characteristics of the mystical experience. James 1902.

¹⁴⁴ This could however also be due to a self-selection of respondents. Maybe only the respondents that do consider storytelling meaningful participated in the research. However, also during my fieldwork I did not encounter any remarks in this direction.

¹⁴⁵ Two strains of evidence that suggest that they were aware are a) the fact that they consider story-telling meaningful; and b) the fact that they stressed the relativity of their own stories. A third line of reasoning,

observation forms a good starting point to approach the experience-narrative dynamics from a scholarly perspective. The narratives of the daimistas should be seen as tools that refer to something else, namely: to the continuous flow of sensations, thoughts and emotions that make up the Daime experience. Although they refer to the experience the stories should not be taken as one-on-one accounts of the experience. Instead narrative making should be seen as a process that enables the daimista to make sense of the Daime experience. The narrative imposes order on the complexity and multilayeredness of the experience reality.

Furthermore, by means of the story-telling the daimistas embed their experiences in the broader fabric of their lives. The story forms a bridge through which the experience reality, the individual's background and the wider social context are connected. Stories also function as a memory of the experience; they have the quality of transposing part of the experience reality to the context in which the story is told. In that vein we should understand my respondents' claims of learning lessons: story-telling is essential to remember specific parts of the experience, in order to integrate these in their daily lives.

If we take this line of reasoning further, we automatically realise that scholars are, similar to their respondents, entangled in processes of narrative making themselves. In order to communicate about the research process, scholars have to transfer their claims within a narrative structure as well. As any narrative, the scholarly narrative is a sharply reduced and static abstraction of the research setting; therefore the scholarly narrative is inadequate as well. However, as any narrative it can give insights into the experiential realities of different persons and it can function as a bridge between the experiential realities of different persons in different moments in time.

which I did not investigate in-depth over here, could be the fact that they did not seem to have any problems with 'eclecticism'. As I already pointed out the daimistas put from a wide range of religious and spiritual traditions to construct their own cosmologies. The diversity is found not only between the stories of my respondents but also within single stories. From a rational perspective this is highly problematic, as different fragments within the stories are built upon different basic assumptions about the nature of reality. However, if we understand the daimistas to be using their stories in a more functional way; as mere 'temporal' but inevitably inadequate placeholders for the experience reality, we can understand why my respondents did not consider mixing inconsistent or incongruent belief systems problematic.

Conclusions about the game of narrative making

*There is, it seems to us,
 At best, only limited value,
 In the knowledge derived from experience
 The knowledge imposes a pattern and falsifies,
 For the pattern is new in every moment,
 And every moment is new and shocking.*
 ~ T.S. Eliot

This study has been about the processes by which narratives are derived from experiences. The Santo Daime church provides an interesting case for our ongoing understanding of experience-narrative dynamics, as the experiential dimension plays a pivotal role in this religious setting.

I have shown that general theories about experience and narrative making can be applied to entheogenic experiences as well, despite the fact that these often have been characterised as extraordinary. In order to answer the question ‘what do Dutch Santo Daime members experience when they drink Daime and how do they translate these experiences into words?’ I have reconstructed the process by which the Daime experience is transformed into a narrative.

By doing so I was able to trace some patterns that are characteristic of my respondents’ experiences, like the movement between ‘going up’ and ‘going down’ during the ritual, and the feeling of truth and a feeling of relativity that is imposed on previously existing beliefs. Furthermore, I found that the daimistas were highly aware of the inadequacy of narrative making, but that they, paradoxically also endorsed the value of story-telling.

It must be noted that these specific patterns are up till now only found within the context of this specific research setting. In order to make more general statements about the Daime or ayahuasca experience, complementary research is needed. As I have shown, the described dynamics are all the results of very complicated interactions between multiple factors, both within the individual daimistas and in the story-telling context. Research in comparable contexts may reveal whether ‘going up’ and ‘going down’ is typical for just the rituals in the Céu da Santa Maria or for all Santo Daime works. Furthermore, it might be possible to determine whether the imposition of a feeling of truth and a feeling of relativity is typical for just the Daime (or ayahuasca) experience, or if it is common to all entheogenic experiences?

The main concern of this thesis was to explicate and test a methodological approach by which ‘entheogenic’ religion (or any religion in which the experiential dimension plays a central role) can be studied. Next to that, I hope to have shown that this method provides a nice outset for constructing an ethnography of such a religious setting. Due to the scope of this thesis my explorations into the lives of Dutch Santo Daime members remain limited. There is also much more to tell about the Céu da Santa Maria and the religious use of entheogens in general, so hopefully my narrative will in the future become complemented by other narratives.

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Appendix A: Interview Schedule

Religious experiences of Dutch Santo Daime members

Interviewschema voor kwalitatieve data-verzameling:

semi-structured interview with open-ended questions

Hoofdvraag: How do Dutch members of the Santo Daime church experience the influence of Daime and how do they put these experiences into words?

Aanwijzingen voor de interviewer:

De hoofdtak van de interviewer is het verzamelen van de benodigde informatie om de hoofdvraag te beantwoorden. Ze probeert het gesprek zo te sturen dat er veel ruimte ontstaat waarin de respondenten over hun *ervaringen* spreken. De vragen moeten zo algemeen en neutraal mogelijk worden gesteld, zodat de respondent ruimte krijgt om zijn/haar eigen woorden te kiezen. De interviewer haakt in op het taalgebruik van de respondent en probeert dit zo veel mogelijk over te nemen. Dus als de respondent over 'Global Consciousness' praat, in plaats van over 'God', dan doet de interviewer dit ook.

De interviewer is verder verantwoordelijk voor het creëren van een comfortabele en vertrouwde sfeer, waarin de respondent vrijuit kan spreken. De interviewer doet haar best om tijdens het interview haar eigen mening en wereldbeeld aan de kant te zetten en zo veel mogelijk mee te gaan in dat van de respondent. Echter zonder de hoofdlijn en de interviewvragen uit het oog te verliezen. Het doel is om zo veel mogelijk te begrijpen/leren/in te leven in hoe de respondent *ervaart* tijdens de rituelen, en vast te leggen op welke manier hij/zij dit onder woorden brengt.

De onderstaande vragen moeten allemaal behandeld worden. '→' duidt aan dat hier eventueel op doorgevraagd kan worden, afhankelijk van de loop van het gesprek. Van de onderstaande volgorde mag worden afgeweken. Dat is zelfs aan te raden: probeer zoveel mogelijk het verhaal van de respondent zelf te volgen (want dat geeft aan welke onderdelen hij/zij zelf relevant vindt). Stuur alleen bij waar nodig, bijvoorbeeld als de respondent te veel afdwaalt, als er verduidelijking nodig is, of als het tijd is voor een nieuw onderwerp/thema. Mochten er in het interview andere belangrijke thema's naar voren komen, besteed hier dan aandacht aan, en pas het interviewschema eventueel aan voor een volgende keer.

De interviews worden opgenomen met een voicerecorder. Hiervoor wordt vooraf toestemming gevraagd aan de respondent. Na afloop worden de interviews getranscribeerd.

De vragen

A) De eerste keer

1. Hoe ben je in aanraking gekomen met Santo Daime?
2. Heb je ervaring met andere religieuze/spirituele tradities?
3. Kan je je de eerste ervaring met ayahuasca/Daime nog herinneren?
4. Kan/wil je de ervaring beschrijven?
→ Doorvragen (zo uitgebreid mogelijk: lichamelijke gewaarwordingen, gedachten, emoties, andere zintuigen, inzichten, betekenis, etc.)

B) Algemeen Daime ervaring

1. Wat gebeurt er volgens jou als je Daime drinkt?

2. Kan je daar een voorbeeld van geven?

C) Wereldbeeld algemeen

1. Zie je jezelf als een aanhanger van de Santo Daime leer?
→ Waarom wel/niet? Waarin verschilt jouw wereldbeeld van dat van de Santo Daime
2. Hoe zou je die leer beschrijven?
(→ later doorvragen op elementen die hier in naar voren komen)
3. Wat trekt je hierin aan?
4. Is er een specifieke hymne of tekst binnen de Santo Daime die je erg aanspreekt?
→ Welke? → Waarom?
5. Heb je zelf wel eens een hymne ontvangen?
6. Is je wereldbeeld veranderd door het drinken van Daime?
→ Hoe? (→ later doorvragen op elementen die hier in naar voren komen)
7. Zou je de Daime-ervaring 'religieus' noemen?
8. Hoe zou je je eigen geloof/wereldbeeld beschrijven?

