

The skin of the earth

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Abstract

The experience with plants of power enables contact with another type of sensibility than the one we are used to in the western world. The planet's environmental situation is presented in an imagery and emotional way. From this, an approximation is made with analytical psychology, symbolic language and the knowledge of the indigenous people of the Yanomami ethnic group. The possibility of extinction of life on Earth has been a growing concern. How to avoid it within current political and economic conditions is still a problem to be solved. Some proposals are presented and compared with indigenous knowledge. The need to understand and assimilate this ancestral wisdom seems to be an essential contribution to finding solutions. ■



Keywords
Climate change, indigenous mythology, psychedelic substances, shamanism, analytical psychology.

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The skin of the Earth

We're all one and life flows on
Within you and without you
(George Harrison).

This 32nd Moitará derives from the previous Moitará whose theme was “Plants of Power and other Psychoactive Substances”. We, the organizers, have decided, within the scientific research protocols, to experiment with power plants to better understand what our last meeting was about. The scientific research surrounding the positive effects of these substances in regards to some psychiatric disorders has been resumed after 30 years of repression, a consequence of the war against drugs led by the United States.

Nowadays, much like in the 50s and 60s of the 20th century, psychedelic substances integrate a promising research line to the relief of some psychic sufferings. The scientific experiments are always conducted with an experienced partner, the subject of such experience has his eyes blindfolded and a music playlist is played to accompany the process. The setting is intended to create a nurturing environment.

The conscience that is awoken under the effect of power plants is of a deep identity and empathy with life in its full meaning. This certainty is a blow to our Judeo-Christian tradition, which affirms we were created in a similar way to God to reign over nature. In my experience, my personal life's frontier was undone, and I disappeared in a life current. A continuity that underlies our humanity, a flow which I belonged to, at that moment, more than to my human status.

Throughout this immersion, an image came up to the sound of Violeta Parra singing “*Gracias a la Vida*”. I had listened to it countless times and when I recognized the song, I didn't like it. But the music faded away, and an image

materialized in the silence. A huge extension of a brown Earth, which I knew had no life. I soared above this Earth moving slowly, as if I was around 5 meters from the ground. The Earth wasn't dried up, with crevices, but smooth and with an unchanging color hue (a dark orange brown). I was filled with a deep sadness and I started to hear lamenting. It was my sadness and at the same time it wasn't, it was associated with the image, but I was part of that same image. An unprecedented amalgamation which I can't put into words. A tiny part of me observed this amalgamation with the Earth. And it wept a low, resigned, unhelpful impotent lament. The sterile Earth.

Afterwards, a few references started emerging and helping me decant this experience and write this text. Among such references, the poem “The Hollow Men” by T.S. Elliot (2018), which last verses are as follows:

This is how the world ends,
This is how the world ends,
This is how the world ends,
Not with a bang but with a whimper.

The second movement of the piece “*Tabula Rasa*” by the Estonian composer Arvo Part entitled “*Silentium*” also helped me relive the experience. And also, the book from Davi Kopenawa and Bruce Albert “The Falling Sky” (2015, p. 470) where it says we are

the skin of the forest composed of a cold blowing that comes from the underworld's darkness, a cold blow that remains because the back of the Earth is covered with leaves and protected by trees. Without this protection, this fresh dew which is like a form of sperm stops inseminating

the trees and the Earth will lose its fertilization becoming sterile.

Jung (1984) shows the proximity of his thought with the ionomani's vision when he affirms that "in Latin, Greek and Arabic the names given to the soul are related to the notion of moving air, the 'cold breath of the spirits'" (par. 664).

What's to do about this experience? Share it with my friends? With the little tribe that we built here as organizers of Moitara? Jung affirms, and I felt it deep inside of me, the responsibility that comes from an intense experience in the unconscious. The expectation to share this image with more people is what this Moitara was thought of and built upon.

