

Benny Shanon

The Antipodes of the Mind

Charting the Phenomenology of the Ayahuasca Experience

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Introduction

What happens when a worldly Israeli cognitive psychologist goes to the Amazon Basin where he ingests the famed psychotropic concoction Ayahuasca (the ‘vine of the dead’) again and again and again? Our intrepid philosophical psychologist is no longer a sprightly youth, maddened for adventure. He is instead an accomplished theoretician with widely published articles (several in this journal) and a noted book (Shanon, 1993) that speak the from the perspective of cognitive (or phenomenological, for Shanon) psychology against the reductive tendency to view the mind’s activities as created by the the brain’s activities. Even before his Amazonian quest, he placed himself in the Gibsonian camp seeing the mind as dynamic intermediary between organism and environment and active participant in both. What did *happen* is this extraordinary book, a scientific analysis of his own visions and the education of both Shanon’s views and, perhaps, his soul.

Benny Shanon’s accomplishment in this unique and carefully written treatise is nonpareil. In his landmark attempt to chart and classify the experiences that follow ingesting the Amazonian brew, Ayahuasca (always capitalized by Shanon), he demonstrates a will to observe and explain as relentless as carbon steel, but his seeing and experiencing also require him to be as flexible as tungsten when he must shape his interpretations within experiences that have all but overthrown the pretense of objective observation. Indeed, as he becomes ‘educated’ through his journeys with this brewed plant compound, apparently beginning his own shamanic initiation, his will, his very self must capitulate to experiences beyond words. Later, back at his desk, Shanon will use his notes and memory to go discover the order of things. This breakthrough study will achieve the respect and renown it deserves, but it is currently causing a stir in certain circles and amongst the openminded international intelligentsia.

Shanon has written a slow-rising classic that should stay aloft for the duration of our era, not just as cognitive psychology or even as another narrative of the psychedelic experience, but as the revelation of the boundless potentials within the human journey itself. Since its release, it appears to have received universal praise from other critics and readers. However, word has not filtered out into the hungry minds of the general public or surely *Antipodes*¹ would be on a bestseller list. Either its subject matter — pharmaceutically induced altered states of consciousness — is still considered too politically threatening or Benny Shanon needs to hit the talk show circuit. His book enters deep waters yet never loses its way. It may be a challenge for some to wade through his classifications but in doing so may find their thinking clarified. Shanon’s writing is clear as a mountain brook. He wastes no words for grand effect but always goes straight and true for the point of the topic he had begun. This makes for a very satisfying read, which is helped immensely by the greater story lurking within it to do

with one man's awakening from the sleep from self consciousness. *Antipodes* is neither obscure nor excessive, so it might make a good selection for a book-of-the-month for educated readers. Oprah, are you listening?

Nothing exactly like this has ever been written before,² beautifully rendered and incisively analysed yet finally superseding its own analytic. The reader joins a dedicated scientist on a journey that most would consider well beyond the possibility of scientific data gathering, except in terms of chemistry or anthropology. This journey is a phenomenological analysis, Shanon's close observation his own experience. He wastes no pages speculating on what the neural correlates of his visionary experiences might be, not even taking much time to explain the active ingredients of the 'brew' or how it changes the brain. Within this work (but not always within his own experience), the phenomenological-analytical approach seldom wavers. Such an approach still requires a certain distance, so when the object of study is his own earthshaking visions or emotional tsunamis rising up to lay bare every suppressed anxiety, guilt, or self delusion (not even to mention the digestive trauma often encountered³), one finds oneself in mute admiration for this stalwart scholar who steadily perseveres, refusing to be swept away from his purpose. He admits to making wrong choices in his early Ayahuasca journeys, lingering at banquet or resisting the lure of jaguar metamorphosis when he should have continued his quest, but he learns and begins again. As new worlds open before him, sometimes terrifying, he never retreats in a desperate attempt to turn the experience off. But he also learns when to surrender. Song pours from him amongst strangers, but he knew he must allow the joy to have voice. Though only briefly alluded to, it seems his perseverance and purity of purpose allowed him to finally transcend the limits of knowledge altogether by surrendering his cognition and his very self in a *metanoia* beyond the realm of words, memory, or interpretation. Needless to say, this experience is not described.

