

PHENOMENOLOGY AND ALTERED STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS: A NEW FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS?

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Abstract

In this paper, we compare two main paradigms of the examination of altered states of consciousness, and we propose a new horizon of interpretation. On the one hand, we review the complicated matters of psychedelics in the context of psychology (and especially in that of transpersonal psychology); on the other hand we use some of the basic concepts of the phenomenological tradition – focusing on Merleau-Ponty's and Husserl's phenomenology – to differentiate between the features of perception, hallucination, and vision. We propose the idea that the actual research regarding the phenomenon of psychointegration can be extended with the heuristic values of basic phenomenological concepts (e.g. intentionality, lived body, imagination). In conclusion, our main purpose is to show that the phenomenology of the *lived body* can be a powerful explanatory tool to describe and specify irrational and chaotic experiences induced by psychoactive substances. The experiential material of the paper is based on Benny Shanon's phenomenological accounts.

Keywords: phenomenology ■ altered states of consciousness ■ psychedelics ■ psychedelic states ■ psychoanalysis ■ psychointegration

Absztrakt

Ebben a tanulmányban a módosult tudatállapotok vizsgálatának két fő irányvonalát vetjük össze és új interpretációs horizontot ajánlunk. Egyrészt áttekintjük a pszichedelikumok bonyolult kérdéseit a pszichológia (különösen a transzpersionális pszichológia) keretében, másrészt felhasználjuk a fenomenológiai tradíció néhány alapvető fogalmát (különösen Merleau-Ponty és Husserl gondolatait) annak érdekében, hogy megkülönböztessük az észlelés, a hallucináció, és a víziók jellegzetességeit. Azt javasoljuk, hogy az ún. *pszichointegráció* jelenségének aktuális kutatásai kiterjeszthetők alapvető fenomenológiai fogalmak (pl. intencionalitás, testséma, fantázia) heurisztikus értéke által. Végül szeretnénk megmutatni, hogy a szubjektíven *megélt test* fenomenológiája egy alkalmazható interpretációs eszköz lehet annak érdekében, hogy leírjuk és körvonalazzuk a pszichoaktív szerek által indukált irracionális és kaotikus élményeket. Tanulmányunk elsősorban Benny Shanon fenomenológiai beszámolóira épül.

Kulcsszavak: fenomenológia ■ módosult tudatállapotok ■ pszichedelikumok ■ pszichedelikus állapotok ■ pszichoanalízis ■ pszichointegráció

1. INTRODUCTION

Recently, the topic of altered states of consciousness, such as drug or artificially induced states (e.g. meditative experiences) became a main concern of interdisciplinary inquiry with a wide spectrum of different approaches. Winkelman's (2010) approach uses the perspectives of anthropology, neuroscience, evolutionary psychology, and he seems to be an advocate of embodied cognition as well. According to the theory of embodied cognition, the mind is not a disembodied entity or process, and consciousness is not a "ghost in the machine"; rather, our bodily attunement to the world is the very subsoil of our higher order cognitive functions (i.e. language, perception, and thinking). Among the wide variety of altered states, ayahuasca visions become increasingly popular in psychological and psychiatric circles. Benny Shanon (2003) combines cognitive psychology with subjective first personal (or *phenomenological*) descriptions when examining the structural typology of ayahuasca visions. Rick Strassman (2001) has a different strategy. His main aim is to do pharmacological research with controlled experiments, and he inclines to plunge into metaphysical speculations as well. Strassman famously coined the term "spirit molecule" to summarize the effects of dimethyltryptamine (DMT), one of the basic ingredients of the ayahuasca brew. Briefly, the term "spirit molecule" symbolizes the intriguing effect of DMT secretion in near-death experiences (NDE) (Strassman, 2001, p. 220–221). The DMT molecule also has a key role in out-of-body experiences (OBE), which is a crucial experience in DMT sessions.¹ Nevertheless, ayahuasca visions are special kinds of altered states, because this compound comes from traditional shamanic praxis. Therefore, there is no common ground between shamanic rituals and DMT experiments despite of the similarities of episodic experiences. In sum, the term "spirit molecule" is a direct consequence of the subjective-phenomenological accounts of DMT states. In several cases, drinkers have the astonishingly lively experience that their *soul* (or their *first personal viewpoint* in a more neutral parlance of phenomenology) leaves the body and travels to the so-called otherworld realms.² In this study, we will characterize