Many of us are aware of the theory developed by James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis, the Gaia hypothesis. The use of this name does not imply the belief of the return of the Greek divinity that would resurrect to watch over life on Earth. It is, however, the realization of a relationship between the atmosphere's composition and the existence and maintenance of some lifeforms that inhabit the planet. It could be called the "Biogeophysical System of Earth" (DANOWSKI et al., 2022, p. 15). Gaia would self-regulate like a living being. In addition, it's always on a dynamic balance. The sea level rises and recedes according to glaciations in 10 to 15 thousand-year cycles. We've been through five mass extinctions of life and only one was due to an asteroid crashing. All of the remaining ones were due to climate changes produced by gases from the greenhouse effect. However, by depending on the climate change degree, Gaia will be able to "readjust" its thermodynamic state to another set of values that would be more favorable, perhaps, to some living species which are currently existent; bacteria, viruses, insects, but not necessarily us, humans (WALLACE-WELLS, 2019, p. 12).

Our western civilization makes our human existence and other forms of life with which we interact become harder and harder. Global warming is occurring at a rhythm that is ten times fast-

er than at the end of the last generation and previous glaciations. Therefore, organisms will have to migrate or adapt ten times quicker (KOLBERT, 2015). Science shows alarming data about the heating of oceans and the following extinctions that derive from it.

Human interference determines a new geological era, the Anthropocene (DANOWSKI, CASTRO, 2015, p. 15). We'll leave marks from our existence in sediments, if there are humans left, they'll rack their brains to identify them in the future. What to do?

In my experience, the image of Earth that came up was one of passivity before the events that took place, a reaction that doesn't need to be unique. It's an image of suffering before alterations that are incisive to the balance that had been established. But the planet will alter itself to reach balance. As I said before, Gaia doesn't particularly worry about humans; she is a receptacle, core to life in general.

Why would us, humans, have any kind of deference? Isabelle Stengers (2015), philosopher and scientist, describes what she calls "Gaia's Intrusion" in human history, which can be taken as a clash. On one side, there's the process of climate change, and on the other, capitalism and its current evolution. Some say we're not in the Anthropocene, but in the Capitalocene, given the importance gained by capitalism in our culture (MOORE, 2022). In that sense, Gaia becomes symbolically the planet Melancholy in Lars von Trier's movie, colliding and destroying life as we know now (DANOWSKI, CASTRO, 2015, p. 53).

We get into a maze of theories about the path to be taken. I can only mention some of these attempts, because each one of them delves into arguments that would be beyond the scope of this text. But first we must make a discrimination: we cannot say that humanity as a whole is contributing to climate change: it is part of humanity, the part that has a utilitarian and immediate vision of the use of the resources provided by nature.

Eliane Brum (2021) relates an event from the 70s of the 20th century that can serve as a

symbol for this part of humanity. The so-called symbolic milestone of the construction of the Transamazon road and the conquest of that “immense uninhabited green world...” was the felling of a Brazil nut tree, more than 50 meters tall, which fell with a terrific thud. This death was vehemently applauded by supporters of the military dictatorship and by part of the press in an improvised platform. It is the attitude of destroying without having the slightest idea of what is being destroyed. In counterpoint, we have those who remain outside this block, the so-called (by European science made by white men) primitive, animistic people. Or the most rustic and organic sub-humanity that clings to the earth, as defined by Ailton Krenak (2020, p. 82).

Back to the various theories about the way forward, we find the “Singularists” (represented mainly by Vernon Vinge and Ray Kurzweil): the singularity will be the point at which human technology and biology will merge (DANOWSKI, CASTRO, 2015, p. 65), creating a machinic consciousness that will remain at the service of the human design. They even think that we will be able to *upload* our consciousness into some network, application, or genetically modified biomechanical body in what would be a kind of transmigration of souls. We could survive in hostile environments. We could even sustain ourselves for much longer! We would be humans without a world. Will technology be able to overcome so many challenges in the time that remains? And the animals, the plants, will they be virtual too? (Years and Years series). I remember watching an American movie, released in 1972 that impressed me. It is called “Silent Running” and it takes place on a spacecraft whose mission was to keep forests alive in huge transparent domes in orbit near Jupiter. Four astronauts and two robots were responsible for running the ship. One of the astronauts maintained a living relationship with the forest while the others, wanted to return home as quickly as possible, with no regard for the for-

est they were keeping alive. They received an order to destroy the domes that were no longer useful, the Earth had reached a temperature that would no longer allow life. To make a long story short, the astronaut, who had a relationship with the nature preserved there, killed his companions and himself in an attempt to prevent the destruction. But first, he managed to launch one of the domes into space under the supervision of a robot, thus keeping the forest alive, immersed in the cosmos, in the collective unconscious, but alive. And humanity would continue, cut off from nature symbolically expressed by the forest.