It is in this sense that *Antipodes* may find itself attacked (or ignored) from two opposed positions at once. Most hard science does not consider phenomenology a respectable undertaking since one's subjective experiences can neither be observed by anyone else nor shown to produce repeatable effects. One attempting to draw up analytical structures for drug-induced visions is likely to be dismissed out of hand as delusional, taking hallucinations for reality.⁴ On the other hand, true believers — religious followers, mystic esotericists, New Agers — will be annoyed for though Shanon puts the stamp of 'reality' upon his altered-state journeys, he continues to be skeptical about the existence of *supernatural* deities behind the metaphysical curtain. In his captivating Prologue he states: 'For years I characterized myself as a "devout atheist". When I left South America I was no longer one' (p. 9), but he later explains that his 'theism' is more related to a Spinozan pantheism grounded in creative dynamics than to anybody's pantheon or hierarchy of static divinities. He also rejects as unlikely the many reports of enhanced *psi* powers during the Ayahuasca intoxication (noting that increased perceptual sensitivity and interpersonal attunement can explain the 'mind reading' he has experienced and heard reported). He remains open, however, expressing the wish that reports like that involving the remote viewing of an actual

European city by an Amazonian native who had neither seen pictures nor heard stories of such a place should be objectively investigated.

Others will argue, and have done so, that immersion in the vision quest involves the suspension of the judgmental, cognitive faculty. Shanon seems to have learned the right steps to his dance between reception and cognition. When the moment presents itself, he allows the imagery or ambiance to take over; but when he returns he makes note of all that can circumscribed. Such imagistic encouragement is similar to Spinoza's intuitive mode of knowing, as Shanon notes (p. 205), but he also stands by the need for subsequent careful analysis in the same way elucidated by Whitehead (1978): 'The true method of discovery is like the flight of an aeroplane. It starts from the ground of particular observation; it makes a flight in the thin air of imaginative generalization; and it again lands for renewed observation rendered acute by rational interpretation' (p. 5). Whether this 'rational interpretation' infects that which is so interpreted, thus standing on the primary ontological ground beyond that of visionary experience remains an open question, to be asked again below.

In what follows, I will attempt the briefest of summaries though such is an injustice to this groundbreaking psychological cartography of what is *terra incognita* to most of us. I will then share my perplexities and a personal response, before concluding.

Summary

As a reader, I was hooked immediately by the dramatic Prologue as well as the few selected illustrations, all details from the artwork *Planos* by Brazilian 'shaman-turned-artist' Céu. Each detail is a picture unto itself — a 'frame of reference' — yet 'the big picture' reveals them all as aspects of a greater dynamic spiralling *out from or in towards* a core of light that no doubt 'passeth all understanding'. The plates seemed to be metaphor for *The Antipodes of the Mind*, frame of reference within frames of reference, each part structured by the whole, while the whole is changed by the activity of the parts.

In the Prologue, Shanon tells the story of his first encounters with the Ayahuasca brew and the questions that brought him to begin his mammoth research project. In his first experience of any consequence he had visions that included jaguars and snakes. He learned later that this was commonplace for Ayahuasca drinkers and his professional curiosity as a cognitive psychologist was roused: 'Snakes and jaguars seem to be just too specific to define cognitive universals' (p. 7). But he also underwent horrible visions of human cruelty throughout history, including what must have been especially wrenching, the Jewish Holocaust. But rather than back away or fall into bitter cynicism, he countered it with contemplation of the beauty that humans had brought into the world: 'However evil and petty human beings are, I thought, they are also the creators of some of the most beautiful things that exist in the universe. With culture and art, as well as with religion and spirituality, humankind can be redeemed' (p. 5). The anguish or fear evoked by unexpected and shocking presentations of evil must be the gate that has turned away many other first time drinkers from further pursuing this course. Through his faith in life and the human journey, Shanon himself emerged

beyond the gates in a centre of serenity within which it seemed the world and himself was born anew: 'It seemed this was the first day of creation' (p. 6).

After these first world-changing experiences with the Santo Daime Church (*daime*=Ayahuasca), he was thrown into a period of critical self-analysis. He knew he had to further study this vine and its power, but how? It seems he first had to accept who he already was, an accomplished cognitive psychologist; he confirmed this identity by ending his self-analysis and beginning his journey to other realities found through Ayahuasca and then a long critical, objective, and categorical analysis of the Ayahuasca experience. This book is the fruit of his labours. It is clear, however, that he had also personal motivations to discover a way to confront the human dilemma of good and evil, as well as facing (or 'being faced by') the everpresent questions of a spiritual nature.