¹ One of Strassman's subject described her spontaneous OBE experience under the DMT session in the following way: „Something took my hand and yanked me. It seemed to say, „Let's go!" Then I started flying through an intense circus-like environment. I've never been that out-of-body before. First there was an itchy feeling where the drug went in. We went through a maze at an incredibly fast pace. I say „we" because it seemed like I was accompanied." Strassmann, 2001, p. 169.

² Strassman made several high-dose DMT sessions with voluntary participants. One of the subjects, Elena, was prone to describe her induced altered state as similar to the Tibetan *Bardo*-realm, which is an intermediary state between life and death. Participants often describe their – frequently

the phenomenology of altered states through the unique example of ayahuasca visions. Our aim is to establish a multi-level or multi-layered framework to interpret altered states of consciousness by means of the basic concepts of Jungian psychology and phenomenology. However, prior to that, we need to review the contemporary dilemmas of psychedelic research.

2. ALTERED STATES AND THE PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF PSYCHEDELIC STATES

In modern medicine, one can find at least six different categories of psychoactive drugs. In the following, we will focus on the category of *psychedelics*. This group can be split further into smaller ones, and the main feature of these compounds (whether natural or artificial) is the consciousness altering effect. The majority of these substances can be classified into the categories of *hallucinogens* or *psychomimetics* (Farthing, 1992, p. 451; Maurer, 2010). From the end of the 1970s onwards, the term “altered conscious states” is often associated with psychopathologies meaning that the similarity of these experiences to psychotic breakdown and positive symptoms of schizophrenia seemed conspicuous. In contemporary consciousness studies, Revonsuo (2010) offers a phenomenologically satisfactory description of altered states of consciousness: “the stream of consciousness sometimes runs through rapids, ravines or waterfalls, sometimes it enters perfectly still and calm waters, sometimes the waters are muddy and at other times crystal clear. The unusual varieties of experience are called “altered states of consciousness” (p. 257). According to the quote above, it is clear that the level of awareness or the luminosity of consciousness represent one of the main conditions of investigating altered states. The second theoretical question is whether the altered state presupposes normal or baseline states of consciousness: “...an ASC is a temporary, reversible state of consciousness that significantly differs from the baseline state, and typically lasts from a few minutes to a few hours at most. Permanent, irreversible changes in conscious experiences, such as neuropsychological deficits caused by brain injury, are usually not counted as ASCs. /.../ One way to define the concept of ASC more precisely is to say that in an ASC, the overall pattern of subjective experience is significantly different from the baseline NSC /normal state of consciousness/” (p. 257).³

ineffable – experiences by means of mythological concepts from mystical traditions (i.e. Buddhism, or Christian mysticism). Strassman 2001, p. 222.

³ Farthing defines altered states in a very similar vein: a drastic change in the overall patterns of subjective experience, which is accompanied by major differences in the cognitive as well as physiological functions. For typical examples we can consider here such states as sleeping, hypnagogic and hypnotic states, a variety of meditative, mystical and transcendent experiences, and all of the psychedelic states of consciousness induced by drugs, etc. Farthing, 1992, pp. 202-203.