Besides Singularism, another proposal is the one known as Accelerationism. Its adherents claim that capitalism proves to be unbeatable, and it is naïve to believe in the survival of anything outside of it. The only way to recreate this “outside” is to accelerate capitalism “until it destroys itself and recreates itself in a radically new world” (DANOWSKI, CASTRO, 2015, p. 71). In my understanding I consider Accelerationism to be a variation of Singularism.

Another current of thought opposes the Singularists/Accelerationists. These are those who believe that a general slowing down of the “more” that characterizes capitalism is necessary: more growth, more production, more consumption, and so on (HICKEL, 2022). People could work fewer hours so that full employment would be maintained. Would GDP shrink to the point of causing recession? If we think of an economy founded on growth, yes. But the proposal would be a post-capitalist economy, focused on people’s well-being rather than on accumulation. It would require huge structural changes that seem impossible. But there are people working on this issue who affirm the reality of this possibility. We can use the following metaphor: if we are on a train and we notice that we have missed our destination, we can only slow down the train, but we will not change the place of arrival. Is it any good? Yes, if we think that science will have more time to find solutions, and people will also have

more time to realize what affects them and the danger they are in.

The journalist Eliane Brum (2021) dialogues with this current and goes further when she affirms that “climate collapse requires radicalism. It is not enough to remodel capitalism, as some want, it is necessary to refound the human person”. Amazonia Center of the World, a movement she created, argues that this re-foundation can only happen through an alliance between forest peoples and deforested peoples, those who were pushed to the outskirts and communities of the cities (position 85%).

Finally, how did we get here? Jung demonstrated abundantly how Western man has relied too much on the intellect, despising his interiority, his unconscious, his soul. We are fissured humans. Or hollow humans, title of the poem quoted at the beginning of this text. We are also split from the environment in which we live and on which we depend. I quote Ailton Krenak (2019):

We were alienating ourselves from this organism of which we are a part, the Earth, and we started thinking that it is one thing and we are another: the Earth and humanity. I don't understand where there is something that is not nature. Everything is nature. The cosmos is nature. Everything I can think of is nature (p. 17).

For Kopenawa and Albert (2015, p. 480), nature is both the forest and the multitude of Xapiris spirits that inhabit it, the animals, the trees, the fish, the wind, the sun, everything that has no fence (fall pg. 480). Xapiris are the images of ancestors who dance and sing for the shamans under the effect of yacoana powder, a psychoactive substance. They are nocturnal beings who gather their songs from trees that are where the earth ends, where the feet of heaven are planted. The trunks of these trees are covered with lips that sing endlessly and never repeat a word. These are the chants full of wisdom that the xapiris learn and teach to the shamans. It is a cul-

ture in which knowledge is passed on through song and dance (p. 114).

The indigenous perspective of nature comes close to the Greek concept *physis*, which corresponds to our word nature. *Physis* encompasses a much broader concept of nature than today, with our narrow view and our arrogant objectification of everything living, so that we can manipulate it as we please. Aristotle claimed that it was impossible to define *physis*. *Physis* transcends the human that fits into it. I can say something about it, but it will always be insufficient. For science today, *physis* has become passive matter, and much has been achieved from this perspective. Technology has brought enormous benefits, but there has been a price. Nature lost its mystery and dimension. If we broaden the notion of nature, as Greek philosophy does, we will arrive at a totality very close to the indigenous notion.

I realize that I have experienced the indigenous way of acquiring knowledge. It is not through books, through the paper skin, as Kopenawa says. It is through immediate experience mediated by the power plant. Jung put great emphasis on the immediate experiences of the unconscious that always bring some danger. The Ego can identify with the symbol that emerges and be pathologically magnified or diminished. The ego's ability to maintain a critical attitude toward the experienced is what will determine the success or failure of the endeavor.

