

# Common Themes in South American Indian Yage Experiences'

by Michael J. Harner

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The existence of a hallucinatory drink made from the South American tropical forest ayahuasca or yage vine (*Banisteriopsis*) was perhaps first reported to the Western world by the Ecuadorian geographer, Villavicencio. He observed (1858: 372-73):

**... this beverage is narcotic, as one might suppose, and in a few moments it begins to produce the most rare phenomena. Its action appears to excite the nervous system; all the senses liven up and all faculties awaken; they feel vertigo and spinning in the head, then a sensation of being lifted into the air and beginning an aerial journey; the possessed begins in the first moments to see the most delicious apparitions, in conformity with his ideas and knowledge: the savages [apparently the Zaparo of eastern Ecuador] say that they see gorgeous lakes, forests covered with fruit, the prettiest birds who communicate to them the nicest and the most favorable things they want to hear, and other beautiful things relating to their savage life. When this instant passes they begin to see terrible horrors out to devour them, their first flight ceases and they descend to earth to combat the terrors who communicate to them all adversities and misfortunes awaiting them.**

**As for myself I can say for a fact that when I've taken ayahuasca I've experienced dizziness, then an aerial journey in which I recall perceiving the most gorgeous views, great cities, lofty towers, beautiful parks, and other extremely attractive objects; then I imagined myself to be alone in a forest and assaulted by a number of terrible beings from which I defended myself; thereafter I had the strong sensation of sleep....**

*1. The data on Jivaro and Conibo-Shipibo Indian experiences are derived from fieldwork by the author among the former in 1956-57 and 1964; and among the latter in 1960--61.*

*In 1961, while engaged in ethnographic fieldwork among the Conibo Indians of eastern Peru, I partook of ayahuasca to try to understand the nature of the personal revelations occurring to these people under its influence. So impressive were the effects of the drug that a number of questions were raised in my mind as to the cross-cultural importance of the hallucinogenic experience in shamanism and religion. One result is the present paper and the one which follows by Claudio Naranjo which are intended to be read in conjunction with one another, and which were presented in an earlier form at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association at Denver in 1965. This paper, written prior to the descriptions of *Banisteriopsis* use and experiences contributed by other anthropologists to this volume, does not embody their data. I wish to express my appreciation to Dale Valory for research assistance.*

Despite this early and intriguing report, subsequent ethnographic research into the use and effects of this hallucinogen has until recently been surprisingly limited. More specifically, ethnographic reports on South American Indian accounts of their experiences resulting from the ingestion of yage or ayahuasca brews of Banisteriopsis are scattered and typically lacking in adequate detail. Yet regularities are discernible, and some of the more commonly reported ones will be noted in the following pages." General observations on the ayahuasca experience have been made by Villarejo (1953: 190-91) :

**Shortly after having drunk the potion, a hyper-excitation is felt in the body, which produces a pleasant agitation in the epiderm and livens the kinesthetic sense, giving one the imagined state of being suspended in air. Once the narcotic is fully activated, various mental reactions and activities, or merely phantasmagoric, supervene.**

**One under the control of the narcotic sees unroll before him quite a spectacle: most lovely landscapes, monstrous animals, vipers which approach and wind down his body or are entwined like rolls of thick cable, at a few centimeters distance; as well, one sees who are true friends and those who betray him or who have done him ill; he observes the cause of the illness which he sustains, at the same time being presented with the most advantageous remedy; he takes part in fantastic hunts; the things which he most dearly loves or abhors acquire in these moments extraordinary vividness and color, and the scenes in which his life normally develop adopt the most beautiful and emotional expression.**

Supplementary information on the effects of the brew are provided by Reinburg (1921: 28-29), one of the very few anthropologists to partake of the drink. In his diary he noted:

Comprehension is highly exaggerated; it seems to me as though my body has disappeared; I am nothing more than a mind observing with interest the phases of experience going on within another person.

**My pulse is extremely slackened, but I do not know how many pulses it is beating; blood pressure is greatly diminished, at least it seems to be to my touch; then my pulse returns at instances, imperceptibly, and the nausea increases. Not feeling well, I inform Teofilo who reassures me, saying that that's just perfect, that the beneficial (!) effect of the ayahuasca is beginning and that I am going to see visions.**

**Not very reassured, in the meantime, I have the lamp lit and ask for a mirror: I am livid, my pupils dilated do not react to the light, my hands have shaky movements, abrupt and rapid as though I was trying to seize something. The earache has increased, but hearing is perfect; the nausea increases and becomes very unpleasant; and, abandoning the precepts of ayahuasca drinkers who desire to let the phenomena thereof amend themselves, I try forcibly to vomit and take tea, especially because my heart bothers me. I get up (midnight), urinate profusely, having difficulty holding myself upright, and make the two or three steps which separate me from my room, where I try to light the chafing-dish in order to prepare the tea. But there, I am taken by a weakness and fall in a heap**