D) Wereldbeeld specifiek

1. Hoe kijk je aan tegen wat men ook wel 'God' noemt?
2. Geloof je in het bestaan van spirituele wezens of krachten (geesten, elven, aliens etc.) die invloed op ons leven hebben?
3. Geloof je in het bestaan van een ziel? (→ is deze onsterfelijk? Reïncarnatie?)
4. ... (Ruimte voor andere ter sprake gekomen elementen)
5. Wat is volgens jou de zin van het leven?

E) Recente ervaring

1. Wanneer heb je voor het laatst Daime gedronken?
2. Kan/wil je de ervaring beschrijven? Of een deel ervan?
3. Wat gebeurde er met je lichaam?
4. Wat gebeurde er met je waarnemingen (zien, horen, voelen, ruiken, tast) (evt. Ook ruimtelijk inzicht, motoriek etc.)?
5. Waren er emoties aan verbonden?
6. Wat gebeurde er met je gedachten?/ Kreeg je bepaalde inzichten
7. Wat betekent deze ervaring voor jou?

F) Indrukwekkendste ervaring

1. Wat is je meest indrukwekkende ervaring met Santo Daime? (→ zie rijtje vragen 2-7 hierboven)
2. Is het mogelijk om een 'gemiddelde' ervaring met Santo Daime te beschrijven? Zo ja, hoe verloopt die dan? (→ zie zelfde rijtje vragen)

G) Feitelijkheden

1. Hoe vaak drink je gemiddeld Daime? → In welke kerk?
2. (Wanneer) heb je je fardamento gedaan? → Waarom?
3. Hoe belangrijk is de Santo Daime voor je?
4. Hoeveel van je vrienden/familie drinken ook Daime?
5. Gebruik je ook ayahuasca en/of andere psychedelica in andere contexten?
6. Ben je ook verbonden aan en/of geïnteresseerd in andere religieuze of spirituele tradities?
7. Wat is je leeftijd? Beroep/studie? Opleidingsniveau? (evt. Nationaliteit)?

Afsluiting: Bedanken.

Nog vragen? Kort verdere procedure onderzoek toelichten.

Appendix B: Standard Prayers and Invocations¹⁴⁶

SIGN OF THE CROSS

By the sign of the Holy Cross

Deliver us God, our Lord

From our enemies

In the name of the Father,

the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen

CREED

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,

Creator of Heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son,

Our Lord, who was conceived through,

the work and grace of the Holy Spirit.

He was born of the Virgin Mary;

Suffered under the power of Pontius Pilate;

was crucified, died, and was buried,

He descended into Hell;

on the third day, he rose again from the dead.

He ascended into Heaven and is seated at the right hand of God,

the Father Almighty, from where He comes to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Church, the communion of Saints

the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting.

Amen

THE ROSARY 1 (Official work)

Glory be to the Father, to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, for all the ages of ages.

Amen

¹⁴⁶ Source: Alfredo Gregório de Melo. *Hinário, English Version*. Céu do Mapiá – AM – Brasil: CEFLURIS; Edition Amsterdam, Céu da Santa Maria.

THE ROSARY 2 (Santa Missa)

Glory be to the Father, to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, for all the ages of ages.

Amen

O my Jesus, forgive me, and save me from the fires of hell.

Lead all souls into heaven and especially help those in most need.

Amen.

OUR FATHER

Our Father who art in Heaven,

Hallowed be Thy name.

Let's go into Thy Kingdom.

Thy will be done,

On earth as it is in heave.

Give us this day our daily bread, Lord,

Forgive us our debts,

As we forgive our debtors,

Let's not fall in temptation,

but deliver me and defend me,

Lord from all evil,

Amen, Jesus Mary and Joseph.

HAIL MARY

Hail Mary, full of grace

The Lord is with Thee.

Blessed art Thou amongst women!

Blessed is the fruit of Thy womb, Jesus.

Holy Mary, Mother of God,

Pray to God for us sinners,

Now and at the hour of our death.

Amen, Jesus Mary and Joseph

KEY OF HARMONY

I wish Harmony, Love, Truth and
Justice to all my brothers and sisters.
With the united forces of the silent
vibrations of our thoughts,
we are strong, healthy and happy,
thus forming a link of universal fraternity.
I am satisfied and in peace
with the whole universe,
and I wish that all beings achieve
their most intimate aspirations.
I give thanks to my invisible Father
for having established Harmony, Love,
Truth and Justice among all his children.
So be it,
Amen.

CONSECRATION OF THE SPACE

Inside the infinite circle of the Divine Presence which completely surrounds me, I affirm:

There is only one Presence here, it is HARMONY, which makes all hearts vibrate with Joy and Happiness. Those who choose to enter here will feel the vibration of the Divine Harmony.

There is only one Presence here, it is LOVE. God is Love, which embraces all beings in one feeling of unity. This place is filled with the presence of Love. In Love I live, I move, I exist. Those who choose to enter here will feel the pure and holy presence of Love.

There is only one Presence here, it is TRUTH. All that exists here, all that is spoken here, all that is thought here is the expression of Truth. Those who choose to enter here will feel the Presence of Truth.

There is only one Presence here, it is JUSTICE. Justice reigns in this room. Everything practiced here is inspired and ruled by Justice. Those who choose to enter here will feel the presence of Justice.

There is only one Presence here, it is God, the BENEFICENT. No evil can enter here. There is no evil in God. God, the BENEFICENT lives here. Those who choose to enter here will feel the Divine Presence of the Beneficent.

There is only one Presence here, it is God, the LIFE. God is the essential Life of all beings, the health of body and mind. Those who choose to enter here will feel the presence of Life and Health.

There is only one Presence here, it is God, PROSPERITY. God is Prosperity because he makes everything grow and prosper. God expresses himself through the Prosperity of all that is undertaken here in His name. Those who choose to enter here will feel the Divine Presence of Prosperity and Abundance.

Through the esoteric symbol of the DIVINE WINGS, I am in harmonious vibration with the universal currents of WISDOM, POWER and JOY. The presence of Divine Wisdom is manifested here. The presence of Divine Joy is deeply felt by those who enter her.

In the most perfect communion between my lower self and higher self, which is God in me, I consecrate this place to the perfect expression of all the Divine qualities that are in me and in all beings.

The vibrations of my thoughts are the forces of God in me, which are stored here and radiate to all beings, thus making this place into a center for emission and reception of all that is GOOD, JOYFULL and PROSPEROUS.

PRAYER

I thank You, oh! God, because this place is filled with Your Presence.

I thank You, because I live and move for You.

I thank You, because I live in Your Life,

Truth, Health, Prosperity, Peace,

Wisdom, Joy and Love.

I thank You, because all those who enter

here will feel Your Presence.

I thank You, because I am in Harmony, Love,

Truth and Justice with all beings.

Amen.

PRAYER OF CARITA

God, our Father who is all power and kindness,

Give strength to those who're going through their trials.

Give light to those who are seeking the truth

Put in the heart of men compassion and charity.

God, give to the one who travels a guiding star, to the afflicted
consolation, to the sick, rest.

Father,, give to the guilty, repentance,
to the spirit, truth.

To the child a guide, to the orphan,
a Father.

Lord, may Your kindness spread above
all that You have created.

Mercy Lord for those who don't know You.

Hope for those who suffer. May Your
kindness allow the consoling spirits
to spread everywhere Peace,
Hope and Faith.
God, one ray, one spark of Your Love
can enlighten the earth.
Let us drink in the fountain of this fertile
and infinite kindness and all tears will
dry and all pains will quiet down.
One single heart, one single thought
will go up to You, like a cry of
thankfulness and of love.
Like Moses on the mountain, we wait
for You with open arms,
O Power, o Kindness, o Beauty, o
Perfection, we want in some way to
deserve your infinite Mercy.
God, give us the strength to support
the progress, in order to rise up to You.
Give us the simplicity that will make
our souls the mirror where Your image
must be reflected.
Amen

HAIL HOLY QUEEEN

Hail Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy,
our life, our sweetness and our hope.
To you do we cry, poor banished
children of Eve;
to You do we send up our sights
mourning and weeping in this valley
of tears.
Turn then, O most Gracious Advocate,
your eyes of mercy toward us

and after this, our exile, show unto us
the blessed fruit of your womb, Jesus.
O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary,
pray for us o Holy Mother of God,
that we may be worthy of the promises
of our lord Jesus Christ, our Lord forever,
Amen, Jesus, Mary and Joseph

CLOSING

Praised be God in the Heights!
May our Mother, the Most Holy Mary,
be forever praised above all
Humanity. Amen!