Shanon set the time aside, returned to the Amazon, underwent prescribed purifications, and became a dedicated student of the School of Ayahuasca, a *mystes* into its mysteries. He knew from the first he would never 'graduate' as the result of a handful of Ayahuasca sessions, so he took his work seriously indeed. He travelled to gatherings among the three churches (two Christian inspired, one an offshoot of the Umbanda movement) in Brazil that use Ayahuasca as their sacrament and participated in their organized sessions. He sat with Amazonian tribespeople under the jungle canopy, often with the guidance of a *ayahuasquero*, the 'specialist of the sacred', a shaman. Later, as he began to master his visions, he journeyed with few others among accomplished shaman-healers. He shared the brew with experienced users in urban settings, and, when he felt ready, flew solo. At the time of publication, he had gone on over 130 Ayahuasca journeys, though the 'core corpus' of his phenomenological research work is his first 67 sessions. Each session was summarized at its conclusion. Beyond that, he read everything he could find on the brew, from early reports of missionaries or explorers to current extended scientific analyses. None combined scholarly analysis with *extended* personal experience. Finally, he set out in good cognitive psychological fashion and interviewed others who had just concluded their own sessions or anyone in general who also had extensive experience with the brew: 'My estimate is that, all told, the data discussed here are based on about 2,500 Ayahuasca sessions' (p. 410).

Then Shanon got back to his desk to reveal the structure of the world (perhaps that should be '*worlds*'). The bulk of the book consists of prolonged exegeses, enumeration and elaboration of steps, systems and subsystems, categories of subcategories within supercategories, and lists of effects and *affects*. His point of departure is the phenomenology of his 'core corpus'. I will not summarize here his structural program, central to his topic as he deems it to be. Strange to say, I rarely found this approach tedious. For one thing, as noted above, the objects of his classifications are confrontations and participation with other realities, so there is a veritable *tale of wonders* interwoven within the data. Running through the exposition like an unruly stream upon well-manicured fields is the underlying narrative of the paradigmatic hero's journey into meaning. Furthermore, Shanon's mind, as expressed in his writing, is so refreshingly clear and organized that one feels perfectly secure in boarding his 'aeroplane' to survey mysteries of terror and delight well beyond most of

our experience or comprehension. It may be, however, that Shanon needed this comprehensive organization as a grounding for his more ultimate revelations. Perhaps it was necessary for him 'systematically to chart the various phenomena that Ayahuasca may induce and *to establish order in them*' (p. 48, my italics), so he could at least recall the pathway back toward the Source, the 'still point of the turning world'.

Shanon learns there are stages of advancement into these mysteries: The novitiate begins passively watching wonders unfold as on a screen, but with experience and courage, learns to enter the vision and explore its reality from within. Then there comes a stage where a certain degree of control over the unfolding reality is possible, though such 'control' is always partial and participatory — Shanon often uses the metaphor of playing an instrument or being played as such: 'Thus, I say that the Ayahuasca experience is like music played on an instrument which is the soul and that this music is a perfect mirroring of one's entire being' (p. 380). Indeed, the final stage seems to involve gaining the power to engage many worlds (or realities) simultaneously, but also the power *to act* in this world in ways never previously attained or attempted, such as the expressive arts or guidance and healing. The 'grades' of the School of Ayahuasca are summarized thus:

First there was an *exposition*. ...the second course was *discipline*. ... The third course of my schooling was primarily concerned with *healing and disease*. ... The grades that followed focused on the *sacred* and involved powerful spiritual experiences. Then I had a long period—coupled with my partaking of Ayahuasca with traditional Amazonian healers—that focused on *shamanism*. ... The subsequent course ... focused on a variety of more *specific issues* (pp. 302-3).

To get this far, the *novitiate* or *mystes* has endured many trials and temptations, yet s/he must be bold enough to know when to surrender to the reality that presents itself and wise enough to know when to actively alter it. One must have overcome the narcissistic limitations of one's fears while not inflating vanity over one's piloting control or expanding knowledge. Such hubris, as myths have taught us, may lead to the pride that goes before a fall.

