

Integrating Psychotherapy and Spirituality: Some Gestaltic and Psychedelic Thoughts on Clinical Practice

Integrando Psicoterapia e Espiritualidade: Algumas Reflexões Gestálticas e Psicodélicas sobre a Prática Clínica

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ABSTRACT

This essay discusses issues raised by research on psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy, especially regarding the misappropriation of ancestral knowledge, the need to consider ineffable and spiritual experiences, and the descriptive and analytical limitations of materialistic Western science in addressing such phenomena. The experiences reported by patients describe aspects related to spirituality and the production of meaning in situations of non-ordinary consciousness, phenomena that have not been sufficiently studied by mainstream academia. We argue that such research would benefit from dialogues with Amerindian epistemologies and shamanic knowledge. There is also a need for a clearer political and ethical stance in recognizing the knowledge produced by indigenous peoples.

KEYWORDS: psychedelics, psychotherapy, spirituality, Gestalt therapy, shamanism.

RESUMO:

Discutimos questões suscitadas pelas investigações sobre psicoterapias assistidas por psicodélicos, sobretudo sobre apropriação indevida de saberes ancestrais, necessidade de considerar experiência inefáveis e espirituais, bem como a limitação descritiva e analítica da ciência ocidental materialista para abordar tais fenômenos. As experiências relatadas por pacientes descrevem aspectos relativos à espiritualidade e produções de sentido em situações de consciência não-ordinária, fenômenos ainda pouco estudados pelo *mainstream* acadêmico. Defendemos que tais investigações se beneficiariam de

diálogos com epistemologias ameríndias e do saber xamânico. Igualmente há a necessidade de um posicionamento político e ético mais claro de reconhecimento do saber produzido pelos povos originários.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: psicodélicos, psicoterapia, espiritualidade, Gestalt-terapia, xamanismo.

INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS: OUR STARTING POINT

Traditional Amerindian therapies open us the doors of the Spirit and teach us that all illnesses are spiritual. Thus, the healing process, the therapeutic act, aims to work on interruptions in contact with the sacred. They are therapies for bonding and reconnecting with the visible and invisible. And the bond with ourselves and the environment places us on the path of the Spirit, on the path of Self (Delacroix, 2022, p. 365).

This theoretical essay purpose is to encourage discussions and dialogues concerning psychotherapy (more specifically through the lens of Gestalt therapy), spirituality and psychedelics, without systematically or exhaustively covering the academic literature on the topics covered in this text. Despite not using a formal survey of the literature, references revised made it possible to weave points of intersection among those areas, discussing some epistemological and political crossings that seem to go unnoticed both by researchers of psychotherapies assisted by psychedelics and by the broader psychology community, such as the nature of consciousness, the role of Psychology and the psychotherapist, the field of forces and processes that produce the phenomenologies of illness and health, and so on. The introduction of new health technologies and the ethical and technical challenges of recent research have proven to be a fertile field for reflections necessary for scientific development and questioning society's position regarding spiritual and non-ordinary states of consciousness. Hence, we question about the need for Psychology to turn to insights brought by psychedelic philosophy, especially that of original peoples.

The acceleration of cycles of change and the level of complexity of human relations in late capitalism, especially in relation to new cognitive and knowledge horizons, has request from Psychology adaptation efforts once again (Amorim Júnior *et al.*, 2024). To the same extent, the rediscovery of psychedelics raises questions towards many theories about psychological processes, and interpersonal and ecological relationships. Doubts regarding the ability to produce theories aligned with evidence and respecting ethical research requirements in a field involving ineffable phenomena emerge. Perhaps, a certain skepticism regarding the methodologies adopted for data collection in ongoing investigations and

the production of meaning in situations of non-ordinary consciousness is valid to remind us that other epistemologies may be able to describe and understand what is experienced by patients (Langlitz , 2023 ; Vollet , 2023), if not necessary in order to expand the descriptive and semantic spectrum of the data collected.

The scientific community and the media have once again turned their attention to substances that promise to transform the current paradigm of neuroscience and mental health. Such substances, on the other hand, are not in fact new, since throughout History, we have used them to experience non-ordinary states of consciousness for different purposes (Arnaud; Sharpe, 2023; Freitas, 2023; Kopenawa; Albert, 2019; Naranjo, 2000, 2020; Reiff *et al.*, 2020; Rodrigues, 2019; Winkelman, 2010, 2021). Perhaps many people don't realize it, but a daily cup of coffee is an example of using a drink to modify our ability to experience and produce meaning. They are substances that alter our perception and consciousness, and that were and are used for spiritual, medicinal and recreational purposes in different societies (Williams *et al.*, 2022). Winkelman (2021) suggests a hypothesis of coevolution between hominids and fungi that produce molecules that modulate serotonergic and dopaminergic receptors, highlighting the development of cognitive and affective processes by the human species that are important for their survival through their intentional use.