SING OF THE CROSS

By the sign of the Holy Cross
Deliver us God, our Lord
From our enemies
In the name of the Father,
the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Appendix C: Trip reports Rommert

1. 22 November 2009

Aankomst in de kerk

Het bizarre begon al toen ik aankwam bij de kerk van santo daime. Een doorsnee protestantse kerk, met heel veel beschaafde, oudere heren en dames. Ik had allemaal spaced-out hippies verwacht, maar niets was minder waar: oude dametjes van 60,70 jaar, inclusief wandelstok. Natuurlijk niet alleen bejaarden, het grootste gedeelte waren gewoon beschaafd geklede mensen van 40-50 jaar. Maar goed, die oma's vielen zo extreem op omdat ik ze absoluut niet verwachtte.

Je krijgt even een korte uitleg als je voor t eerst bent over de "spelregels" (je krijgt een eigen stoel bijvoorbeeld, er zijn mensen die voor het ritueel zorgen etc.) en dan begin je. Ze zingen overigens de hele 4 uur lang van het ritueel. Je gaat naar voren, en alsof je een hostie haalt krijg je een glaasje ayahuasca. Enorm smerig spul, dat wel. Dan weer zitten, en langzaam slaat het in.

Het wezen in de kerk

Eerst begon ik een "wezen" te zien. Het was een soort mens, maar ik nam hem vooral met mijn ogen dicht waar. Hij was daar, in de kerk, en praatte tegen me. Hij voelde heel bekend, en legde gewoon allerlei dingen uit. Wat er gebeurde in de kerk, dat soort dingen.

Het eerste wezen in de kerk legde me een aantal dingen uit over wat er zoal gebeurde. Dat mensen als het ware dingen onder ogen moeten zien die er zijn gebeurd. En er zijn nu eenmaal dingen, die met sommige mensen zijn gebeurd, waarvan je moet overgeven. Er waren als het ware ook mensen die "meehielpen" om bepaalde nare dingen onder ogen te zien. Door samen te kijken naar de nare gebeurtenissen, en daarvan te moeten overgeven, nou ja, dat was behulpzaam ofzo. Ik heb persoonlijk een hekel aan overgeven, en was allang blij dat ik niet hoefde over te geven en had dan ook geen behoefte om te helpen met zaken onder ogen te zien.

Ik voelde me overigens wel misselijk worden, het lag zwaar op mijn maag. Maar het wezen legde mij uit dat dit geen persoonlijke emoties waren, maar emoties van mensen om me heen die ik had opgepikt. Om die reden kon hij me helpen om het direct uit mijn lijf te verwijderen. Hij pakte het als het ware uit mijn maag, en haalde de emoties er zo uit. De misselijkheid werd toen minder.

Naar boven

De mensen in de kerk waren allemaal intens aan het zingen. Het zingen maakte dat er een soort ruimte opening, alsof het dak van de kerk transparant werd. Er verscheen een soort, nou ja, een soort wand of iets dergelijks. Je moet je overigens voorstellen dat ik mijn ogen dicht had. Ik nam het als het ware in een andere realiteit waar. Met behulp van het zingen kon ik omhoog, door de opening, de ruimte in. Er waren nu meer wezens. Ze legden me uit, dat niet iedereen de UFO binnenkon. Ik noem het maar UFO bij gebrek aan een beter woord. Het was eigenlijk veel organischer, de ruimte leefde als het ware, er was ook geen metaal, het was eerder steen en hout achtig. Nou ja, ook dat niet helemaal. Het was levend materiaal, maar wel hard zeg maar.

Maar goed, niet iedereen kon de UFO in. Dat kwam, omdat in de UFO iedereen bewust had gekozen om zich aan de intentie van liefde over te geven. Liefde als in, mededogen voor anderen. Als ik dat schrijf klinkt het heel EO-erig, maar goed, ik vertel t ook maar door he haha. Nou goed, niet iedereen kon zich daaraan overgeven werd mij uitgelegd. Sommige mensen moesten, alleen al door de uitstraling van de Tijdloze UFO, door allerlei persoonlijke zaken heen van vroeger. Zeg maar, om de uitstraling van de UFO te verdragen werd er als het ware oud zeer uit de mensen gewassen / gestraald. Er waren ook daadwerkelijk een aantal mensen in de kerk die aan het huilen waren, dat soort dingen. Ik kon ook waarnemen dat een aantal mensen die naast mij zaten niet de UFO in konden, anderen, dichterbij het midden (en meer ervaren) wel. Ik zat samen met hen in de ruimte.

De zaal

Het was een soort grote zaal, waar iedereen zong. Ik werd ontvangen. Echt heel hartelijk. Alsof je jaren weg bent geweest uit je geboortedorp en met een warm onthaal verwelkomd werd. "Hee cheiron, wat fijn! Wat leuk! Kom vaker langs! Zolang geleden, wel dertig jaar!". Ik begreep dat ik hier eerder was geweest, en wel voordat ik geboren was.

Er waren ook mensen die veel en veel ervarener waren dan mij. Ik voelde me een beetje het jonge broekie van de zaal. Het was een enorm fijne ervaring. Ik had de indruk alsof ik jaren had rondgedwaald, me niet helemaal op mijn plek voelend op deze planeet, en dat ik eindelijk had gevonden waar ik thuis hoorde. Alsof ik met een verkenningsschip op pad was geweest, en nu eindelijk het moederschap had terug gevonden.

Overlopende realiteiten

Nou, daar was ik dan in de Tijdloze UFO. Ik begreep dat er geen tijd was. Soms was dat erg desorienterend voor me. Als ik mijn ogen opendeed, zag ik nog vagelijk de kerk waar ik in zat. Hoewel de twee realiteiten als het ware door elkaar heenliepen. Alsof je een tv tegelijkertijd op nederland 1 en 2 zet: twee zenders door elkaar heen. Ik kon waarnemen dat er een heleboel wezens buiten de UFO waren, die niet binnen konden. Ik was heel blij dat mannen en vrouwen in de kerk gescheiden zaten. Dat was een soort van minimale ordening in de nu tijdloze en eeuwige realiteit. Als ik naar de mensen in de kerk keek, waren sommigen ook echt een soort aliens ofzo. Sommige zagen er meer uit als dinosauriers, andere meer als insecten. Het is heel lastig te omschrijven, <http://gotopublicschool.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/4ism5ph.jpg> deze afbeelding van Alex Grey komt een beetje in de buurt van wat ik probeer te omschrijven, hoewel nog te menselijk voor wat ik bedoel. Ik begreep ineens dat ik al gedurende jaren was voorbereid door allerlei media op deze ervaring. Ik moest denken aan Men in Black, waarbij je een shot hebt van een grote zaal waar allerlei aliens rondlopen. Ik dacht dat er veel meer filmmakers etc. Wisten van hoe dit in elkaar zaten, en dat ze me via films etc. Hadden proberen uit te leggen van wat ik zou gaan ervaren.

Hogere wezens

Er waren ook wezens die nog hoger waren. Iedereen in de kerk stopt met zingen. De ruimte kraakten, echt hoorbaar: krrrr, prsss trkrk , krr....krkrkr.pprrr.....rkrkrksss. Alsof we een fysieke ruimte hadden gezongen, van materiaal dat we nu konden horen leven en kraken. Toen kwam er een wezen binnen. Het was een enorm groot wezen. Hij had iets insectachtigs, maar dat klinkt zo koud en gevoelloos: dat was hij juist totaal niet. Het insectachtige is wellicht een manier van mijn

onbewuste om het totale anderszijn, of het vreemd zijn, van dit wezen aan te duiden. Het was juist een wezen dat zo ontzagwekkend veel kennis had, zoveel wijsheid, zoveel mededogen, dat het enorm was om erbij in de buurt te zijn. Het was overweldigend. Ook heftig. Alleen al door zijn aanwezigheid toe te laten, werd ik getransformeerd. Ik voelde een angst om me over te geven. Het was tastbare wijsheid die door de ruimte straalde. Ik wist op een of andere manier, dat dit wezen uit een ruimte kwam ik ik zelf nog niet kon betreden. Dit was nog een voorportaal, waar ik was. Toen ging hij weer weg, en was ik enerzijds blij dat ik hem had mogen ontmoeten, maar ook blij dat hij weg was. Hij voelde zoveel grootser dan mij dat ik mij totaal overgeleverd had gevoeld. Alsof een reus over een mier heenbukt.