Nevertheless, the discrimination between baseline and altered levels of consciousness is highly debatable. Charles Tart, in 1969, considered altered states as qualitative shifts in the pattern of mental functioning, but he gave no answer regarding the proportion of the needed qualitative difference (Beischel et al., 2011, p. 115). According to Rock and Krippner's (2011) proposal the newly developed questionnaires have to describe the changes of the phenomenal characteristics and not conscious states. In this regard, we can think of alterations in "time sense" or "visual imaging", but we can also ask such questions that give enough freedom to the subjects to represent the major phenomenal changes in their experiences. This approach does not investigate the structural changes in conscious states, but rather focuses on the intensity alterations of phenomenal characteristics embedded in the whole domain of the phenomenal field. As a result, the seemingly radical difference between normal and altered states of consciousness fades away, and the research of conscious functions can detach from the endless questions of "normal and pathological" dilemmas (Rock & Krippner, 2011). In sum, we consider the possibility that the above-mentioned developments will lead us to a kind of phenomenological understanding of altered states. To our mind, the two main dimensions of the investigation of altered states of consciousness are: i) the *level of conscious awareness*. We have to mention here that the relation between consciousness and awareness is also a complex dilemma, especially in neuroscientific research.⁴ In our phenomenological approach "conscious awareness" means the level or luminosity of consciousness in conscious states. In this respect, we could think of the baseline level of dreamless sleep or the concentrative awareness in cognitive tasks. ii) The holistic *characteristic of the subject's phenomenal field*; as we will see in visionary states the whole perception of reality can be gradually altered. Visionary states tend to superimpose upon the normal perceptual states; the subject experiences an endogenous source of visions, and follows their trace to a place similar but not equal to the dream-world.

For the sake of phenomenologically oriented investigation we also have to consider the blurred line between psychopathological and altered states. By comparison of the diverse symptoms of psychiatric anomalies (e.g. schizophrenia,

⁴ "The concepts of "consciousness" and "awareness" are often used interchangeably, as in "visual consciousness" and "visual awareness": both refer to conscious experiences in the visual modality. "Awareness", however, is more often used in connection with externally triggered, stimulus-related perceptual consciousness, as in "awareness of a stimulus". Consciousness (phenomenal) as such refers simply to the direct presence of subjective experiences, but awareness of a stimulus refers to an entire process of conscious perception wherein an external physical stimulus first physically affects our sensory receptors and then triggers neural responses that travel to the brain, where cortical mechanisms analyse the content of the stimulus and cause a subjective experience that internally represents the external stimulus. To be aware of something thus presupposes that there is some kind of perceptual object out there, behind the experience, and that our conscious experience represents that object; therefore we are "aware of" the object and have a conscious experience of the object." Revonsuo 2010, p. 96.

paranoid episodes, etc.) we find parallels between these disrupted experiences and the experiences induced by LSD or other psychoactive substances (González-Maeso & Sealson, 2009). Unfortunately, psychological classifications cannot fully exhaust the phenomenological varieties of the experiences in question. This means that – with detailed scrutiny – experts and scholars have to consider the wholly different context of a hallucination of a schizophrenic patient, and the relatively manageable visions of an ayahuasca ceremony or LSD-therapy. Nonetheless, according to the theory of *model-psychosis*, drug induced altered states are pathological modifications of normal, waking perceptual states. However, several phenomenological descriptions and even more anatomical and neuroscientific data suggest that psychoactive substances can push the doors of perception wide open. The main theoretical difficulty lies in the *indeterminacy* of psychedelic experiences, that is, there is a chance to experience “what is it like to be a schizophrenic”, and also there is a chance to experience the hidden inner workings of the body, or wonder at the world in an incredibly detailed manner due to the opening of hidden perceptual capacities. In his paper, Király (2014), by reviewing a decent body of data, admits that several psychoactive compounds have the potential to increase latent psychopathologies in vulnerable individuals. However, he also clearly demonstrates that in appropriate context the aim of the use of psychoactive compounds is not to stimulate the reward centers of the brain, rather to increase the adaptive capacities, strengthen the ego and wellbeing of the subject.⁵ Moreover, psychedelics can trigger neurosynchronizing mechanisms and pharmacological dynamics that do not disrupt the organization of cognitive-perceptual data in the brain, but rather allow the mind to integrate subliminal information into conscious awareness (Winkelman 2002, p. 1877).