**upon a bottle-case, crying to Teofilo, "I've been poisoned." My pulse has completely disappeared, I am livid, my pupils dilated, the throat locked with a strong dysphagia, dryness in my mouth, the sensation of the lower part of my body disappearing, uncontrollable movements of the hands in attempting to pick up anything; extremely accentuated thymus, speech very difficult and erratic.**

Reinburg's experience was interrupted by the administration of stimulants, and he never did achieve visions, but his physical symptoms remarkably parallel those which I experienced without previous knowledge of Reinburg's account. In my case, visions, sounds, singing, and other hallucinatory material were plentiful, with the first effects (numbness in the jaw) occurring within fifteen minutes and actual visionary material within five minutes after that. The period of immersion in visions lasted about three hours in its deepest effect, with an additional hour of tapering off.

I will not dwell further on the experiences of Reinburg, myself, and other whites who have taken the drug in the jungle. The companion paper by Claudio Naranjo deals with such experiences in a situation more controlled for comparative purposes. Let us turn to some common denominators which can be observed in the reported experiences of Indians of the tropical forest who take the drug as part of their normal cultural life. A survey of the literature reveals the following to be among the most commonly reported hallucinatory experiences:

## 1. The Soul Is Believed to Separate from the Physical Body and to Make a Trip, Often with the Sensation of Flight

Among the Jivaro is felt that part of the soul may leave the body, with the subject having the sensation of flying, returning when the effects of the drug wear off. This is actually referred to as a "trip" by the Jivaro, who say that this is an experience more commonly achieved by shamans than by other takers of the brew.

The Conibo-Shipibo Indians of the Ucayali region of eastern Peru report that a common function of ayahuasca-taking by shamans is to permit the shaman's soul to leave his body in the form of a bird which flies to kill a distant person at night. The bird changes back into the shaman's human form to kill the sleeping person. Another typical experience of Conibo-Shipibo shamans is setting out in a supernatural launch manned by demons to recapture the stolen soul of a sick patient from the demon launch of an enemy shaman. A non-shaman under the influence of ayahuasca may likewise have his soul taken away by a demon launch. Under such circumstances, his body appears to observers as "dead," with no noticeable heart beat nor respiration, according to the Indians. A shaman, taking ayahuasca, pursues and recovers the patient's soul.

Among the Amahuaca, eastern neighbors of the Conibo in the Peruvian Montana, it is reported by the Indians that "a man's soul may leave his body when he drinks ayahuasca" (Carneiro, n.d.).

For the Zaparo of eastern Ecuador, as noted before, Villavicencio (1858: 372) reports: "they feel vertigo and spinning in the head, then a sensation of being lifted into the air and begin an aerial journey"

Of the group yage' session of the Desana branch of the Tukano Indians in eastern Colombia, Reichel-Dolmatoff (1971: 173) reports :

**The hallucination has several phases, and during the first the person feels and hears a violent current of air, as if a strong wind were pulling him along; the kumu [ritual leader] explains that it is the ascent to the Milky Way; in order to arrive at their final destination, they must leave this world and first find the current of communication with the winds. Now, following the Milky Way, the men descend to Ahpikondia' [Paradise].**

Among the Siona of the Putumayo region of Colombia, Placido de Calella (1944: 745) reports of the man apprenticed to become a shaman and taking yage': "In this state he goes off to heaven (the sky) several times, with God (Dios), where he spends one night and descends again." The accomplished shaman leads group sessions, makes trips to heaven to learn God's wishes, returns to reveal them to the group, and also makes trips to Hell. "It is necessary for one to be a very good curaca [shaman-leader] or drinker in order to be able to penetrate to the deepest of Hell, because one is jeopardized such that he might not know how to get out of there and might have to remain" (Placido de 'Calella, 1944: 747).

A half-breed Peruvian woman, in the Rio Guapore region near the Brazil-Bolivia frontier, whose family used ayahuasca regularly, told E. H. Snethlage in 1933-34 that the drug freed the spirit which was then "able to travel where it desired" (Santesson and Wassen, 1936: 341).

In describing the effects of ayahuasca, apparently on both Indians and whites in the upper Amazon, Villarejo (1953: '90) says that it puts the drinker into "the imagined state of being suspended in the air" shortly after taking the hallucinatory concoction.