Inzichten

Ik kreeg ook een aantal lessen mee. Er werden persoonlijke gebeurtenissen uit mijn leven teruggehaald, en er werd me uitgelegd waarom deze gebeurtenissen van belang waren voor anderen. De rol die ik had gespeeld werd uitgelegd, omdat ik hem onderschat had. Een aantal situaties werd anders uitgelegd: voor situaties die ik moeilijk had gevonden werd uitgelegd hoe ik daar zo mee had kunnen omgaan dat ze tot meer inzicht hadden geleid. Het bleken helemaal geen moeilijke situaties te zijn, maar eigenlijk allemaal situaties waarbij ik de energie uit deze andere realiteit niet had durven laten dringen en bijvoorbeeld had gedacht dat ik me moest schamen, terwijl ik juist had kunnen rusten in de transformerende ervaring die het voor iedereen was en kon zijn.

Er werden nog veel meer persoonlijke lessen gegeven, waarbij ik inzicht kreeg in de situaties waar ik mee worstelde op dat moment in mijn leven.

Afscheid

Ook begon ik afscheid te nemen. Drie, vier keer ging ik weg. Ik wilde helemaal niet weg, vond het jammer dat ik weg moest. Ze zwaaiden allemaal. Daaaag! Daaag! Dan begonnen ze weer te zingen in de kerk, en op de energie van het zingen kon ik weer terug. Maar dan ging ik weer. Ze legden uit dat ik in mijn dagelijks leven moest leren afscheid te nemen, en dat op een goede manier moest leren doen.

Verwarring

Toen was er een periode een soort verwarring. Ik had in een tijdloos universum gezeten, maar nu was ik echt weer in de kerk terug. Maar ik dacht dat het nog steeds tijdloos was. Heel vervelend: fuck , nu zit ik voor eeuwig in deze kerk te zingen! Dat wil ik niet! Ik werd tegengehouden bij de deur toen ik in mijn auto wilde stappen. Ik overwoog of ik de persoon die me tegenhield bij de deur (ik heb het nu dus over een persoon in deze realiteit, die mee zorg droeg voor het ritueel) een soort personage van mijn onderbewuste was dat ik moest overwinnen en dat ik hem bijvoorbeeld moest neerslaan. Ik voelde me ook enigszins gevangen in de kerk toen. Waarom mag ik niet weg? Gelukkig was ik met een goede vriend van me, dus dat was al weer beter. Een tijd heb ik toen bij de deur gezeten, nog twee keer geprobeerd naar buiten te breken om bij mijn auto te komen. Als ik naar huis zou gaan rijden, zou de tijd weer starten! Gelukkig werd ik heel vriendelijke tegen gehouden. Toen maar terug de kerk in, naar mijn stoel. Ineens had ik momenten waarop ik begreep: "het is allemaal een kosmisch spel! Maar we vergeten de spelregels, en denken dat het echt is. Waarom verteld niemand de regels?" Maar daarna ging ik weer onder in overpeinzingen waarom ik gevangen

zat in deze kerk. Dat ging zo een aantal keer rond: inzicht: het is een grap! Waarom vergeet ik dat steeds....en dan weer verwarring.

Terug

Plotseling was het over. Iedereen begon "in de gloria" te zingen. Het was feest, we waren klaar. Alle structuur en regels verdween, mensen namen weer hun "normale" sociale zelf aan. Ik was "mindblown". Wat in CHRISTUSNAAM was DAT? Was het eerste dat ik zei. Ik voelde me alsof ik was meegenomen door een UFO en nu weer netjes was afgeleverd. Enorm verbaasd, blij weer met mensen te kunnen spreken, zocht ik mijn weg naar buiten.

2. 15 Januari 2010

Start

Ik zit in de kerk. Ik herken ondertussen een aantal mensen van vorige keren. Ik voel me op mijn gemak, want ik voel het vertrouwen dat ik hier ongeschonden uitkom. Het is een goede plek waar ik mezelf kan toevertrouwen aan de structuur. Ik heb een boekje met de liederen die ze gaan zingen, ik ga een poging wagen mee te zingen. Na de ayahuasca naar binnen te hebben gewerkt (zo bitter dat de rillingen door mijn lijf lopen) ga ik terug naar mijn plaats en zing mee.

Opschonen van mijn lijf

Langzaam begint mijn lijf effecten te voelen van de ayahuasca. Het ligt zwaar op mijn maag. Kleuren beginnen er anders uit te zien, lichteffecten beginnen op te spelen. Langzaam begint zich een innerlijke beeldenwereld te openen. Mijn vaste "begeleider" is al in de buurt en doemt op in mijn innerlijke wereld. Hij is mannelijk, maar wekt deze keer een minder menselijke indruk dan voorheen. Ik begrijp dat hij is opgebouwd uit energie, intelligentie, en dat ik als het ware in mijn "beeldendatabase" in mijn geheugen zoek om een soort rationeel begrijpbare interpretatie te krijgen voor wat ik zie. Ik heb stress in mijn lijf, gelocaliseerd rondom het zware gevoel in mijn maag. Mijn "begeleider" helpt me de stress uit mijn lijf te schonen. Hij vertelt me dat ik in mijn werk teveel het gevoel van eeuwigheid verlies. Door te denken dat ik haast heb, dat dingen snel af moeten, vernauwt de realiteit zich en ontstaat er stress. Door te werken vanuit de eeuwigheid zal het beter gaan met de stress. Hij legt uit, laat zien, hoe ik dit gevoel kan herstellen in bijvoorbeeld een vergadering. Ook dat het niet alleen voor mijzelf goed is, maar voor iedereen. Het zware gevoel zakt uit mijn maagstreek, mijn lijf begint langzaam te tintelen. Ik weet nu zeker dat ik niet meer zal hoeven overgeven: de ayahuasca is door mijn systeem geaccepteerd.

Ontmoeting met een tweede gids

Ik wordt door mijn begeleider meegenomen naar een andere entiteit. Deze is veel complexer, wijzer, grootser. Hij heeft een wijsheid van eeuwen. Ik ben een beetje ongerust, ik weet niet zeker of ik hem kan vertrouwen. Deze nieuwe begeleider ziet mijn onrust, en identificeert zichzelf door zijn hart te laten zien. In zijn hartstreek is allemaal informatie zichtbaar. Het doet me denken aan egyptische hieroglyphen. Het zijn niet echt hieroglyphen, maar dat is het dichtsbijzijnde beeld dat ik in mijn geheugen kan vinden om het te begrijpen. Hoewel ik de informatie niet kan lezen, begrijp ik wel wat er staat: het spreekt over de intentie vanuit licht te werken, mee te werken aan de ontwikkeling van

de mensheid, liefde. Ik vind dat voldoende om hem te vertrouwen en met hem mee te gaan. Mijn eerste begeleider blijft nu achter, deze nieuwe begeleider neemt me mee.