In order to highlight the different uses of these substances, it is common to find references in the literature to psychedelics, entheogens and many other terms – which we will not focus on in detail so as not to escape the scope of this text. Both terms, psychedelic and entheogenic, if we resort to their Greek etymology, suggest their application in contemporary medicine. The radicals ψυχή (*psyche*) mean soul or mind and δηλεῖν (*delein*) reveal or manifest – so for the first word we have the meaning of substance that reveals the mind or soul. For the second term, the radicals ἔνθεος (*entheos*) meaning inspired or filled with god and γενέσθαι (*genesthai*) suggesting becoming – that is, substance that makes us inspired by the sacred (Freitas, 2023; Johnstad, 2020). Various peoples systematized knowledge about the use of a range of herbal medicines, fungi and animal excretions in association with many other technologies, as well as the invocation of spirits, songs and dances, for example, for the individual and collective treatment of natural and supernatural sufferings (Evans , 2018 ; Naranjo, 2000 , 2020; Learn, 2021; Metcalfe, 2023; Rodrigues, 2019; Williams *et al.*, 2022; Winkelman, 2010, 2021). They have been used for centuries, including by ancient Latin American peoples, from whose expertise much of the scientific interest originated, and are increasingly common in urban centers in neoshamanic ceremonies, object of ethnotourism , biopiracy and environmental degradation (Hauskeller *see him.* , 2023; Williams *et al.* , 2022). This concern is relevant for ethical, political, ecological, and philosophical reasons, among others.

Interest in these psychotropic drugs is back in the first decade of the 21st Century, namely as the “psychedelic renaissance”, referring to the Enlightenment, period that follows the Middle Ages in transition to the Modernity – a position that is too Eurocentric and colonialist (Hauskeller *et al.*, 2023; Williams *et al.*, 2022). The current paradigm and its rational vein do not resonate with attitudes of surrender and transcendence, ecstasy and loss of control over oneself, so that experiences in which we let ourselves be and flow with the moment, more aligned with pathos (πάθος), are considered shameful, marginal or pathological and, therefore, should be avoided (Evans, 2018; Naranjo, 2005; Winkelman, 2010), alienating us from the notion and experience of transcendence (Ribeiro, 2009). Since the early days of psychotherapy, Freud refuted spiritual and transcendent experiences as an oceanic escape and infantilized attitudes (Carhart-Harris *et al.*, 2014; Naranjo, 2000). Since then, Psychology has struggled to line up with other scientific disciplines over the last century. Its focus on studies with data evidence and the specialization of his sub-areas of knowledge and professional practice are two brief examples of the attempt to outline its theories and techniques.

However, we may remember that psychotherapy, spirituality and psychedelic substances shared part of this period of reaffirmation of Psychology’s scientific status, especially between the 1960s and the present day (Naranjo, 2013, 2020; Passie; Guss; Krähenmann, 2022; Reiff *et al.*, 2020). Given recent research advances, Psychology has had and still has its epistemological and methodological foundations gauged, what directs us towards a return to metaphysical discussions and the development of psychedelic philosophy, which can contribute to discussions about spirituality, semantics and theory of mind. The “first wave” of Western psychedelic investigations acknowledged the importance of these experiences for expanding our creative potential and scrutinize diverse philosophical propositions (Freitas, 2023). Nevertheless, it lacked the methodological rigor currently required and many authors seemed to give in to a certain euphoria, in a *naïve* manner towards the consequences of using psychedelics both therapeutically and recreationally.

NEW HORIZONS: PSYCHOTHERAPY AND DIALOGUES WITH THE MORE-THAN-HUMAN DIMENSION

There was a time when humanity considered physical health, mental health and spirituality dimensions of a totality of individual and collective lives (Hauskeller *et al.*, 2023; Kopenawa; Albert, 2019; Naranjo, 2000, 2020; Williams *et al.*, 2022; Winkelman, 2010). However, our devotion to humankind gradually separated our species from the rest of Nature and produced a dangerously dualistic humanism in Eurocentric societies (Gray, 2006; Ribeiro, 2009; Castro, 2018). This change of course ended up producing an ideology in which Nature is at our disposal and must be explored and benefit humans.