Chaves (1958: 131) reports on some specific experiences under the influence of yage recounted by a Siona Indian of eastern Colombia :

**But then an aging woman came to wrap me in a great cloth, gave me to suckle at her breast, and then off I flew, very far, and suddenly I found myself in a completely illumined place, very clear, where everything was placid and serene. There, where the yage people live, like us, but better, is where one ends up [i.e., on a yage "trip"].**

Grandidier (1861: 143) states that among the Campa Indians of eastern Peru a sick person may take ayahuasca ("camalampi" in Campa) with the result that ". . . he is drunk, his head spins, he thinks he is flying through the air, he is prey to strange apparitions. . . ."

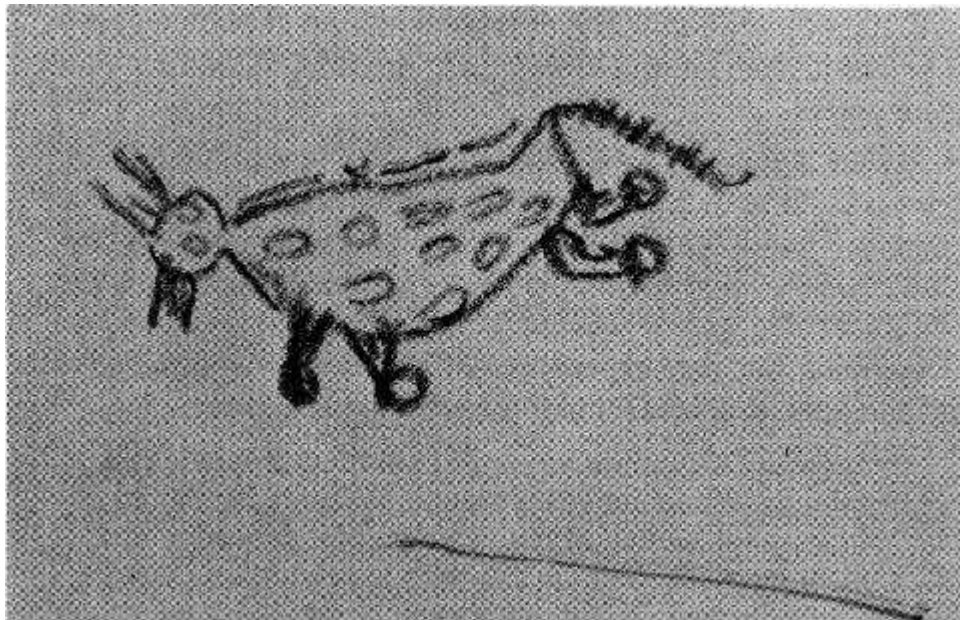
Oberem (1958: 80) says that among the long-missionized Quijos Indians of the Rio Napo of eastern Ecuador two ayahuasca-using shamans told him that they "have the

power to go to a place beneath the earth, beneath Hell, from which they are able to bewitch somebody."

## 2. Visions of Snakes and Jaguars

The visions most commonly reported for all tribes are of snakes, generally poisonous varieties and the anaconda, and of jaguars and other dangerous forest felines. In some cases, these predatory creatures appear to threaten or attack the yage taker.

Among the Jivaro, the most typical apparitions seen on the vision quest by persons taking the Banisteriopsis drink or Datura are pairs of giant anacondas or jaguars which roll over and over through the forest as they fight between themselves (see Harner, 1963: 260-61, t71) (see Fig. I). The shamans under the influence of ayahuasca, see snakes apparently at least as often as any other single class of beings (see Fig. II). Sometimes they also see caymans (Fig. III). The intruding objects to be sucked out of the patient's body very commonly have the appearance of various snakes to the shaman (see Fig. IV).



*1. Jaguar drawn by a Jivaro shaman after a Datura trance. Jaguars are often seen in fighting pairs in the trances; in this instance the artist recalled only one.*

Villavicencio (1858: 372), in his early account of yage' experiences among the Zaparo of eastern Ecuador, does not mention specific predatory animals as appearing in the visions, but does say "they begin to see terrible horrors out to devour them."

Perez Arbelaez (1937: 175) reports that some Coreguajes Indians from San Miguel, Colombia, when asked what one of their curacas saw when he took yage, replied that he saw "all kinds of boars [puercos], tapirs, and jaguars [tigres] out in the forest."