Shanon found the pure heart and 'empty centre' to be accepted amongst the healers of the Amazon rain forest. He mentions that now he feels his role has become more performative than explorative as guide, hierophant, and something of an *ayahuasquero* himself. In terms of powers, Benny Shanon emerges as 'Benny Shaman' (though I doubt he would admit this or appreciate the wordplay). In terms of wisdom, he states his conviction that the most expressive gesture of ontological truth is found simply in songs of praise for all creation, in the *Hallelujah* of his ancestors. As to the ontological question of what exactly is being so praised, Shanon avers it is not *anything* at all but the joy of the eternal dynamic process — neither God as an entity (or any other form of the supernatural), nor is it humanity or nature, as such. *Creation* is what the name implies, an ongoing unfolding of the infinitely potent creative core of all things, including ourselves.

Obviously, such 'knowledge' cannot be attained either through phenomenological or analytic reduction. It is everpresent beyond the edge of the 'known world', that is, beyond the conscious mind 'Wherefrom words turn back, / Together with the mind not

having attained...’ (*Tattiriya Upanishad* 2.9). It is at this point that Shanon the scientist must give up on science and even knowledge in any usual sense and admit that such direct communion exceeds communication: ‘Yet, there were occasions that it was clear to me that I had to make a choice—if I really wished to undergo the experience presenting itself to me, I would have to forgo my future recollection of it and give up any thought of ever talking about it’ (p. 355). Furthermore, even the path to the edge of this unspeakable awakening is one not of ordered signposts and structured roads but of intuitive knowledge, well beyond categorical reasoning. After all his phenomenological analysis, Shanon at last confesses that

very poignantly, I realized how limited the scientific approach is. It was evident to me that [in] pursuing this stance, there are realms of knowledge that can never be attained. I further comprehended that there are levels of knowledge that demand one to let go and relinquish all critical, distanced analysis. ... In this respect, despite all its limitations in terms of sociological power and cultural permanence, the indigenous stance has the upper hand (p. 356).

Perplexities

I continue to be perplexed about several things hinted at in this tome but not fully explained and I outline them here. These mainly result from my own application of traditional reasoning to that which eludes it or from Shanon’s expressed reticence to reveal more personal detail or delve into metaphysics. My perplexities are mainly to do with the world of light and truth revealed to the author and apparently to other experienced Ayahuasca drinkers. Either the dark side is less real or it plays a smaller role than I had imagined.

Unlike with LSD, there are said to be no ‘bad trips’ with Ayahuasca. Shanon admits he interviewed no one who drank the turbid brew but once, which would surely be the result if anyone ‘freaked out’ or was just turned off by the whole experience. The nausea, gastritis, and vomiting, emphasized in other first person accounts, may be enough to cause one to avoid the substance next time, but actual ‘mind-blowing’ has not been reported, to my knowledge. Shanon makes it clear that when faced with a personal crisis under the intoxication one must soldier on, dealing with fear and related negative emotions in as grounded and unperturbed manner as possible. Still, crises occur: ‘Quite commonly,’ he states matter-of-factly, ‘people feel that they are about to die’ (p. 57). Elsewhere he notes that a mental breakdown is real possibility. Yet not in *Antipodes* or anything else I have read to do with Ayahuasca experiences is such a breakdown recorded. Is it bad-trip free?

Along these same lines, my all-too-human binary thinking gets skewed in Shanon’s brief discussion of the ontological status of good and evil. On the same page he reports that ‘Ayahuasca leads people to the conclusion that the world contains both good and evil, that the two are intertwined, and that the ultimate reality is beyond good and evil’, but that, ‘Finally, there are visions in which one feels one is encountering the Supreme Good’ (p. 174). I realize I’m probably not getting the mystical paradox here, but elsewhere it’s said that Ayahuasca has a cosmic sense of humor (not always benign), that it lies or hides as much as it reveals. Is the Supreme Light without shadow, or what?

I wonder also about the dark side of the initiatory process, especially shamanic initiation. In the pattern of the ritual death-rebirth cycle, there must be a dark night of the soul before the dawn of revelation. Shamanic lore especially emphasizes the almost universal experience of death and dismemberment⁵ (apparently the death of the everyday self) before the shaman returns, being one with death yet remaining alive. Shanon modestly and perhaps wisely downplays the significance, but he acted as shamanic healer and guide for others and was accepted at least among one *ayahuasquero* guild. The fact of this exceptional book's existence is enough to convince me of Shanon's shamanic metamorphosis. No ordinary insight could have carried it through to the end. What I want to know is what sort of ritual or visionary death did our author have to endure? Or did he achieve his dawn without a dusk? Admittedly, he states such an autobiographical confessional was not his purpose here and may have to await a future literary venture.