Henry Osmond coined the famous term *psychedelic*, but there is another common one, the so called *entheogen*, which alludes to the archaic psychoactive plants and animals (Walsh & Grob 2005a, 2005b.) Entheogen simply means “generating the god within”; this expression symbolizes the positive, mind-expanding, uplifting, and spiritual experiences during certain psychedelic therapies. Let us hasten to add that spiritual experiences can be interpreted similarly to a *psychotic breakdown* or a pathological (maniac) ego-expansion from the therapist’s viewpoint. These experiences are often *ineffable* by the experiencer, or they have ridiculous qualities according to the third-personal observer. We have to take into consideration that a radical phenomenological investigation is burdened with subjective distortions on the part of the experiencer and of that of the critical observer as well; but this fact can lead us to an alternative phenomenological approach. Before elucidating our *phenomenological* proposal we

⁵ Furthermore, Király emphasizes the “instrumentality” of drug usage showing that by means of psychedelic states the subject gains access to such conscious states that are suitable for surviving and adaptation. Király 2014, p. 4.

will give a brief account of the contemporary psychological interpretations of psychedelics.

Two basic interpretations exist in the literature about psychedelics burdened with metaphysical speculations. One of the main interpretations is the *depth psychological* explanation based on the works of Jung and Rank. In certain papers, Jung deals with the psyche in a phenomenological manner, that is, he regards the products of *imagination* as real as the objects of perception. Although, when he speaks about his own near-death experience, or the concept of meaningful *synchronistic* events and the indistinguishable unity of the psyche and world he is openly ponders on metaphysical questions (Jung, 1989). In this context we can interpret psychedelics as tools for reaching the archetypal realm of our psyche, or we could say that these substances mobilize and elevate the subliminal archetypal pictures into our conscious phenomenal field. The main issue here is that these – in Jungian terms – *numinous* visualizations or symbols (when presented to the conscious horizon) can be very disturbing or awe-inspiring at the same time. The ego, which inhabits the consensual perceptual world, can undergo very stressful and/or transformative experiences due to the very nature of the unknown affective, somatic, and visual information. Nevertheless, there is a basic philosophical difficulty in the Jungian conception of archetypes. Jung had to make a clear-cut distinction between the “archetypal images” (which are mostly mythological images mixed with personal memories and meanings) and the “archetypes” *per se*. We cannot fathom the very nature of archetypes as it is similar to the Kantian “Ding an sich”; however, the polymorphic symbols of archetypal pictures are representatives of the transcendent-metaphysical realm of archetypes (Kugler, 2008, pp. 86–87). Following this logic, psychedelics can improve the mind’s capacity to acknowledge and digest the unfathomable depths of archetypes so that we ultimately encounter the “*imago Dei/Self*” in our deepest layers of our psyche.

It is the most intriguing aspect of the newest research findings that certain psychoactive substances (in certain circumstances) can not only mimic the fragmented experiences of schizophrenia, but it seems that an integration process follows the seemingly harmful and dangerous ego-dissolution. Winkelman uses the term “psychointegrator” to describe the effects of ayahuasca experiences. Unfortunately, Winkelman’s descriptions about psychointegration are very concise. He argues that the gamma-synchronization in the limbic system that follows ayahuasca visionary states is the sign of conjoined information-integration of “innate representation modules”. The result of this neurodynamics is that the user’s behavioral, emotional, and cognitive capacities begin to show a great deal of integrity – a more harmonic collaboration – that can be expressed as increased group cohesion in a psychosocial context. Increased group cohesion in this context means a growing affective, emotive contact between members of the group/tribe and a more stable self-identity and self-respect (Winkelman,