Carneiro (1964: 9) reports for the Amahuaca Indians of Peru:

**Taking ayahuasca for the first time is apparently a rather frightening experience for a young man. Some of them reported seeing snakes crawling up their bodies. The yoshi [spirit] of the jaguar is the one most often seen at this time, and it teaches the apprentice drinkers all about yoshi.**

Also (Carneiro, 1964: to) :

**The most important yoshi connected with witchcraft is that of the jaguar. This yoshi appears to the sorcerer after he has drunk ayahuasca and tells him everything he wants to know, including the whereabouts of the intended victim.**

For the Cubeo of the Colombian Amazon, Goldman (1963: 210) reports:

**At the beginning, the Indians say, the vision becomes blurred, things begin to look white, and one begins to lose the faculty of speech. The white vision turns to red. One Indian described it as a room spinning with red feathers. This passes and one begins to see people in the bright coloring of the jaguar.**

Describing the yage' experiences of the Tukano Indians of eastern Colombia, Reichel-Dolmatoff (1969: 335) reports:

**Occasionally the individual wakes from his trance in a state of great calm and profound satisfaction; other times he may hardly be able to grasp partial visions, fleeting and disturbing images difficult to interpret. And on still other occasions the person remains overwhelmed by the nightmare of jaguars' jaws or the menace of snakes that approach while he, paralyzed by fear, feels how their cold bodies go coiling around his extremities.**

Speaking of the Desana group of the Tukano, he (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1969: 332-33) also notes:

**A certain yaje belonging to the Desana makes one see "feather crowns that jump" or snakes in the form of necklaces that coil around the houseposts. Another kind of yaje is said to produce hallucinations of "snakes that jump."**

Koch-Grunberg (1909: 190), in a chapter on the Tukano and Desana Indians, similarly says that the Indians see "brightly-colored snakes winding up and down the houseposts."

Chaves (1958: 134) reports that among the Siona of the upper Putumayo River in Colombia:

**When the drinker of yage' is a novice, he sees serpents, tigers, and other nonsense. These snakes represent the vines of the yage; at times many snakes are seen in one bunch and one cannot escape from them. For this reason, he who conquers yage' also conquers nature and all the dangers which attack men. Thus the Siona explain the taking of yage.**

A Siona informant described his first yage' experience as follows (Mallol de Recasens, 1963: 65):

**After drinking the yage, I went to lie down in a hammock; shortly I began to see small snakes in great quantity, then a large snake in a shrub which, when it shook, dropped something like scales.**

For the Piro of eastern Peru, Baer (1969: 6) states that an informant reported that under the influence of ayahuasca:

**.. he had seen a great boa constrictor in his trance, that he had become afraid and had attempted to keep the boa away or to fend it off with his hands. In the attempt to take hold of it, he had recognized that no boa was there.**

Tessmann (1930: 517) says that among the Ikito (Iquito) Indians of northeastern Peru:

**Enough of the drink is taken so that one collapses. Thereafter an alien substance takes possession. Even though one may see many animals, for example jaguars and great serpents rushing about, one is to have no feelings of fear.**

Zerba-Bayon states (Fabre, '955: 50) that the Indians in the Caqueta region, after taking yage, "always end up being seized by a mad delirium; believing themselves to have been taken by ferocious beasts, they plunge into the forests in order to imitate their howling and break to pieces everything they find in their path . . ."

Santesson and Wassen (19~6: 341) report that the previously mentioned half-breed woman interviewed by Snethlage in Bolivia said that her people took a drink made from Banisteriopsis and known locally as "huascar" [ayahuasca?] and "when properly drunk they had visions of animals, particularly snakes . . ."

Under the influence of the Banisteriopsis drink, the Conibo-Shipibo Indians of the Ucayali River region in eastern Peru commonly see giant anacondas, poisonous snakes, and jaguars, and, less frequently, other animals. The novice shaman, taking the drink, believes he acquires giant snakes which are to be his personal demons to be used in defending himself against other shamans in supernatural battles. The Conibo-Shipibo shamans, under the influence of the drug, believe they capture and recover other persons' souls with supernatural boats whose demon crews are led by a yellow jaguar and a black puma.

Among the Yekuana Indians of southern Venezuela, Koch-Griinberg (1917: 324) reports that under the influence of caapi the shamans mimic the roars of jaguars. He does not, unfortunately, describe the contents of Yekuana Indians' experiences under the influence of the brew.

Joy and Schultes (1955: 127) report that when the Taiwano Indians of the Kananari River of eastern Colombia drink yage:

**There can be no question that they see jaguars and other animals, but the hallucinations come in a semi-dream state and usually are not frightening to them.**

Villarejo (1953: 19) states that among the Indians of the upper Napo River (tribe unspecified), ayahuasca, when brewed with the addition of a plant called amaron-yage (literally, boa-yage), produces visions of boa constrictors "of all sizes which approach menacingly, and crawl down the body leaving the sensation of their weight, their stench, and their clammy character. When the hallucinating person becomes frightened and cries out in fear, the ayahuasquero (the man administering the ayahuasca) fans him with the leaves of the 'huasca huayra china panga,' while saying: 'Be off, snake. Hasten, get thee away from here, boa.' With this act the vision disappears. The hallucinating person can continue experiencing one or another vision according to his will."

Villarejo (1953: 190) apparently is generalizing about the effects of ayahuasca on both Indians and whites on the upper Amazon when he states that a person under its influence sees "snakes which approach and wind down his body or are entwined like rolls of thick cables at a few centimeters distance . . ."