And one wonders about the whole question of the existence or creation of orderly categories from the data resulting from his phenomenological and statistical analysis. What sort of lists, tables, categories, and structures are being brought forth here, and why? On the one hand he notes commonalities in his visions and those of many others as well as intriguing parallel reactions to these visions, especially amongst the *Ayahuasca cognoscenti*. As noted, it was in fact these inexplicable similarities that set him on his quest in the first place, professionally speaking at least. Does he then think his structural analyses is revealing the universal latticework of creation, or at least of the *Ayahuasca* experience? Or is he himself creating such a latticework to place over the chaos of creation? Neither, it seems, or both. Shanon is well aware of the ambiguities of his project and how boundaries in the realms of visionary experience seem to shift or even, with a wink and smile, disappear altogether. In a universe in which the only constant is creative dynamism itself, it is impossible to distinguish between that which one discovers and that which one projects. He states that 'there is no clear-cut differentiation between interpretation and creation. ... In essence, all is interpretive, all is creative' (p. 351). If it is so that all phenomena are simultaneously the product of interpretation *and* creation then — aside from the author's need, personal or professional, 'to establish order in them' (p. 48) — it feels like such cartographic detail is mapped onto shifting tides that will change with the phases of the moon.

This is a slippery metaphysics with which we are left. Shanon lays his detailed phenomenological analysis upon the creative essence with some ambiguity, it seems to me, like placing the picnic blanket on the lake. If our acts participate in the unfolding of reality then categories, maps, structures, laws of science, and what have you achieve their substance over millennia of cultural or even transcultural 'use', which results in the reality of habitual consensus. They are as real as anything else that seems to just be there, in one place, here and now. Does this leave his categories and structures and patterns with a ground on which to stand? Probably — at least *temporarily*. In fact, his studies prove beyond much question that certain visionary and experiential patterns reoccur across cultures and in times far apart.

Several times Shanon asserts that his purpose is not to explore ontological questions, but he takes enough steps in that direction that the reader understands that

when Shanon finally states that ‘the view put forth here is that the Ayahuasca experience is one of *generation* and *creation*’ (p. 383), he is tantalizingly close to claiming this for our usual experience too.

He even briefly discusses the source of these patterns of creation, which brings me to my last perplexity, the uncertainty over the terms ‘creativity’ and ‘imagination’. Early on, Shanon assures us that ‘Ayahuasca visions [exhibit] a beauty that is beyond imagination’ (p. 17)’, referring to our usual notion of the imagination as a post-language faculty activated by the self from other images already stored in memory. In speculating on the source of such beauty, he denies that such creative imagining comes either from a ‘world of forms’, already ‘out there’ in their own ultimate reality or from psychology, that is, the unconscious ‘in here’. So, in his interpretation, neither Platonic ideas nor Jungian archetypes will do.

To account for the reality of Ayahuasca experiences (and by implication, all experience), he posits a *creational reality* in which our own creativity participates but which ultimately exceeds our personhood or existence. So, ‘the notions of “human creativity” or “power of imagination” turn out to be much more fantastic than they are usually thought to be’ (p. 396). Yes, indeed, but the originality of this position is where perplexity arises. In the first place, isn’t this the core of the Romantics’ apotheosis of the transpersonal imagination? Creativity as the core can also be found in some form in both Bergson and Whitehead.

In the second place, I think Shanon is too dismissive of Jung’s concept of the collective unconscious by reducing it to residing ‘in here’, but this may be mistaken assumption based on Jung’s misuse of Freud’s original term, the *unconscious*. In his later years, Jung wrote a good deal about the *objective psyche*, meaning that the collective or transpersonal unconscious is the very world with which we engage and which is our source. Shanon refers approvingly several times to the somewhat similar notion of the *anima mundi* (‘world-soul’) as source of the *real*, both subjective and objective. Then again, as a result of his experiences of communion he would likely disagree that the world or world-soul should be understood as ‘unconscious’ (even if Jung meant ‘unconscious from the perspective of our self-contained conscious’).