Several consequences emerged from this dichotomy: the degradation of ecosystems, the exploitation of other people, the separation between matter and processes, and the division of physiology, subjectivation and spirituality. Even though we have distanced ourselves from a monistic understanding in favor of a modern materialist, mechanistic and mercantilist ideological alignment, we observe that contemporary psychotherapy preserves traces of ancestral beliefs, especially in comprehensive psychotherapeutic schools, such as Gestalt therapy. Although there are differences between psychotherapy and spirituality in terms of their foundations, there is also significant common ground, so that they are not segregated territories, but rather a single path with different nuances that lead to the same end (Delacroix, 2021, 2022; Naranjo, 2000, 2013, 2020; Ribeiro, 2009; Winkelman, 2010). The spirituality we refer to in this essay goes back to a wide range of beliefs, meanings, narratives, practices and technologies that involve a connection with something greater than the individual self. We, hence, refer to religious or non-religious beliefs, meanings, narratives, practices and technologies, considering religion as the intention of reconnecting to something transcendental, transpersonal, and that makes up an institutionalized group, with its own culture and identity aspects. However, spirituality does not always follow institutionalized values, knowledge or practices and, ergo, we are considering spirituality as a larger umbrella term that speaks of transpersonal and transcendental experiences and that also encompasses religiosity for some people.

The exploration of the inner world, the search for growth, personal development and well-being, the connection with oneself and with the community and Nature, overcoming difficult and painful moments and memories, regaining a sense of purpose, feeling fully present are some of the intersections between spirituality and psychotherapy. The explanations of the phenomena and the instruments of intervention have changed, but the narratives maintain a common root of self-appropriation and reconnection with something greater and more-than-human (MTH). We may consider that psychotherapy will hardly follow paths that do not touch spirituality in its broadest sense, as it is something so inherent to human experience (Delacroix, 2022; Naranjo, 2000; Ribeiro, 2009). Perhaps, it would be more pertinent to recognize that some psychotherapeutic traditions propose to be more or less transpersonal in their theoretical propositions and technical framework due to their ecological perspective and a MTH perspective (Delacroix, 2021, 2022; Naranjo, 2000; Ribeiro, 2009), which brings them closer to narratives of indigenous peoples who consider the territory they inhabit and its entities as participating in the web of life and whose attitudes have repercussions on human daily life (Hauskeller *et al.*, 2023; Kopenawa; Albert, 2019; Williams *et al.*, 2022). Psychotherapy is typically based on a scientific and evidence-based framework; it usually focuses on observable behavior and its practitioners undergoes such training that enables them to work within a legally regulated scope. Spirituality, on the other hand, is

often based on personal beliefs and experiences, and focuses on deep transformation, using techniques that involve interventions in the person seeking help, in their community and/or in the environment in which they live. Spiritual guides and medicine people also undergo training within their traditions in order to understand phenomena based on a matrix of knowledge transmitted orally and assimilated through direct experimentation.

Unfortunately, psychotherapy was separated from spirituality in its early days both by the modern context and by Freud's statements about the oceanic experience of losing oneself in something greater and regressive and infantilized attitudes, contrary to what other equally notorious names, such as Jung and James, have stated about the need to study ineffable experiences (Carhart-Harris *et al.*, 2014; Winkelman, 2010). Even though modernity has tried to kill the sacred, people continue to seek solutions to everyday problems, meanings for obstacles they face, and connecting with values and purposes that transcend the human dimension. Modern Psychology has positioned itself to occupy a place that was previously exclusive to spirituality and religiosity. With the materialization of the Universe and our separation from Nature, some knowledge and its technology should fulfill the duty of helping people recover their social role and regain their purpose in life. In mechanistic and dualistic (and why not say to some extent, humanist) ideology, phenomena beyond human understanding and control are “forbidden” (Evans, 2018; Gray, 2006). However, in mid-20th Century, with the emergence of comprehensive and humanistic psychology, attention once again turned to explanations further mechanismism and physiologism, in what we could consider as a transpersonal stance since the beginning of this movement (Naranjo, 1978) and which sought to produce meaning from experiences without this necessarily implying adopting explanations that necessarily include supernatural forces (Momotake, 2018). This is a point of ethical reflection, since the use of psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy fosters experiences that can lead the patient to change their perspective on metaphysical aspects, among other principles (Letheby, 2022; Letheby ; Mattu, 2021; Johnson, 2022). Modern and scientific Psychology has restricted itself to work with the ego (Delacroix, 2022) or the “small mind” (Naranjo, 2000) instead of the whole, often reducing us to isolated neural and biochemical processes, and stimulating egotistic values to the detriment of our participation in an expanded, transpersonal and transcendental Gestalt (Delacroix, 2022; Ribeiro, 2009). A mistake, as the Universe evolves and functions on a transpersonal level (Naranjo, 1978; Ribeiro, 2009), demanding from us acceptance and confirmation of developments in the field as they blossom and evolve, in a detached manner, yet with interest, intense dialogical participation and compassionate consideration. Something lost in Eurocentric societies and still observed in indigenous peoples (Hauskeller *et al.*, 2023; Kopenawa; Albert, 2019; Williams *et al.*, 2022).