Use of ayahuasca among the Ixiamas Chama (Tacana) Indians of tropical forest Bolivia produces, according to Hissink (1960: 524), "hallucinations which involve the approach of beasts, especially jaguars and serpents of supernaturally great size."

Reinburg (1921:31) states of the Zaparo of eastern Ecuador, among whom he worked, who take either "ayahuasca alone, or with yage' added," that "their principal apparitions are the jaguar [tigre], snake, the enemies of neighboring tribes (Jivaro mostly, and Tukano) or the animals that they meet while hunting during their rounds in the forest: different birds, monkeys, tapirs, deer, etc. . . ."

Chaves (1958: 131-32) describes the visions reported by a Siona Indian during his apprenticeship as a boy. Of the nine visions described, two involve snakes and one refers to jaguar "paintings" :

**(1) "When he gave me the third drink of yage', I saw numerous snakes which came out of bonfires in incalculable numbers. . . ." (2) "I Went into a very beautiful house, all the people came out adorned with feathers and rattles [strings of beads from dried fruits with which the Siona adorn themselves] and they all attended to my getting dressed in this manner as well. The ponchos [kusmas] that they wore had paintings of jaguars [tigres] and various designs." (3) "Then I went through the water to the place where the anaconda is found, who is the mistress and mother of fish; she has the form of a woman, and lives in a big house in the water where all the fish are born."**

### 3· Hallucinations Interpreted by the Indians as Visions of Demons and/or Deities

A sense of experiencing first-hand contact with the supernatural Seems to become almost routine with the aid of the Banisteriopsis drink. Thus Carneiro (1964:9), reporting upon group ayahuasca sessions among the Amahuaca, can note as an apparently commonplace occurrence that:



**As the drug takes effect, yoshi [spirits] begin to appear, one or two at a time. They are said to drink ayahuasca, too, and to sing along with the men. The Amahuaca ask a yoshi where he has been and what he has seen, and he tells them. Unlike dreams, in which yoshi occasionally molest or injure a person, in ayahuasca seances they are generally friendly and tractable. It is just like when Amahuaca came to visit, we were told. A yoshi may stay an hour or two, and then he goes. But then another one comes, drinks with the Amahuaca, talks with them, and then he too departs. In this manner many yoshi may be seen and interrogated during the course of the night.**

Regarding the Desana group of the Tukano in eastern Colombia, Reichel-Dolmatoff (1971: 174) says:

**On awakening from the trance, the individual remains convinced of the truth of the religious teachings. He has seen everything; he has seen Vai-mahse [Master of Game Animals] and the Daughter of the Sun, he has heard her voice; he has seen the Snake-Canoe float through the rivers, and he has seen the first men spring from it. The voice of the kumu [ritual leader] has guided him and has explained everything to him in detail.**

The visions also strengthen the belief in the reality of witchcraft, as is illustrated in the accompanying drawings made by a Jivaro shaman (see Figs. IV, V).

Carneiro (n.d.) was told by an Amahuaca informant that "one can get the yoshi to help him by drinking ayahuasca, and talking to yoshi." Also that a shaman (hawa'ai) "can order a yoshi to go and kill somebody" but "he has to first drink ayahuasca before he can get communication with yoshi, however."

Among the Quijo Indians of eastern Ecuador, Oberem (1958: 78) notes that the shaman in this group, as among the Jivaro immediately to the south, is able to see the magical darts which other shamans throw at him in order to cause illness and death:

**If the sagra is strong he catches them and puts them at his side on the ground and, since they hurt him a great deal, he asks the lightning to come down from the heavens to destroy these "darts" [demons].**

**During the delirium, whenever a "dart" appears in his imagination, lightning flashes when the latter is approaching, during which time he defends himself with a mat of huairashina panga leaves, and it (the lightning) dispatches it with a blast.**

The Conibo Indians of eastern Peru similarly believe that the taking of ayahuasca permits them to see the supernatural aspect of nature. They believe that only the man taking ayahuasca can see the demons in the air, including demons who act as doctors, and that, when the demon doctors come and sing, only the shaman taking ayahuasca is able to hear them and thus join them in singing. One Conibo shaman said that the demon doctor he sees when taking ayahuasca is a white man arriving in an airplane, launch, or on a bicycle (these are familiar to the Conibo from visits to Peruvian settlements). After this particular kind of demon doctor leaves, the shaman usually

sees an Indian demon (chai koino) who enters the patient's body to suck out the intruding object causing the illness.