Dieper erin: door de poort van de dood heen

Ik wordt diep in een tijdloze wereld meegenomen. Een tijd terug had ik snachts een droom waarbij ik door een shamaan in de leer werd genomen en hij had beelden losgemaakt van een vorig leven waarin ik werd opgehangen. We gaan naar dat moment in de tijd toe. Daar hang ik! Het is een leven, lang geleden. Ik denk ergens in de middeleeuwen, 1400 ofzo. Ik begrijp dat ik was opgehangen omdat ik teveel had gezegd. Ik voel de strop om mijn nek klemmen, nu, zittend in de kerk. Ik zie zijn/mijn doodsangst. Het gevoel: het was allemaal voor niks! Alles is verloren. De angst om te sterven. De spijt: was het deze prijs wel waard? Vaag besef ik dat ik mensen achterlaat in dat andere leven. Ik zie dat deze vorige incarnatie van mijzelf als het ware in dit moment gevangen is. De tijd staat stil en ik/hij kan zich niet overgeven aan het sterven. Samen met mijn gids benader ik hem. We zoeken contact, ik kijk in zijn ogen. Hij is blij, maar ook verrast: wie zijn jullie? Ik stel me voor met mijn normale dagelijkse naam, maar besef me meteen dat deze incarnatie nog niet weet dat hij het zelf is, in de verre toekomst. Hoe moet hij/ik weten dat ik over zoveel jaren, eeuwen, deze naam zal krijgen? Mijn begeleider legt me uit dat deze incarnatie als het ware gevangen is in het duister van zijn sterven. Dat we kunnen helpen om het voor hem lichter te maken. Ik laat los dat ik aan mijn stervende zelf uit wil leggen dat ik hem ben. Ik kijk hem gewoon aan, zoek contact. Hij is bang, verdrietig. Maar er komt ook een soort ruimte. Ik voel, zittend in de kerk, mijn keel. Alsof ik de strop om mijn keel kan voelen. Ik kijk naar mijzelf, er komt licht in de keel van mijn stervende zelf. Ik zie het letterlijk oplichten. De gedachte: alles is verloren gegaan is niet waar. Want: de kennis kan nu doorgedragen worden. Ik heb gewoon toegang tot de kennis. Dat lucht mijn stervende zelf als het ware op: hij dacht dat hij voor niks een hoge prijs had betaald, denkend aan wie hij achterliet. De tijd staat stil. Het doet iets denken aan die special effects uit "The Matrix" serie, waarbij een speler stil in de ruimte hangt en je om dat moment heen kunt lopen. Het is als het ware bevroren in bewustzijn. Maar door contact met mijzelf te maken ontstaat er licht, vertrouwen, liefde. Ineens merk ik dat ik toegang heb tot alle informatie van dat leven. Ik heb in dat leven uren, maanden gestudeerd, gedachten gevormd. Ik kan als het ware over mijn eigen schouders meelesen, eeuwen terug. Het voelt alsof ik de informatie "download" op mijn harde schijf van nu. Mijn stervende zelf beseft zich dat hij dood is, maar niet verloren. Dat het doorgaat. Hij wordt blijer, lichter, omdat hij door de dood heen is gegaan. Het doet me denken aan de film van "the fountain". Ik denk dat de maker ervan een soortgelijke ervaring gehad moet hebben.

Werk: interesse in het licht.

Mijn begeleider is nu geïnteresseerd in het werk dat ik doe. Hoewel een vrij specifiek gedeelte van mijn werk: dat stuk waarbij er als het ware licht ontstaat in de interactie met anderen. Hij gaat een tijd lang in op mijn kennis van acupunctuur. Hij laat me in beelden zien hoe het energetische systeem van mensen eruit ziet. Ik zie mezelf naalden zetten en de naalden veranderen in slangen. Het is als het ware een levende slang in plaats van een naald die ik prik. Ik zie hoe energiebanen verschuiven bij mensen, ik begrijp iets van de samenhang van lichaam en geest door middel van dit licht. Ik krijg ook een aantal specifieke aanwijzingen: prik voor die persoon dit en dit punt, verwarm dat punt met moxa. Niet zozeer om die combinaties klakeloos over te nemen, maar ook om te

begrijpen wat ik doe als ik iemand behandel. Ik krijg verder nog een aantal heel specifieke aanwijzingen over opstellingen waar hij aan mee wil werken. Hij legt uit waarom sommige zaken minder makkelijk lukken, hoe ik dat anders aan kan pakken.

Oplossen in het kosmische licht

Dan gaan we een tweede keer ayahuasca drinken en wordt er ook Santa Maria gerookt. Dit is extreem heftig. Mijn hele beeld wordt kaleidoscopisch. Ik probeer de teksten van de liederen te lezen, maar dat is nagenoeg onmogelijk. Ik zie de zwarte letters op de witte bladzijde in allerlei kleuren: geel, rood, blauw, wit. De letters zijn ook een soort magisch geschrift, die licht geven. Het is portugees, ik kan het niet lezen maar begrijp wel dat het een magische tekst is met een diepe boodschap. Het boek in mijn hand is een soort representant van een kosmische tekst. Dan worden de visioenen intenser. Ik los langzaam op. Er komt een steeds feller licht. Ik los op in kristallen, kaleidoscopische punten, stromen van licht en energie. Dan verdwijn ik totaal. Mijn lijf lost op, ik ben een kosmische vibratie. Ik hoor het zingen in de kerk. Ik vibreer mee, de klanken scheppen een heelal gevuld met de intentie van liefde. Ik adem door, hoewel taal hier eigenlijk tekort schiet. Hoezo ik...? Er is adem. Er is bewustzijn. Er is licht. Er is vibratie. Maar geen ik meer. Geen lijf meer. Deze toestand houdt een tijd lang aan. Ik heb geen enkel besef van tijd, dus het kan 5 minuten zijn geweest of een uur. De klanken van de liederen dringen diep door in mijn energetische toestand. Heel langzaam wordt "Ik" weer gevormd. Ik krijg weer vaste substantie, een identiteit. Ik heb het gevoel alsof ik wordt wedergeboren uit een kosmisch licht. De intensiteit is enorm: vergelijkbaar met verblindt te worden door een rij bouwlampen. Nou ja, vergelijkingen schieten tekort. Het is zo intens en enorm fijn. Ze zingen over kracht, over liefde, over het hart. Ik neem langzaam weer vorm aan, voel mezelf geconstrueerd worden uit de kosmos. Ik begrijp dat ik in mijn identiteit iets van dit licht kan en mag meenemen. Het heelal wordt voortdurend opgebouwd uit klank, uit verhalen. Ik begrijp dat het verhaal dat ik nu vertel over mijzelf, mijzelf scheidt. De mate waarin ik het licht kan vasthouden in mijn verhaal, bepaalt mijn nieuwe geboorte. Ze vertellen me over dood en wedergeboorte, over het scheppen van het heelal. Ik begrijp dat we duizende keren worden geboren, dat zelfs mens zijn elke dag opnieuw een daad is van het scheppen van het heelal door onze verhalen.

De godin

In de zaal is ondertussen iemand luid aan het huilen. Ik weet dat dit goed wordt opgevangen door de begeleiders. Ik heb een diep ontzag voor de mensen die dit ritueel kunnen begeleiden. Vooral ook omdat zij allemaal meedrinken. Hoe is het in godsnaam mogelijk om nog iets te doen in deze toestand. Ik wordt me wat meer bewust van mijn omgeving. Dan wordt mij een beeld getoond van een godin. Het lijkt op de egyptische Isis. Ze vertellen me dat dit geen echte ontmoeting is, maar een beeld. Het is bedoeld om te kunnen tekenen als ik straks weer "op aarde" ben. Ik krijg te zien hoe ik het perspectief kunstzinnig kan vertalen met behoudt van de kaleidoscopische natuur van deze wereld. Dan verdwijnt het beeld en zie ik een Godin, maar nu echt. Het is een enorm diepgaande ervaring. Het is een stralende Godin, een vrouw, maar zo licht, zo omvattend dat ik mijn handen ophef. Ik baad mijzelf in haar licht.

Vrouw en kinderen

Ik denk na over een vriendin. Die heb ik op het moment niet maar ik ben wel op zoek naar iemand. Ik open mijn ogen en zie een vrouw aan de overkant in de kerk zitten. Als ik mijn ogen sluit, wordt mij verteld dat het van belang is om te weten of ik nog kinderen wil. Het is van belang om te weten , voordat ik me met een vrouw verbindt. Ik zie hoe de relatie tussen man en vrouw een symbool is voor een archetypische verbinding tussen het mannelijke en het vrouwelijke. Dan zie ik ineens allemaal zielen die nog niet geboren zijn. Ik begrijp wat het betekent om een kind op deze aarde te zetten: het is een ziel die kan afdalen naar de aarde. Dan zie ik opeens L en M. Ze zitten op mijn schoot als energetische wezens. Ook N is aanwezig. Hij vibreert door de lucht als energie, licht. Ik voel me intens gelukkig met wat ik al heb.

Afscheid nemen

Langzamerhand moeten we afscheid nemen. Ik versta de portugese liederen niet, maar ze klinken voor mij als afscheid. Ik voel de andere wereld afstand nemen. Het is een soort gelukkig gevoel, maar ook een beetje, nou ja, zoals afscheid voelt als je het heel fijn hebt gehad. Maar ik krijg heel veel licht mee, ik weet ook dat ik deze ervaring mee kan nemen. Mijn lijf krijgt langzaam steeds meer vorm. Ik voel mijn spieren, mijn energie stromen. Dit proces gaat nog een tijd door. Langzaam gaan mijn tijdsbesef weer werken. Een periode is dat nog verstoord: de tijd loopt terug. Ik weet van de vorige keren dat ik hier niet over in paniek hoeft te raken: het is mijn "tijdzintuig" dat ontregeld is en het gevolg van half hier, half daar zijn. Het zal straks weer gaan werken. Hoewel dat "de tijd loopt achteruit" een bizar gevoel is. Mijn lijf bouwt op, ik voel me diep gelukkig. Het was bizarder dan ooit. Dan is het ritueel afgelopen en kan ik, intens gelukkig, naar huis.