Likewise several human sciences, Psychology is also subdivided according to epistemological and ideological aspects that underlie its methodologies for producing knowledge and proposing technologies for individuals and society. Within its methodological diversity in the field of psychotherapies, we find Gestalt therapy, a psychotherapeutic tradition that focuses on the here-and-now, helping people connect and integrate thoughts, feelings, behaviors and other vital processes active at a given moment (Delacroix, 2021, 2022). This psychotherapeutic school understands that life happens in the contact boundary established between the organism and the environment, from which emerge affects we feel, think and act (Delacroix, 2021, 2022; Perls, Hefferline, Goodman, 1998). This tradition emphasizes the importance of the person as a whole (encompassing physiological, sociocultural, philosophical, environmental dimensions, and so on), their meaning making while investing in life, and encourages us to assume our participation as one of the elements in the field that produces phenomenologies we experience. Furthermore, the organism would be able to self-regulate, finding resources within and outside itself for a dynamic balance of the processes inherent to the relationship established with the environment (Delacroix, 2021, 2022; Perls, 2019; Perls *et al.*, 1998; Resnick, 2020). However, the conditions of the field in which the contact takes place are sometimes unfavorable to the organism, making it difficult to sustain vital processes due to the tension of the contextual forces present at a certain moment.

A common ground shared by Gestalt therapy and psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy (PAP) is their emphasis on the importance of experiential and non-directive learning. The first one encourages us to engage in experiments in order to explore and learn about ourselves, the environment and the relationship we establish in this encounter. Likewise, the second one seeks to facilitate experiential learning with the help of psychoactive substances, since these act to suspend processual biases and stimulate new ways of experiencing and behaving. PAP research manuals suggest a non-directive methodological approach that is based on the organism's own capacity for self-regulation (for example, Ching *et al.* 2023; Mithoefer, 2017), opening space for ineffable experiences with spiritual connotations that can be questioned by the current paradigm (Letheby, 2022; Letheby; Mattu, 2021; Johnson, 2022). Once again, we reiterate the relevance of dialogues with psychedelic philosophy, especially regarding metaphysical subjects and theory of mind.

WHEN OTHER CHARACTERS APPEAR IN THE LANDSCAPE: INTEGRATING OTHER DIMENSIONS AND EPISTEMOLOGIES INTO THE FIELD AND CLINICAL MANAGEMENT

Shamanism, a traditional practice found in many cultures around the world, involves the use of spiritual techniques, such as rituals, prayers and meditation, to promote healing and well-being. The term

used to name this practitioner (*saman*) has Siberian origins (Winkelman, 2010) and their praxis generally involves connecting with entities, such as spiritual guides, ancestors and non-human beings, to receive guidance and support (Castro, 2018; Winkelman, 2010). Many indigenous peoples relate to the territory where they live, the animals, plants and fungi that live there, as well as natural phenomena, in a large social web that produces meanings and social identity (Castro, 2018; Williams *et al.*, 2022). In these cultures, dimensions such as art, religion, politics and medicine overlap and complement each other to a large extent. Some practitioners who are part of the neoshamanic movement dedicate themselves to working with spirituality from a context still influenced by a modern, urban, dualistic matrix, which is detached from the original cultural background – even if inspired and with good intentions of reconnecting with a more profound understanding that fosters personal development, health, and spiritual growth, both individually and collectively. These stakeholder values are lost along the way despite the good faith and effort of many who invest in this endeavor. A risk to which we subject ourselves with PAP protocols (George *et al.*, 2020; Hauskeller *et al.*, 2023; Williams *et al.*, 2022), since the cultural background in which one participates also influences their experience in psychotherapy, shamanic rituals, and psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy (Eisner, 1997; George *et al.*, 2020; Langlitz, 2023).

Winkelman (2010) describes shamanism as essential for our species, enabling us to create more complex groups, coordinate social functions and spell what is experienced through symbolism. But, after all, who is the shaman? She is an important character in indigenous societies because she plays different spiritual, medicinal, political, religious and educational roles (Naranjo, 2000; Castro, 2018; Winkelman, 2010). A shaman is more than a simple “primitive” healer or doctor. She works to help individuals connect with human and MTH forces and develop a deeper sense of meaning and purpose in their lives, as well as assists politically and spiritually in balancing multiple forces in the field. The shaman is a technician who manipulates consciousness (her own and that of those who ask for help) in search of information and to enhance dialogical aspects with the natural and spiritual dimensions to carry out individual and collective healing and transformation processes (Delacroix, 2022; Hauskeller *et al.*, 2023; Kopenawa; Albert, 2019; Williams *et al.*, 2022; Winkelman, 2010). We can distinguish different professionals that are commonly grouped under the shaman umbrella concept, such as shamans themselves, healers, mediums, priests, sorcerers and witches (Winkelman, 2010), but we will focus on only two of these categories at the moment. Both are common for two of the authors mentioned in this essay (Castro, 2018; Winkelman, 2010) and deserve to be highlighted in our debate on transpersonal psychotherapy and the role of the therapist, namely shamans and priests. Shamans are more common in hunter-gatherer societies, while priests are more frequently seen in agricultural societies. The first carries out the occupation in parallel with the need to produce their subsistence through other means, while the