The tendency of individuals to believe they are seeing the: super- natural is also illustrated by Chaves' report of a Siona's visions in eastern Colombia (1958:32). Chaves' informant, an Indian of a tribe with a history of exposure to Christianity, included among his visions the following:

**Here's another vision. I then saw God who had a big cross and blessed me.**

**Here's another vision. Afterwards I saw a big, beautiful church and I went into it in order to see the ceremony whereby one ought to rule his people; they gave me a kind of wine, of sugary water which represents the relieving remedies which the kuraka gives to sick people.**

**Here's another vision. As well I observed there a big ceibo tree where all the people that live here on earth are to be found; they are in the form of birds of various kinds. From that place I could make out a big ship and in the prow a great mirror in which could be seen countless parrots; they are the sun people. Also women of the dry season dressed in red can be seen and women of the wet season, dressed in dark, blue clothing. There all things are seen as God created them; when he wishes to punish he sends the continual winter in the form of a flood. Also from there I was capable of making out the ship of the devils, from which the evil spirits come forth who come to the earth so that people perish.**

Another student of the Siona, Placido de Calella (1944: 747), Provides additional information on the sense of the supernatural contact among these missionized Indians. An informant told him:

**The Curaca, in these sessions, goes up to heaven, asks per- mission to enter; they give him a very attractive new garb and introduce him into the presence of Diosu; but he cannot get very close to him; he speaks to him from a distance. And Diosu manifests to him his will, his wishes, and what he ought to tell the people. He also makes visits to Hell. Supai, the uatti or principal demon, lets him see everything.**

Another Siona Indian told Placido de Calella (1944: 748):

**The yage house is like the church; in it one is to act with much reverence. At times the curaca warns us: "Diosu raiji [Cod is coming]." Then the people kneel and Diosu sprinkles all present with water. And the Indians feel the water falling on their heads. The curaca says: "we the Indians have our custom (or religion). Diosu has given us yage'. The same, when he was among us drank it and left it for the Indians." And drinking yage the curaca at times lets the book of Diosu be seen, very pretty and his cup as well. He prays or speaks with him.**

## 4· The Sensation of Seeing Distant Persons, 'Cities' and Landscapes, Typically Interpreted by the Indians as Visions of Distant Reality, i.e., as Clairvoyance

The Jivaro shamans, under the influence of ayahuasca, often believe that they are seeing distant persons and what they are doing. Non-shamans frequently employ a shaman to "look" and tell them what is the current situation of distant relatives or sweethearts. These distant persons apparently have to be individuals with whom the shaman is already acquainted, so that he can "know whom to look for." Also it is normally necessary for the shaman to be already acquainted with the distant locale and the route to get there, and preferably he should know the appearance and location of the house of the person being sought. The ayahuasca-taker, whether shaman or non-shaman, frequently also has the experience of traveling to distant and unfamiliar villages, towns and cities of the whites which they cannot identify but whose reality is unquestioned (see Fig. VI).

The shamans of the Conibo-Shipibo tribes of eastern Peru, with the aid of ayahuasca, commonly have the experience of traveling underground in supernatural boats to see distant cities of the demons. These, too, are believed to be underground, but are said to be visible "because the sunlight passes through the earth."

Among the Coreguajes Indians of eastern Colombia, Perez Arbelaez (1937: 175) reports the belief of a yage'-using shaman that he could travel to distant places. Of his third experience with yage, a Siona Indian of eastern Colombia said (Mallol de Recasens, 1963: 67), "I saw mountainous forests, stands of ferns and the face of the Devil."

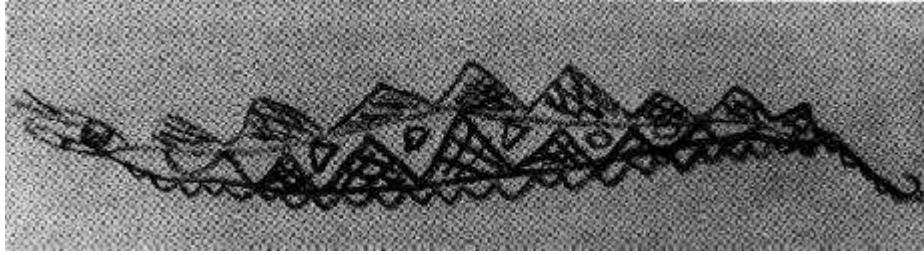
According to Roessner (1946: 14), the members of an unidentified tribe in the Ucayali River region of eastern Peru:

**. . who frequently practice the use of ayahuasca sit at times together, and, drinking it, propose that they all see something of the same subject, for example: "Let's see cities!" It so happens that Indians have asked white men what those strange things (aparatos) are which run so swiftly along the street: they had seen automobiles, which, of course, they were not acquainted with.**

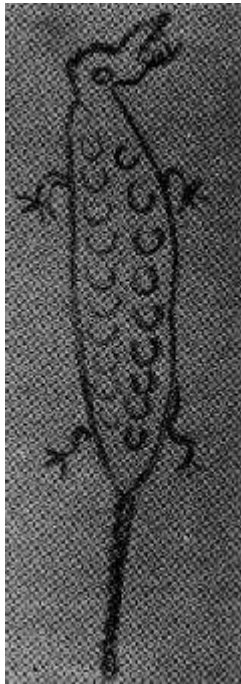
Villarejo (1953: 19) States that the Indians of the upper Napo River in eastern Ecuador, taking yage, see "forests, cities, wild beasts, mists . . ."