3. 7 Maart 2010

Santo Daime verslag

Ik ben een beetje nerveus. In mijn buik zit wat spanning, tegelijkertijd voel ik vertrouwen: ik weet dat ik in goede handen ben bij de Santo Daime. Ik voel de smaak van de Daime van te voren al door mijn lijf gaan. Zo bitter, zo bitter. De rllingen lopen al over mijn rug bij de gedachte aan de smaak alleen al. Ik voel hem al in mijn mond, nog voordat ik hem heb gedronken. Na wat inleidend gebed beginnen we snel aan de Daime. Oh, zo bitter, zo sterk. Het lijkt alsof de smaak elke keer dat ik hem drink intenser wordt. Ik probeer de smaak tot me te laten doordringen, te proeven zonder af te wijzen. Bitter... Ik ril... Neem dan toch een slokje water, nadat ik dat zolang mogelijk heb uitgesteld. Alsof de smaak te proeven een voorbode is van wat de Daime zal gaan vertellen.

De Daime ligt er zwaar op mijn maag deze keer. Ik voel mijn buik. Ik probeer het toe te laten. Misschien moet ik overgeven, als dat nodig is, is dat nodig. Die overgave is al heel wat, voor mij, wat betreft overgeven dan. Ik richt me op het zingen, ga op in de zang. Dan , langzaam, beginnen de beelden te komen, de visioenen. Langzaam bouwt zich de wereld op, de andere realiteit, die begint te openen. Het is niet eens zozeer een andere realiteit; het is eerder deze realiteit, maar op een andere frequentie. Ik voel hoe de zaal zich verbindt in de energie. Het wordt langzaam meer een geheel. Ik zing door, geniet van het zingen. De zang trilt in mijn lijf. Dan voel ik de wezens komen. Engelen, intelligenties, aliens... Ik weet niet hoe ze te noemen. Ze zeggen: engelen is een goede naam. Ik voel de Daime door mijn lijf stromen; mijn lijf heeft de Daime geaccepteerd. Het stroomt,

het zware komt van mijn maag af. Dan voel ik: we gaan. De kerk heeft voldoende energie opgebouwd: we kunnen. Dan wordt de consecration of the space voorgelezen. Ik sluit mijn ogen, probeer de woorden zo volledig mogelijk toe te laten. Intens.... Mijn aandacht dwaalt af van de woorden... Ik ga de ruimte binnen... Het is een soort binnentreden in een andere realiteit. Of beter: in een andere frequentie van deze realiteit. Alsof je de stekker uit de realiteitsmachine trekt, en het "beeld" ineens uitvalt; ik duik dieper in de stemming in mijn maag. Het is verdriet; Ik worstel om het toe te laten; dan begrijp ik: met deze emotie kan ik de ruimte niet betreden. Ik heb echter toestemming om het los te laten: want alles is goed. Ik mag me overgeven aan het licht, aan het weten dat alles goed is. Juist in die overgave ligt de oplossing voor mijn verdriet. Ik hoef het verdriet niet "uit te werken": ik kan gewoon de ruimte ingaan, en me overgeven aan het licht.

Ik zie hoe alles samenhangt. Alles is een. Alles hangt samen. Een diepe ordening. Waar alles een plek heeft. Wij denken zo vaak dat het universum gescheiden is, niet een. Dat we in een proces naar heilheid toe werken; dat is echter niet zo. Alles is al een. Alles past in de samenhang. Ook de pijn, het verdriet. Het is juist de illusie dat er geen samenhang is, die het verdriet en de pijn veroorzaakt. Ik ga dieper de ruimte in. Er zijn hier verschillende kamers, verschillende vertrekken. Ik voel hoe de engelen rondlopen, werken. Er wordt geheeld. Mensen geven over, huilen; ondertussen draagt de zang ons door het ritueel heen.

Ik zie een fel licht. Vreugdevol. Het is het licht in het centrum van het heelal. Grootst, stralend. Ik zie dat het een gezicht kan hebben: Christus. Maar het licht is veel ruimer dan dat beeld. Het licht straalt, vlamt, jubelt. Het is een soort weten: alles is licht. Alles is goed. Alles mag er zijn.

Ik zie meer lijden. Concentratiekampen, hakenkruizen, moorden. Ik besef me: ook dit hangt samen. Ook dit hoort erbij. Ik realiseer me dat het lijden ook hier in de zaal is. De slangen komen ook binnen, als een soort beeld van het lijden van de mensen in de zaal. De pijn, het lijden. Ik zie een moord. Een archetypische moord. De mens die een ander mens vermoord. Het bloed aan zijn handen. Ook dit is onderdeel van de cosmos. Van het grote geheel. Het is heel onpersoonlijk, niet eng of zo. Het is een deel dat zich verduisterd heeft. Het zwart, het donker, laat ik toe. Ik zie de moord; heel erg as-it-is, matter-of-fact. De moord. Het bloed. Het verdriet. En door het te zien, door het licht toe te laten, door het licht te schijnen, wordt het geheeld. Het donker in de zaal wordt getransformeerd. De deelnemers nemen hun duister mee: met elkaar helen we het duister, de pijn, door het licht toe te laten.

Ik probeer te zingen, uit het boekje. Ik merk hoe ik, door te zingen, mee vibreer op de intentie van het ritueel. Hoe ik mijn energie toewend voor heling. R naast me begint te grappen; het is lastig de tekst te volgen. Maar wanneer ik geconcentreerd ben, mijn voeten op de grond voel, geaard bent, ben ik ineens weer in-tune met het lied en kan ik de tekst volgen. Het vraagt echter enorm veel concentratie. Ik zeg tegen hem: door te zingen, helen we de mensen. Onze vibratie raakt de mensen die daar op de grond liggen, hun diepste trauma's verwerken.

Op een bepaald punt wordt gezongen over "the line of tuncum" die komt om alle "liars" tot gerechtigheid te brengen. Ik zie hoe er een of twee mensen enorm beginnen over te geven. Ik denk: zij hebben iets met die leugens. Zij worden nu door "the line of tuncum", wat dat ook precies mag zijn, met hun leugens geconfronteerd.

De tweede keer drinken. Ik wil niet. Ik ga niet drinken. Ik weet: dit wordt meer dan ik kan dragen. Ik kan niet nog een keer drinken. Dat is too much. Ik zal eraan bezwijken. Het zal een overload zijn. Het

zou overmoedig zijn. Ik drink maar een keer vanavond. Mijn ogen gaan open, ik kijk rond. Ik beseft me hoe het ritueel wordt gedragen door de aanwezigen. Hoe er leiding is in het ritueel van de ouderlingen. Ik beseft me, hoe het er juist om gaat dat ik het niet hoeft te dragen. Ik mag de anderen voor laten gaan; alles heeft zijn plek. Zijn tijd. Zijn moment. Ik voel me ineens wakker worden. Ik ben nu uit de engelenwereld. Ik voel hoe de engelen het goed, fijn vinden als ik mee werk. Zo van: je bent welkom. Ik heb mijn plek in het werk, daar. Dan begrijp ik: ik mag drinken, maar het zal meer zijn dan ik zelf kan dragen. Maar ik hoeft het ook niet te dragen: dat doen zij. Ik heb toestemming om mee te gaan, de ruimte te betreden, om mee te kijken hoe het geavanceerdere, diepere werk zal gaan.

Dan ga ik naar voren, het voelt nu goed. Ik krijg het glaasje met Daime. Ik zet een stap terug. Ik ga het niet impulsief drinken, maar met aandacht. Hoe wil ik dat deze slok zal zijn? Ik bid om grond, om voeten, om aarde. Ik concentreer me op mijn voeten. Mijn contact met de grond. Met de intentie gevoed te worden in het contact met de grond drink ik. Het is bitter, maar heeft een zoete ondertoon. Als honing. Bitterzoet. Ik denk: de pijn, het bitter, maar ook de liefde die de pijn verzacht. Ik zet mijn glaasje terug, maar wordt teruggehaald: de laatste druppel. Ik denk: symbolisch: het laatste is het bitterst. Tot op de laatste druppel de beker leegdrinken.

De smaak is bitter. Ik ril, mijn lijf schokt. Bijna alsof ik moet huilen. Whhhuuhhhuhuhuh. Een rilling. Nog een rilling. Ooooh zo bitter. Ik probeer de smaak toe te laten. Voel hoe de smaak zijn werk doet. Dan roken we Santa Maria. Het geeft een zoete smaak over het bitter. Het verzacht de pijn.