second is a full-time activity. The shaman places himself more horizontally in the relationship with the patient and with the forces with which she works, being at their mercy and needing to act actively in the healing and transformation processes; the priest, in turn, positions herself vertically, being a representative through whom whoever requests her can have access to the supernatural – something one could not achieve alone. By lending herself to diplomatic negotiations with the supernatural and non-humans, the shaman makes her body a vehicle for her patient, becoming a sacrificial offering herself. Thus, the shaman is the officiant of the ceremony and the offering. The priest, on the other hand, is an administrator and executor of other people's sacrifice, supervisor and sanctioner of necessary adjustments. From a Gestaltic understanding, we should adopt a shamanic attitude and not a priestly one.

Shamanism is a spiritual practice that involves a dialogical relationship with the natural world and the spirits of the ancestors. However, there are also important differences between psychotherapy and shamanism. Shamanic healing focuses more on the spiritual aspects of healing and growth, while psychotherapy takes into account human processes of subjectivation, whether organismic or psychosocial. Furthermore, shamanism may involve the use of psychoactive substances, while psychotherapy does not typically use such substances, this being a new paradigm emerging from recent research. Among the various tasks performed, the shaman sings songs, prescribes diets with master plants and herbal baths, among other technologies. Master plants – those that teach us something – can be consumed in food, smoked, taken as snuff or used in baths. Some of them are psychoactive, others are not. Among the most common psychoactive drugs by Amerindian peoples, we can mention classic psychedelics such as ayahuasca (it is actually a tea with at least two plants), Peyote, San Pedro, Jurema, and several types of mushrooms of the genus *Psilocybe*. The active principles of these plants are part of a new paradigm of scientific investigations in the area of mental health that has been called the “psychedelic renaissance” and which we will discuss below.

One similarity between Gestalt therapy and shamanism is their emphasis on experiential techniques. Both traditions encourage individuals to explore their inner experience through techniques such as guided imagery, visualization, and meditation. Both also recognize the importance of connecting with the present moment and developing a greater sense of self-awareness. Another similarity that we can point out is the focus on personal and collective responsibility, emphasizing protagonism in the healing and growth processes, instead of depending unilaterally on external sources of support. What brings Gestalt therapy closer to shamanism, then, is its versatility of organically engaging with the sensorial, affective, cognitive, interactive and meaning-making dimensions, touching the Universe and overflowing us beyond the egotistic consciousness, in a transpersonal proposal (Delacroix, 2022; Naranjo, 1978; Ribeiro, 2009). However, shamanism suggests a form of diplomacy, a political dialogue

with “foreign” subjectivities of MTH entities in the field. This occurs based on a distinct understanding of these entities. In such epistemologies, all beings share an ancestry and are related to each other, even if it is not evident or apparent to us at first, and also consider that they have consciousness and intentionality in their actions (Hauskeller *et al.*, 2023; Kopenawa; Albert, 2019; Castro, 2018; Williams *et al.*, 2022; Winkelman, 2010). Thus, there is nothing that occurs passively or incidentally, except through authorship and interest in established cosmic relationships.

The transpersonal psychotherapist, with spiritual and perhaps shamanic influence, is willing to walk through the valley of shadows, descend into the hell of human experience, without fearing chaos and pain (Naranjo, 2000). This professional is committed to accompanying those who ask for help along the way through suffering, dealing with the ecstatic and surrendering to the forces of the field, being their vehicle when necessary and co-participating in the development of new adjustments. Delacroix (2022) states that the shaman's work takes place in the opening of consciousness and in cathartic processes focused on the pre-contact phase, mobilizing the *id* function and “raw” and diffuse contents that remain in the background, tensioning the formation of clear and energized figures. Here we speak of embodied consciousness in lived experiences, with our understanding influenced by Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology (Delacroix 2021, 2022). The interventions made are, firstly, aimed at pre-reflective awareness and the expansion of *awareness* in a broad sense. The assimilation of what has been experienced and the making of meaning occur later in interviews with the shaman and in interaction with the community. From this perspective, the shaman seeks to access other levels of knowledge, thus self-knowledge, knowledge of others and the environment. These are aesthetic knowledges, closer to *pathos* and the sensitive realm, arising from experienced phenomenologies and learned in addition to identity and rational aspects. Such a movement suggests a return to another phenomenological basis, of a prereflective self-consciousness, of corporeality. Thus, the transformation of oneself and the relationship with others happens in dimensions that are not ordinary for the modern materialist paradigm.