The use of ayahuasca by the Amahuaca shaman of eastern Peru permits him, according to Carneiro (1964: to) to contact the jaguar spirit which "tells him everything he wants to know, including the immediate whereabouts of the intended victim [of witchcraft] ."

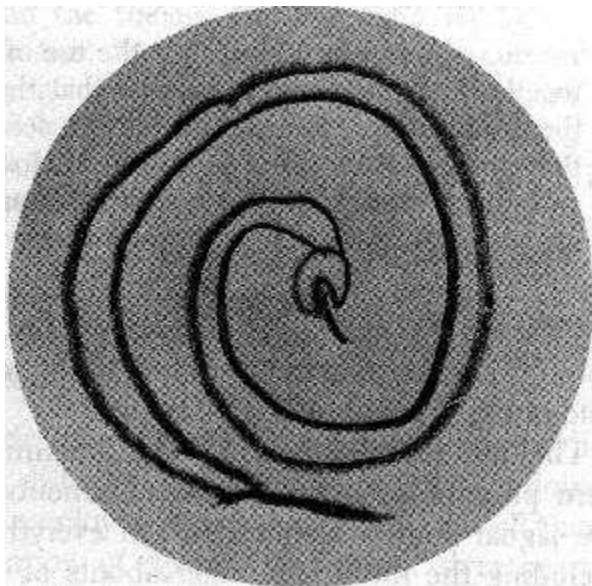
Calderon (1944: 87) reports that the Indians of eastern Colombia, apparently the Coreguajes, use yage' in order to "point out places where game is abundant."



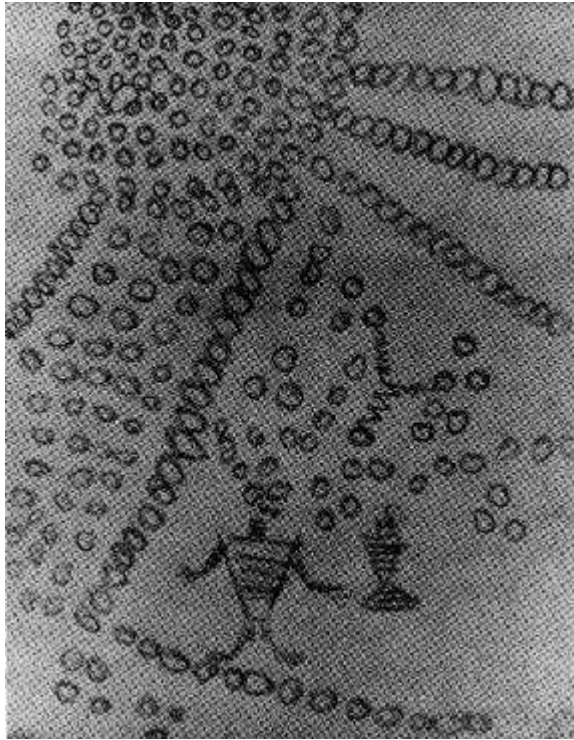
*II. Boa Constrictor*



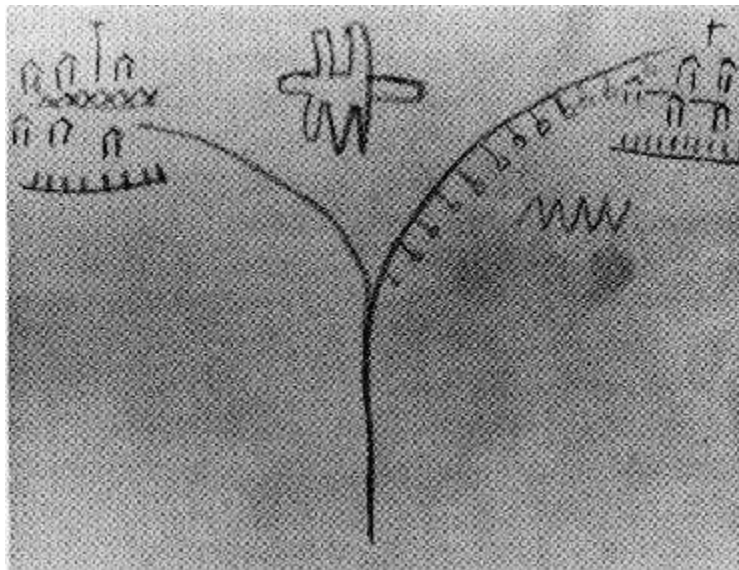
*III. Cayman*



*IV. Coiled snake as seen in a patient's abdomen*



*V. Golden spheres revolve about the shaman; to his left is a giant butterfly demon. The swirling field of spheres is the "spirit of natema"*