The Jung-inspired archetypal psychologist James Hillman (1975) brings us to the point where Jung meets Shanon when he proclaims that every perception, cognition, or memory is fantasy-laden and not possible without such imaginative elaboration. Fantasies, in this sense, are not individual: ‘The revelation of fantasies exposes the divine, which implies that *our fantasies are alien because they are not ours*’ (p. 184). This may add some flesh to the ontological skeletal frame of Shanon’s ‘*generation and creation*’ pantheism, though he adds the last note that in the ‘dance’ of creator and created it is impossible to tell who is leading.

Allow me to reemphasize that my above ‘perplexities’ are not in the way of criticism. These are questions I would love to sit and discuss with the author; no doubt the inadequacy of my understanding would soon be made plain. I should even apologize for critiquing the few hints of ultimate matters which he deigned to mention, for he himself admits they have not yet been fully thought through. However, feeling perplexed by Shanon’s extraordinary encounters and the great work of his

phenomenological analysis, I couldn't help but wonder, 'What does it all mean?' Perhaps in his next book Shanon will explore an answer to that question.

Personal Reaction

After reading *Antipodes* with great pleasure and new discovery each time over several careful readings, I retain two reactions that are probably mine alone. One is that I am now sure I will never seek an opportunity to drink the brew of the 'vine of the dead'. Put simply, I doubt that I have the strength of character it took for Shanon to advance from audience member to conductor of the orchestra. In part, my reticence arises from my tendency to wander off and become thoroughly lost in the aforementioned psychedelic era, sidetrack to sidetracks. It is my understanding — *faith*, if you will — that cognition, rationality, and analysis are themselves particular cultural fantasies. When one give intuition primacy, one tends to wander as way leads on to way. Shanon could absorb his incredible experiences and then later at his desk, '*establish order in them*'. In fact, to the extent that it is possible, he has done just that. However, I fear I would become an Ayahuasca drifter, lost in other realities, but with no wish to return and nothing in order at all.

The second reaction was not one I had expected. *The Antipodes of the Mind* gave me, first dimly then with increasing illumination, hope, suffusing me generously with that unfamiliar but uplifting emotion. By reminding me, 'There is more here than meets the eye and you know it!', a flood channel of forgotten memories opened and I was able to recall the moments I had found myself elsewhere or elsewhere (and not always as the result of substance ingestion). In the need to 'get real' as I grew older, I had simply suppressed such experiences of wonder and awe because they were not 'useful'. I had pushed aside visions or encounters that threw into doubt the solid finality of day-to-day reality so I could join the grim march through the lifespan toward dusty death. I'm no fatalist, but I felt as though this book fell into my hands at just the right time. It is not just poetic license but a fact of consciousness-limited awareness that we walk about in worlds unrealized. So I wish to end this book review with appreciation rather than criticism: Thanks, Benny. You've done wonders. *Hallelujah* to you and your important book.

Notes

1. There is no singular form of 'antipodes'. From my 1938 Funk 'n Wagnalls *New Standard Dictionary*: 'antipodes, *n. sing. & pl.* **1.** A place or region on the opposite side of the earth; also, any two places or regions so opposed; as, australia is the *antipodes* (or *at the antipodes*) of England. **2.** Those who live on the diametrically opposite sides of the earth; as, our antipodes sleep while we wake; the two nations are *antipodes*.'

2. The only comparable work I know of may be John Horgan's (2003) recent study. Former senior writer at *Scientific American* and noted science writer, Horgan takes a similarly skeptical show-me approach, even to his own ayahuasca experience. In Horgan's Amazon.com review, he puts *Antipodes* on a par with classics on the further reaches of conscious experience by such as William James and Aldous Huxley. He errs, however, when he states that, after his journeys, Shanon remained an atheist, except in the most narrow definition of the term.

3. Shanon downplays the extreme digestive tract disturbances that have been widely reported, occasionally resulting in projectile vomiting. With experience, Shanon found he could avoid bringing forth such unpleasantness by bringing forth spontaneous song instead!
4. Benny cogently argues that such visions are more 'other realities' than fictional hallucinations (also see Shanon, 2003).
5. 'The shaman learns to know death in the course of his initiation, when he goes for the first time into the underworld and is tortured by spirits and demons,' declares Mircea Eliade (1990, undated entry 1952). Such universality (*all universality* for that matter) remains highly controversial in academic circles.
6. It would be most intriguing for Shanon write a phenomenological cartography after experimentation on LSD trips. Knowing the differences and similarities would tell us much about the status of visions. Do they arise from specific drug, personal idiosyncrasy, or have they a transpersonal status?

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