PSYCHEDELIC-ASSISTED PSYCHOTHERAPIES: RECLAIMING ANCESTRAL PERSPECTIVES TO FIND OUR PATH BACK?

In mid-20th Century, the scientific community began to investigate psychedelics, new paradigms of consciousness and its semantics, as well as ways of their use in individual and group psychotherapy (Carhart-Harris *et al.*, 2014; Johnstad, 2020; Passie *et al.*, 2022; Rodrigues, 2019). That is the same period in which comprehensive schools were born, with a phenomenological-existential background, e.g. Gestalt therapy. It was an attempt to get closer to *pathos*, to rediscover what makes us human and produces meaning and purposes in life. After a period of infertile, violent and, why not say in agreement with

Naranjo (2020), tragicomic prohibitionism, the beginning of the 21st Century witnessed the revival of research on PAP for chronic conditions that do not respond to current pharmacopeia and psychotherapeutic models.

Nutt, Spriggs and Erritzoe (2023) remind us that the United Nations convention that classifies classic psychedelics as dangerous and without potential use for treatments is not evidence-based and exaggerates in pointing out risks and harm to patients. Survey carried out by Hendricks, Thorne, Clark, Coombs and Johnson (2015) with data from the *National Survey on Drug Use and Health* on over 190,000 adult participants found that the use of classic psychedelics, contrary to common sense expectations, was a protective factor for mental health. The authors found that continued use reduced the participant's chances of experiencing psychological distress in the month prior to data collection, and of ideation, planning and attempting suicide in the last year. In contrast, the use of other drugs was highly associated with these factors. These authors also reiterate the low risk of abuse of these substances and suggest continuing research regarding the use of classic psychedelics as drugs for treating various mental health conditions, such as depression, anxiety, OCD, PTSD (Hendricks *et al.*, 2015; Nutt *et al.*, 2023; Reiff *et al.*, 2020), including for drug, alcohol and tobacco abuse (Nutt *et al.*, 2023).

Research suggests that psychedelic-assisted therapy may be effective in treating a variety of mental health conditions, including depression, anxiety, PTSD, and addictions (Nutt *et al.*, 2023; Reiff *et al.*, 2020). One of the most common effects of these drugs is the reduction of the activity of the Default Mode Network (DMN), which is responsible for tasks such as organizing autobiographical information, self-reference, memory recalling, empathy, emotions, social judgment and narrative comprehension. Thus, neural processing increases in entropy, that is, being unable to occur through usual neural pathways, it occurs through “secondary pathways” producing new semantics (Carhart-Harris *et al.*, 2014; Nutt *et al.*, 2023). In addition, there are analysis that suggest neuroplasticity and some clinical evidence indicating that such medications would assist psychotherapy in the production of new meanings and concepts; however, investigations are not precise in pointing out the specific role of these drugs and psychotherapy in the entire experience of overcoming addressed sufferings and fostering a healthier clinical prognosis (Carhart-Harris *et al.*, 2014; Nutt *et al.*, 2023; Reiff *et al.*, 2020). Regardless of how specific variables work, the result of the proposed interventions in PAP resembles the description that Delacroix (2021) makes of the traditional therapist (as he calls the person of medicine of indigenous peoples) working with different methodologies in a paradoxical position, that is, to add disorder to the disorder of psychological sufferings in order to regain health and a full life.

Studies also indicate that physiological conditions, biography, and emotional state during the drug session, the environment in which the medication is taken, among other factors, make up the *set and*

setting background widely described in the literature and which leads to a wide diversity of clinical experiences and prognoses (Eisner, 1997; Langlitz, 2023; Nutt *et al.*, 2023; Passie *et al.*, 2022; Reiff *et al.*, 2020). Set refers to variables related to the patient, whether physical, psychological or biographical, and setting refers to the psychoactive drug administration environment. A fourth factor is present in the experience equation, that is, the cultural background in which the individual participates, where they come from before the psychedelic experience and to where they will return. Eisner (1997) reminds us that a more restricted view of the scene of psychoactive use can lead us to misunderstanding what is experienced by disregarding the larger matrix that encompasses the experiential field. In line with this perspective, Winkelman (2010, 2021) states that human consciousness and our ability to produce meanings are influenced by both physiological and symbolic variables. In other words, we are talking here about something already predicted in one of our Gestaltic roots, i.e. field theory. In the most recent research (see those cited in this text), we observed a tendency to consider the drug as one of the variables and not the most important in the outcome and prognosis, which brings us closer to a shamanic and transpersonal context as discussed previously.