*VI. A "trip." The forked lines represent the two different routes the shaman took to two white men's towns (indicated by crosses). He found one of the trails beautifully decorated with beads (shown as pendant circles)*

5. A Divinatory Experience, Specifically the Sensation of Seeing the Enactment of Recent Unsolved Crimes, Particularly Homicide and Theft, or of Seeing the Shaman Responsible for Bewitching a Sick or Dying Person.

Ayahuasca is utilized by curing shamans among the Jivaro of eastern Ecuador for divinatory purposes to "see" the shaman who bewitched his patient. Generally, he can recognize who it is, unless it is a Shaman who lives far away, or in another tribe.

Among the Candoshi (Murato and Shapra), Tessmann (1930: 285) reports that the caapi drink is used "for better 'vision,' i.e., in order to discover the cause of death and then to recognize the perpetrator." He (1930: 402) similarly reports that among the Tschamikuro, "the caapi drink serves to allow one better 'vision' while curing ..." For the Zaparo, he (1930: 539) notes the use of the caapi drink "to allow for better diagnosing."

Reichel-Dolmatoff (1960: 131-32) reports the use among the Noanama and Embera of the Choco region of both Banisteriopsis and Datura "to produce hallucinations, generally with divining as the purpose." He states, without distinguishing between the effects of the two plants, that they are used "in order to identify personal enemies who seek to cause harm by their magical practices; in order to get in touch with ancestral spirits or the spirits of the animals of prey; to locate the resting place of lost or stolen articles. The visions are usually accompanied by auditory sensations and a state of euphoria they say lasts a number of hours. One of our informants, who had in past times taken dapa (native term for Banisteriopsis), described the experience thusly: 'Where there's a hill, it's whisked away; where there's water a beach is seen. All sorts of animals and people and towns are seen and all sorts of music are heard, like flutes, whistles, and drums.' "

Spruce (1908: 4<sup>3</sup>-4) reports that at the Zaparo village of Puca-yacu in eastern Ecuador he was told:

**If he be a medicine-man who has taken it, when he has slept off the fumes he recalls all he saw in his trance, and thereupon deduces the prophecy, divination, or what not required of him.**

He also notes that the shamans of the "Zaparos, Anguteros, Mazanes, and other tribes" drink ayahuasca "when called on to adjudicate in a dispute or quarrel--to give the proper answer to an embassy--to discover plans of an enemy--to tell if strangers are coming--to ascertain if wives are unfaithful--in the case of a sick man to tell who has bewitched him, etc."

In summary, the meager and dispersed data on the Banisteriopsis drink experience of tropical forest Indians tend to represent the following themes:

- (1) The soul is felt to separate from the physical body and to make a trip, often with the sensation of flight.
- (2) Visions of jaguars and snakes, and to a much lesser extent, other predatory animals.
- (3) A sense of contact with the supernatural, whether with demons, or in the case of missionized Indians, also with God, and Heaven and Hell.

(4) Visions of distant persons, "cities" and landscapes, typically interpreted by the Indians as visions of distant reality, i.e., as clairvoyance.

(5) The sensation of seeing the detailed enactment of recent unsolved crimes, particularly homicide and theft, i.e., the experience of believing one is capable of divination.

Other experiences which are commonly reported by the Indians include auditory hallucinations and visions of geometric designs, auras, one's own death, and combats between demons or zoomorphic forms. In addition, the visions seem to involve very bright colors, and the constant changing of shapes as scenes dissolve one into another. Both Jivaro and Conibo-Shipibo Indians who had seen motion pictures told me that the ayahuasca experiences were comparable to the viewing of films, and my own experience was corroboratory.

In conclusion, one may note that regularities are found in Banisteriopsis drink experiences between tribes as widespread as the Choco Indians west of the Andes in Colombia and the Tacana Indians east of the Andes in Bolivia. However, all of these Banisteriopsis-using peoples occupy a tropical forest environment and their cultures often share much in content. Given the relative contiguity as well as the environmental and cultural similarities of these tribes, it seems virtually impossible to isolate the nature of the yage'-induced experience from its cultural context on the basis of these ethnographic data alone. Comparative material, such as the following paper by Naranjo, may eventually help contribute to a gradual solution of this problem.

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