Ik ziet echter hoe M heeft besloten om de twee energieën van F's en mijn familie te integreren. Enerzijds de power, anderzijds de lichtheid.. Ik zie hoe ik haar kan helpen dat te integreren. Of, vooral, ik zie dat het zo is. Het te zien zoals het is zal mij de kracht geven haar te helpen. Ik kan haar helpen door het gedicht dat we bij haar geboorte hebben gemaakt voor te lezen. Dat zal haar goed doen, haar te herinneren aan de boodschap van licht en warmte die we hebben meegegeven in het gedicht.

Ik begrijp hoe iedereen informatie overdraagt aan de ander, waarbij als het ware het gehele hologram van de biografie in een keer wordt overgedragen.

In de zaal verschijnt een licht. Een liefdevolle aanwezigheid. Vrouwelijk. Ik zie Maria voor me. Het is moeilijk om waar te nemen wat er precies gebeurt. Het is zo overweldigend, zo grootst, dat het nauwelijks te bevatten is. Ik zie het beeld van de



Maria zoals mijn oma die had: een halve maan, daarop de slang, en Maria die haar voet op de slang heeft en daar hoog bovenuit toort.

Ik beseft dat het een beeld is: het beeld verduisterd juist de volle ervaring, de volle waarneming. Het beeld is meer bedoeld om een soort beseft te hebben van wat ik waarneem; om een soort herinnering te kunnen hebben aan wat ik zie. Ik begrijp echter heel goed, dat wat ik zie op geen enkele manier op het beeld lijkt. Het is zo ongeveer de verhouding die het woord "aap" tot een werkelijke aap heeft: het woord bestaat uit drie letters. De werkelijke aap is duizenden malen complexer dan het woordbeeld zelf. Het woordbeeld helpt echter met communiceren; zolang het duidelijk is dat het een beeld is, is het goed.

Maria is zo liefdevol aanwezig; ze neemt alle leed tot zich. In de zaal zijn mensen aan het huilen. Gesnik, verdriet. Mijn neus loopt; het water stroomt eruit. Ik zing mee; het kost me moeite om te zingen, om te lezen. Maar ik kan mee zingen. Maria neemt alle verdriet tot zich. Ik voel hoe het verdriet in mijn buik naar haar toe mag stromen. Hoe zij mijn verdriet en het verdriet van de wereld tot zich neemt. Ze troost, koestert. De tranen van maria. Het is heel zacht, heel vochtig, vrouwelijk. Yin. En ze kan het dragen; ze is zo grootst, zo sterk; ze is er gewoon. Ze blijft gewoon aanwezig in het verdriet, en heelt het zo.

Het zingen neemt de overhand. Ik luister. Zo mooi, hoe de oudste mensen van de Santo Daime doorzingen. Zij dragen het ritueel nu. Zij kunnen doorzingen. Het zijn nog maar 5, 6 mensen lijkt wel die zingen. Zo mooi hoe hun gezang samenhangt. Zo mooi.

Dan is er het stuk van afscheid nemen. Het is steeds datzelfde lied dat zo van afscheid spreekt. Ik herken het lied: het is echt een uitzwaai lied. De energie begint af te nemen, ik ga langzaam terug. Ik mag nog even blijven: enerzijds beangstigd het me om zo diep in die andere realiteit te zitten. Of, beter, ik voel een stem die zich afvraagt: ik zit nu wel heel diep in die andere wereld. Tegelijkertijd voel ik het vertrouwen: ik kom terug. Het is mijn werk om zo diep in deze realiteit te gaan. Ik breng het licht, de heling, terug in mijn dagelijkse werk.

Ik begrijp heel diep wat er gebeurt als we praten. Hoe lastig het is om af te stemmen. Alles is al aanwezig. Niks hoeft gezegd of uitgelegd te worden. In het contact, in het samenzijn, ontstaat vanzelf de taal. Ontstaat vanzelf het woord. Ik kan spreken zoveel ik wil over het Daimeritueel; echter, in afstemming. Ik zie hoe ik soms praat vanuit mijn herinnering. Dan heeft de ander niet de energie om mij te volgen. Wanneer de ander aandachtig is, kan ik ook vertellen. Dan groeien de woorden als vanzelf uit het contact.

Ik beseft ook het belang van woorden geven. Woorden kunnen helen. Dit is een ritueel dat ik zal kunnen en mogen navertellen, vanwege het effect dat het geven van woorden heeft.

Ik beseft me hoe fantastisch het is om een lijf te hebben. Mijn DNA wordt de hele dag door gelezen. Er stroomt informatie uit mijn DNA, om mijn lijf draaiende te houden; de processen passen zich voortdurend levend en intelligent aan. Enorme informatiestromen. Ik ben onder de indruk.

4. 17 Juli 2010

Ik ben weer in de kerk van Santo Daime die na ongeveer 10 rituelen wel min of meer vertrouwd begint voor te komen. Ik ben met vier andere vrienden. We krijgen allemaal een vaste plek

toegewezen, de mannen aan de ene kant, de vrouwen aan de andere kant. Een vriend komt een rij achter me terecht, een andere vriend een aantal rijen aan de andere zijde van de mannenkant.

Het ritueel begint. Een aantal portugeese gebeden klinken, dan wordt de Santo Daime geserveerd. Ik voel me goed voorbereid. Ik heb de afgelopen week elke dag een uur yoga gedaan en vaak daarbij nog een uur gemediteerd. In mijn onderrug is wel een stuk spanning voelbaar, door de yoga is dat enerzijds soepeler geworden maar het is ook wat gevoelig en gespannen, soms pijnlijk.

We gaan de Daime drinken. Ik zie een vriendin van mij aan de andere kant rondkijken. Het is voor hen niet eenvoudig het juiste lied uit het boekje te vinden en ze geven het dan ook snel op en luisteren aandachtig naar het gezang. Ik weet ondertussen waar ik moet zijn in de bundel en zing mee. Sommige liedjes zijn ondertussen zo bekend dat ik stukjes uit mijn hoofd kan meezingen. Ik ga in de rij staan voor een glas. Ik de rij staan is altijd spannend, vind ik. Ik weet dat het enorm heftig en intens gaat zijn, maar ook goed. Ik krijg een vrij vol glas Daime en drink het aandachtig op. Wat is het toch bitter altijd. Ik krijg rillingen door mijn lijf van de smaak. Wat een intense smaak..... Dan ga ik zitten. Ik voel me eigenlijk ook al vreemd door de intense smaak. De Daime is heel aanwezig in mijn lijf.

We zingen het eerste deel van de liedbundel. Ik herken de teksten. Langzaam begint de Daime mijn waarneming te beïnvloeden. Geluid klinkt anders, mijn gevoelens worden intenser. Langzaam ontstaat er een tinteling door mijn lijf. De waarnemingen in mijn lijf intensifieren.

Ondertussen weet ik dat deze fase de fase van het 'loskomen' is. In deze periode kom ik meestal los van mijn lijf en begeef me innerlijk sterk in een soort innerlijke wereld die vooral bestaat uit mijn eigen gedachtespinsels, emoties, waarnemingen. Deze eerste fase kan soms best pittig zijn, want hij vraagt een acceptatie van alles wat er aanwezig is. De waarnemingen in mijn lijf intensiveren. Ik voel de pijn in mijn onderrug, subtiele waarnemingen van spanning en emoties. Gedachtes beginnen langs te schieten, gevoelens komen en gaan. De spanning in mijn onderrug voelt als iets dieps dat niet eenvoudig te accepteren is. Er zitten allerlei emoties in die onuitspreekbaar zijn. Ik voel dat het emoties zijn, maar ze zitten zo diep in mijn lijf verstopt dat het als het ware een onprettig soort spanning is op het grensgebied van lichaam en ziel. Ik communiceer met de engel (na lang zoeken tussen termen als alien, geest, gids, wezens etc. ben ik maar gesetteld voor de term engel) die in mijn buurt is. Hoewel ik hem nog niet kan zien, weet ik dat er hulp in de buurt is. Ik vraag wat ik hiermee moet doen: kan dit mee naar de 'andere wereld' of 'hyperspace' zoals het ook wel genoemd wordt? De engel geeft aan dat ik het mee mag nemen zonder het helemaal achter te laten.