The resumption of psychedelic science calls on Psychology to study its literature and the most recent findings regarding the emerging clinical paradigm in PAP. The inclusion of these drugs in mental health treatments promises important changes in clinical practice and how we understand experiences' semantics (Carhart-Harris *et al.*, 2014; Johnson, 2022; Letheby, 2022; Letheby; Mattu, 2021; Naranjo, 2005, 2020; Reiff *et al.*, 2020). Passie and collaborators (2022) reaffirm the intention of both ancient and contemporary protocols to support a phenomenological approach, stimulating introspective investigation during the period of drug action and subsequently integrating what is experienced and producing meanings in subsequent psychotherapy sessions.

CROSSINGS, CROSSOVERS AND CROSS-CUTS: WHERE DOES THIS TRAIL HEAD TO?

We have invited more and more often to recognize our ancestry, to reconnect with something greater and more intimate, some kind of a “going back home” (Delacroix, 2021, 2022; Naranjo, 2000, 2005; Ribeiro, 2009), not only through “ancient technologies” but also contemporary ones (Evans, 2018). Some Gestalt therapists who advocate in favor of psychedelics, such as Delacroix (2004a, 2004b, 2021, 2022) and Naranjo (2000, 2005; 2020), see them as tools for spiritual and psychological development. At the crossroads between Gestalt therapy, spirituality and psychedelics, we understand that the use of these drugs can facilitate experiences of ego dissolution, transcendence and connection with something greater than oneself. Experiences that resemble those orchestrated by shamans.

Although there are some similarities between these three paths (Gestalt therapy, psychedelics and spirituality), they are not necessarily or directly linked to each other. Some people may choose to explore their spirituality regardless of using psychedelics or engaging in psychotherapy. Others seek psychotherapy without considering their spiritual development or either transcendental or transpersonal aspects, and may never have an ecstatic or psychedelic experience. We still have those who use psychedelics as a form of personal growth and self-awareness without considering these same aspects or simply for recreational purposes. Walking the path taking into account psychotherapy, spirituality and psychedelics all together is an individual choice and one that is certainly not considered by most people.

As said previously, the use of psychoactive substances is part of human practice throughout history and several religious traditions have some relationship with psychoactive substances used to evoke altered states of consciousness for spiritual purposes. They were harshly repressed in Western societies in the last century due to racist, Eurocentric reasons and because they clash with the current epistemological, political and moral paradigms (Arnaud; Sharpe, 2023; Evans, 2018; Naranjo, 2005; Rodrigues, 2019); after all, reaching ecstatic states and losing control is contrary to modern ideology (Evans, 2018; Naranjo, 2000). The Gestalt tradition invites us to carefully lose ourselves in ourselves and in others (Ribeiro, 2009), let go of control and express ourselves freely (Naranjo, 1978, 2013). Our path is one of expression rather than avoidance, abstraction and neurotic manipulation. Our path is one of organismic consciousness, of recognition of a prereflective wisdom resulting from the vivid contact experienced. Gestalt therapy, like several ancestral traditions, seeks to confirm the lived experience and connect us by flowing with the elements present in the field, that is, contact from a transpersonal perspective.

It may seem worrying for someone the idea of ingesting a substance to experience transcendence and transpersonality . On the other hand, other strategies such as fasting, breathing techniques, dancing, chanting and praying , sleep deprivation, among many others, are equally common to alter physiology and the context of contact with the aim of experiencing non-ordinary states of consciousness. and other ways of relating to life. The ingestion of psychoactive substances for spiritual or psychotherapeutic purposes differs from recreational and/or abusive use, as it is characterized by being systematic, planned, controlled and contextualized (Arnaud; Sharpe, 2023; Naranjo, 2005, 2020; Winkelman, 2010). The desire for personal growth and the search for wisdom and transcendence tend to characterize the infrequent or occasional use of psychedelics. Arnaud and Sharpe (2023), for example, observed in their investigation with 684 users of psychoactive drugs that those who included such substances as part of their spiritual practice did it when participating in individual or collective rituals three or four times a year, with moderate to high doses, and who sought to integrate experiences with meditation and reflecting on

learning and how to consider them in their daily lives. The authors also observed that such participants more frequently reported mystical experiences and high levels of transcendence. In research with an international sample of 319 psychedelic users, Johnstad (2020) observed that 43% of participants used them alone, 21% accompanied by one person and 27% in a group of closer friends. The data also revealed that 71% of users did so for spiritual motivations. In both studies, aspects of spirituality were reported as experiences of greater connection with people and Nature, ineffable sensations and self-transcendence.