I tend to say that Jung's proposal for the exploration of the unconscious is close to the one I have described. Jung proposed active imagination, a meditation on a dream or an image whose purpose would be to conduct a dialogue between consciousness and the unconscious. The ego would need to learn to withdraw from the center of consciousness and become an observer with much less autonomy. Jung, like other people, had an easy time gaining this kind of access to the unconscious. I am not among them. But that is what I was able to obtain through my experience with the power plant. It is a possibility of access to the unconscious, just like active

imagination. Jung himself wrote his theory based on the active imaginations registered in his “Red Book”. But this does not imply that we think that every image will become science. We would be turning images into pre-science and exercising the tyrannical power to affirm what is real. Not to hierarchize the ways of knowing the world, placing the rational above images, opens a more creative field.

My experience awakened me to understand a perspective that facilitates empathy with the indigenous universe. There, spirits are the reflection of things that exist in our world. It is like a library that opens up; instead of books, we have songs and dances of spirits that reveal knowledge. It gives us a chill to think that our civilization puts this library at risk. I remember being impressed by the destruction of the library in Alexandria. Today, we are in danger of losing another one.

Let’s return to Krenak and Kopenawa’s ideas about nature. We are immersed in it, whose am- pleness surpasses us. In the same way, we are immersed in the psyche, according to the Jungian understanding. The concept of a psychic to- tality of which we are part as individual psyches is a fundamental idea in Jungian thought. To represent it, religious symbols have always been used. Each culture has its images of the deity, the Creator, the Prophet, that represent this ar-

chetype. Christ is often cited by Jung as one of these possibilities. But after all this contact with Nature and its biomes, it has naturally emerged that a possible symbol would be nature itself. The philosopher Spinoza, studied by Nise da Sil- veira, affirms that God is nature.

I return to the skin of the earth. I was reminded of Guimarães Rosa by my wife. In the novel “*Cam- pos Gerais*”, Miguilim, the eight-year-old protag- onist, puts on glasses for the first time when a traveler notices that he squeezes his eyes to see: “Miguilim (gazed). He couldn’t believe it! Every- thing was so bright, all new and beautiful and dif- ferent, the things, the trees, the people’s faces. He saw the little grains of sand, the skin of the earth, the smaller pebbles” (ROSA, 1970, p. 101).

We need a new look. We are the Indian sung about by Caetano Veloso. We have to find him in our interiority and reconnect, according to the song, to what may have always remained hid- den even though it is the obvious. To re-learn to dream, not to remain with our heads full of for- getfulness in the words of Kopenawa and Albert (2015, p. 462). Let us stop being just the people of the merchandise and re-learn to dream big and not only see in dreams what is close to us. And thus respect the trees and the layer of leaves that form the skin of the earth. ■

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Resumo

A pele da Terra

A experiência com as plantas de poder permite o contato com outro tipo de sensibilidade daquela a que estamos acostumados no mundo ocidental. A situação ambiental do planeta se apresenta de modo imagético e emocional. A partir disso é feita uma aproximação com a psicologia analítica, a linguagem simbólica e a o conhecimento dos indígenas da etnia yanomami. A possibilidade de extinção da vida

na Terra tem sido uma preocupação que cresce dia a dia. Como evitá-la dentro das condições políticas e econômicas atuais ainda é um problema sem solução. Algumas propostas são apresentadas e cotejadas com o conhecimento indígena. A necessidade de compreender e assimilar esta sabedoria ancestral parece ser uma contribuição essencial para o encaminhamento de soluções. ■

Palavras-chave: Mudança climática, mitologia indígena, substâncias psicodélicas, xamanismo, psicologia analítica.

Resumen

La piel de la tierra

Una experiencia con plantas de poder permite entrar en contacto con otro tipo de sensibilidad a la que estamos acostumbrados en el mundo occidental. La situación ambiental del planeta se presenta de modo imagético y emocional. A partir de eso se hace una aproximación con la psicología analítica, el lenguaje simbólico y el conocimiento de los Indígenas de la etnia Yanomami. Una posibilidad de extinción

de la vida en la tierra ha sido una preocupación que crece día a día. Cómo evitarla dentro de las condiciones políticas y económicas actuales sigue siendo un problema sin solución. Algunas propuestas son presentadas y cotejadas con el conocimiento indígena. La necesidad de comprender y asimilar esta sabiduría ancestral parece ser una contribución esencial para el encaminamiento de soluciones. ■

Palabras clave: Cambio climático, mitología indígena, sustancias psicodélicas, chamanismo, psicología analítica

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