Dan wordt de consecration of the space voorgelezen. Vind ik altijd een enorm mooie teksts, en hij markeert voor mij vaak het binnengaan in de 'andere wereld'. In de tekst wordt steeds herhaald: those who choose to enter here will feel the divine presence of.... De Daime begint nu echt goed 'in te slaan'. Ik breng het niet meer op mijn ogen open te houden of om mee te zingen. Ik luister naar het gezang, richt me op mijn lijf.

De engelen zijn er. Ondertussen wordt in het ritueel de liederen voor de Cura (dat betekent genezing in het portugees) gezongen. Ze leggen me dingen uit over mijn rug. Ik had me afgevraagd waar de spanning in mijn rug mee te maken had. Ze laten me zien hoe ieder mens zijn lijf resoneert om bewustzijnstoestanden. Het lijf van elk mens is als het ware een klankkast die is afgestemd op specifieke frequenties. Sommige mensen zijn 'gebouwd' voor, of hebben de juist vorm om te resoneren op specifieke bewustzijnsinhouden en toestanden. Ze laten me zien dan mijn lijf geschikt

is voor een specifieke frequentie die grotere groepen mensen omvat. Alsof als het ware meer collectieve spanningen zich makkelijk in mijn lijf laten voelen. Ik kan dat wel begrijpen als ik bijvoorbeeld denk aan de manier waarop ik naar de wereld kijk. Ik kan me innerlijk sterk betrokken voelen bij globale ontwikkelingen. Maar ze leggen dus uit dat het een frequentie is waar mijn rug op is afgestemd en dat ik voor het moment niet meer kan doen het gewaar zijn. Het is geen persoonlijk thema dat ik onder ogen moet zien, het is een collectief thema dat ik in mijn bewustzijn moet leren toelaten.

Ik probeer dieper te onspannen in mijn lijf, toe te laten de gevoelens die er zijn. Ik adem door, onspan langzaam dieper. Ik ga langzamerhand een soort diepe paniek in mijn lijf voelen. Alsof de cellen van mijn onderrug in een toestand van diepe doodsangst verkeren. Een soort blinde paniek, een soort gevoel van "O Mijn God Alles Gaat Nu Helemaal FOUT". Het is echt een heel fysiek/lijfelijk gevoel. Als ik mijn cellen vanuit hun perspectief zich hoor vastzetten en schrapzetten voor de klap. Ik herken de angst bij andere mensen in mijn familie, bijvoorbeeld mijn zus en mijn vader. Ik weet dat zij deze angst ook kennen. Het is heel basaal een soort angst om er te zijn. Gek genoeg ben ik in een paradoxale toestand: ik voel tegelijkertijd mijn cellen pure doodsangst uiten, mijn geest is in een diepe meditatieve stilte gehuld. Ik neem waar, ik ben bewustzijn.

Langzaam onspan ik nog dieper in het gevoel. Het is zoals het is. Het is gewoon een waarneming van diepe angst. Ik ben dat niet, het is enkel een fenomeen dat waarneembaar wordt in mijn bewustzijn. Ik ga dieper in allerlei angsten. De angst om gek te worden, mijn verstand te verliezen. Ik zie demonen, concentratiekampen, duister. Ook dit allemaal: ik beseft me dat het gewoon fenomenen zijn die in mijn bewustzijn komen. Ik realiseer me dat dingen waar ik bang voor ben gewoon iets zijn dat ik onder ogen kan zien. Ok, ik ben gek. Ontspan maar bij die gedachte. Ok, ik zie demonen. Ontspan maar.

Langzamerhand beseft ik me, dat mijn bewustzijn een veld is. Mijn lijf verdwijnt langzaam. Ik ben een veld van bewustzijn waarin zich allerlei verschijnselen voortdoen. De tijd zoals ik die in mijn normale realiteit ken verdwijnt langzamerhand. De tijd lost helemaal op. Alles is aanwezig, in mijn bewustzijn. Verleden, heden, toekomst, het is allemaal een veld waarin mijn bewustzijn zich bewust is. Ik begrijp dat wij allemaal een veld van bewustzijn zijn. Wij hebben echter geleerd ons te identificeren met bepaalde fenomenen die zich voortdoen in dat veld, zoals ons lichaam, gevoelens, relaties etc. In feite zijn we echter gewoon het veld dat we waarnemen en vloeien we dus ook voortdurend over in anderen. Ik zie heel helder hoe dit in het dagelijkse leven aanwezig is zonder dat wij ons hiervan bewustzijn. Onze collectieve werkelijkheid definiëren we anders. Maar hij kan ook zo worden gezien.

De ervaring wordt instens, dieper. Licht. Ik ben een veld van licht. Ik heb mijn ogen dicht. Mijn lichaam is opgelost in trillingen, frequenties, licht. Ik neem overal licht waar. Ik voel licht door mijn lijf stromen. Ik VOEL gewoon licht. Ik HOOR licht. Al mijn zintuigen worden doordrongen van licht. Ik zie een wereld van licht met mijn ogen dicht. Intens, alsof mijn zintuigen tot het uiterste worden gedreven. Alsof mijn zintuigen een rivier zijn die nu tot over de rand volstroomt met licht. Wouw, het is prachtig. Wat een schouwspel. Dan verdwijnt ik. Er is geen ik meer, alleen nog maar bewustzijn en licht. Het bewustzijn is alles. Honderduizenden jaren geschiedenis stromen door me heen. Mijn bewustzijn omvat lichtjaren, sterrenstelsels. Ik zeg mijn, maar er is geen mijn meer. Mijn is opgelost in het licht. Er is enkel waarneming. Een-zijn. Dan plof ik weer terug in een ik-bewustzijn. Er is weer een persoonlijkheid, ergens op de planeet aarde, die waarneemt. Een persoonlijke geschiedenis komt in beeld, het netwerk van mijn leven. Ik richt me weer op het licht. Het lijkt alsof mijn adem

heeft stilgestaan toen “Ik” wegwas. Dan plof ik weer weg. Enkel zijn. Licht. Alles vloeit over, alle zintuigen. Ik sterf. Tijd loopt achteruit. Ik weet dat ik iedereen kan worden. Ik ben geschokt. Natuurwetten zoals ik ze ken gaan niet meer op. Hoezo loopt de tijd terug. Hoezo ben ik een collectief bewustzijn. De engelen zijn geamuseerd. “Als er kosmische wetten worden geschaad, wie ga je aanklagen” is de grap. Ik lach. Er worden natuurwetten geweld aangedaan. Tja, wie heeft die dingen in de eerste plaats vastgesteld.

Ik zie de mensheid, als het ware op de zee van tijd beuken op het strand van het nu. Wij, als mensheid nu in leven, zijn voortdurend in contact met de eeuwigheid, met de zee van tijdloosheid. Met deze andere wereld. Ik zie hoe het is als een vrouw een kind krijgt en er een bewustzijn incarneert. Hoe een vrouw zich fysiek openstelt voor deze andere wereld. Ik zie het vrouwelijke verlangen naar een kind. Ik zie beelden voor me van een Rainbow Gathering: duizend mensen, in een grote kring, handen vast, zingend ‘We are a Circle’. Ze leggen uit dat ook dit momenten zijn waarop als het ware die wereld van de eeuwigheid de aarde zeer dicht nadert. Het zijn natuurlijk maar korte momenten dat zoiets gebeurt, maar het beeld, de herinnering, het weten dat dat is gebeurd is belangrijker dan dat het een kort moment was. Doordat het bestaat als beeld dat mensen aan elkaar vertellen en in zich hebben opgenomen heeft het zijn werking.

Ik merk dat ik langzamerhand weer terugkom in mijn persoonlijkheid. Ik wordt weer lokaler, het ritueel is ook al weer een flinke tijd aan de gang, een uur of 4.

Ik kan in de tijd kijken. Als ze zingen, zie ik de klanken als het ware uit de eeuwigheid aan komen golven naar het nu. Dan stromen ze door het nu heen op het moment dat ze gezongen worden en verdwijnen ze weer richting eeuwigheid. Ik zie niet een moment, maar een tijdsspanne van een aantal seconden. Hierdoor kan ik de liederen meezingen zonder dat ik de tekst ken: ik “zie” de tekst aan komen golven, kan me erop voorbereiden en zing hem dan op het moment dat hij in het nu aankomt.

Na verloop van tijd, er komen nog allerlei losse inzichten langs, ben ik steeds beter in staat weer gewoon mee te zingen uit de liedbundel. Het ritueel loopt ten einde, uiteindelijk is het afgelopen. Ik kan naar mijn vrienden toe om te delen wat ik heb meegemaakt.