Naranjo (2005, 2020) also reminds us that often a single ceremony with psychedelics provides us with material for months of integrative work in psychotherapy. As a technology of expansion and reconnection, these psychoactive drugs are not intended to remove us from everyday life, restrict us or foster any type of avoidance; quite the contrary, these substances are tools for introspection, new ways of perceiving the environment, providing opportunities for creative contacts, facilitating encounters with challenging emotions and memories, and nurturing personal growth (Arnaud; Sharpe, 2023; Delacroix, 2004a, 2004b, 2022; Freitas, 2023; Johnstad, 2020; We reiterate that the isolated and unguided use of psychedelics does not characterize them as treatment or personal development, but rather their incorporation into a broader ritual context of spiritual search and growth or psychotherapy. We must consider these substances as one of the elements that sum up an entire structured system aimed at individual (and sometimes collective) treatment and evolution, including psychotherapy, previous diets (with or without master plants), songs, dances, paintings body parts, prayers, and even the place where the ceremony or treatment takes place. All of these alone, as well as the substance taken, would in itself provide contact with the sacred and the expansion of consciousness. However, the convergence of all these technologies in favor of the person seeking help promotes a greater field favorable to the established objective.

This is the same point made by authors who study PAP (for example, Carhart-Harris *et al.*, 2014; Carhart-Harris *et al.*, 2018). It is also worth highlighting that, as with every spiritual path, the importance of accompanying someone knowledgeable about this path, a guide who accompanies us on the journey, pointing out here and there something on the horizon and where we are going in order to provide us with moments of challenge and integration. Just like the psychotherapist, this guide does not provide ready-made answers, but invites us to meet ourselves, recognizing who we are at that moment, how we contact each other and what we want at each step along the path. Each experience, including the use of entheogens or not taking them, arises from the need that is revealed in the field and aims to include new experiential data based on what has been experienced, in order to expand our possibility of choice and to live creatively. Carhart-Harris and collaborators (2014) reaffirm the importance of being monitored by a professional in order to create a context that promotes the use of psychotropic assistance and reduces

the risks of loss of contact with reality and the persistence of magical or delusional thoughts, another relevant point in protocols that include these drugs. In a shamanic approach, we would say that one needs the shaman-guide-diplomat to go with her to negotiate with other beings and the sacred realm and guide one on the way back home. We need someone to accompany and support us, if necessary, so that the psychological and spiritual processes activated in this experience are completed and take their due course.

Claudio Naranjo (2000, 2005, 2020), one of our ancestors in Gestalt therapy, invited us to dialogues between our tradition and psychospiritual development assisted by psychedelics. Would it be a case of recovering one of our most radical characteristics and fundamental pillar? Field theory starts from a transpersonal perspective. Even though there is a tendency to talk about transpersonality, associating it with altered states of consciousness, paranormality and forces of the sacred (Naranjo, 1978), the field perspective and other fundamental concepts of Gestalt therapy alone lead us to the need for a transpersonal psychology (Delacroix , 2022). Many spiritual traditions consider that spiritual awakening and development occurs when a person expands their ability to perceive themselves beyond ordinary consciousness, reaching broader states of understanding and creatively adjusting relationships with humans and non-humans.

Nevertheless, a warning needs to be made: PAP clinical practice and psychological counseling for entheogen users are not the same as what is usually done and requires specific training. Technical qualification and personal experimentation may be relevant for professionals who wish to embrace new and old technologies, as well as transpersonal dimensions and spiritual themes in their clinical practice. But, will training focused on physiological descriptions of psychological processes be sufficient for this endeavor? Are we prepared to truly understand subjective processes beyond material causality (Costa, 2023)? Delacroix (2022, p. 95) reaffirms the need for theoretical support that considers dialogical relationships, the prereflective knowledge of organismic consciousness based on emerging phenomenology and ecological ethics:

“The philosophy of Gestalt therapy can lead us to think of the therapeutic act as a political act, the change in one provoking reactions in the other and so on. (...) In this philosophy, the same laws that govern the microcosm also govern the macrocosm: what touches one, touches the other. The favored intentionality of the therapeutic act is called into question, in the opening of thought and heart, in our desire to participate in the evolution of the world. Space is made for the values of respect, sharing, generosity, solidarity, taking responsibility. Taking care of the non-human environment means taking care of yourself and others. And, in this logic, engaging in the action of saving planet Earth from destruction is a therapeutic and political act.”

It is up to us in the present generation to turn our attention to current research and the use of ancestral knowledge, taking care not to make an undue, unethical and decontextualized appropriation, committing epistemicides and instituting a new order of biocolonialism disguised as a “psychedelic renaissance” (Freitas, 2023; Hauskeller *et al.*, 2023; Williams *et al.*, 2022). We are facing the recommencement of a paradigm that began decades ago in contemporary Western science. An old and new paradigm brought here and now by generations of indigenous peoples to whom we must pay our respect and gratitude for illuminating our path back home and for offering us other epistemological and ethical bases for understanding the nascent philosophical, political and social scenario. mental health that we now glimpse.

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