2002, p. 1878). Nevertheless, the term of psychointegration is far from being without contradictions, and at present, we are not in a position to consider it a universal biological or anthropological phenomenon. Shushan raises two main questions from an anthropological point of view: (i) Why is it that the trance state is able to induce transformative effect in certain persons in certain cultures, but in other contexts it can be harmful or go without any significant results? (ii) Are shamans the only exceptional persons who possess the capacity to facilitate psychointegration, or not? (Shushan, 2009, p. 183). Furthermore, an interesting phenomenological assumption lies in the heart of Winkelmann's research: he supposes that the "spirit world" of tribal societies can be decomposed to symbolic elements and these basic categories will be correlated with brain structures in the future developments of neuroscience. Thus, the main point is some kind of neurological underpinning or reduction of the Jungian *archetypes*, but this project presupposes a kind of questionable universal knowledge at the moment, at least from relativistic and other perspectives.⁶ In line with the philosophical and metaphysical dilemmas, however, it seems certain that the integrative mechanism is not a peculiar feature of ayahuasca. According to recent studies, *psilocybin* and *ibogain* are also proved to be similar substances. Furthermore, it is not without reason to argue that the *dreaming* bears a similar function in destabilizing and re-stabilizing self-identity. Winkelmann (2002) came up with the following argument: "Shamanic ASCs involve intense visual experiences that reflect an innate representational system referred to as "presentational symbolism," the same representational system reflected in dreams (Hunt, 1995). Shamanic visionary experiences are a natural brain phenomenon resulting from release of the normal habitual suppression of the visual cortex" (p. 1879). Nevertheless, it is worth considering the differences between psychedelic states and usual dream content.

The second line of interpretation about psychedelics also has Jungian basis but more dramatically emphasizes *mystical experiences*. While the first approach is mainly psychological spiced up with anthropological and neuroscientific findings, the latter appears to be strictly transpersonal. This theory refers to psychoactive substances as catalysts of transcendent experiences, and adherents to this theory proclaim that these non-ordinary states can be induced by endogenous processes by means of the ancient methods of eastern practices (e.g.

⁶ Shushan argues that the *quasi-universal* symbols or archetypal motifs are only *trans-cultural* similarities and not full-blown universal, biological determinants. In a transcultural examination we cannot step out from our own traditional biases, because we have no room for an independent platform to make the comparisons without interferences. Our own culture represents our very starting point. Furthermore, we are not in the position to fully examine all of the archaic mythologies. If we systematically scrutinize the symbol system of a specific culture against others, it is more likely to recognize the small differences between the symbols. It is similar to the situation when we make a photograph in high resolution from a city; the higher the resolution the more details become visible. For detailed discussion see: Shushan, 2009.

meditation, yoga). Mystical experience is a broader term than transpersonal experience; in case of the former, not only the mind-expanding feature is relevant but in addition there is some kind of “contact” with the “sacred” or “god” in the heart of the experience (Krippner & Sulla, 2000, p. 67). The mystical interpretations are still more prone to come up with metaphysical explanations. A good example for this tendency is Aldous Huxley’s “perennial philosophy” concept (Huxley 2009).

Transpersonal psychology is by no means a unified project. Following the basic Jungian assumptions, these interpretations agree that the personal unconscious is not the end of the psychological journey into the depths of the psyche, rather a trail that culminates into the chaotic sphere of the collective unconscious. The collective unconscious is the hypothetical layer of transpersonal, *numinous* experiences that can be raised into the sphere of consciousness with mind-altering techniques. Jung was frequently criticized by psychologists and anthropologists when arguing for the existence of the collective unconscious, and he replied not without animosity that one who has never been a subject of the *direct experience* of an archetype is not able to comprehend the heart of the concept (Shamdasani, 2003, p. 266). Although it is a crucial issue to characterize the deep-seated emotive dynamics of the soul, the distinction between personal and collective unconscious is very blurry. Despite the existence of several methodological problems that aim to map the collective unconscious, certain transpersonal psychologists consider it as an insurmountable psychic fact. According to the model of the holotropic mind, developed by Stanislav Grof, under the layer of perinatal experiences one can discover the *transpersonal realm*, which consists of the elements of archetypal and/or mythological themes. Grof (1990) articulated a kind of “archetypal-cosmology” based on his and others’ phenomenological descriptions. In this regard, the archetypal realm is not only the product of fantasy and memory but it has its independent status in reality. The archetypal spheres of unconscious are as real as the perceptual objects in our ordinary life. Due to this fact, transpersonal psychology is far from acknowledgment of mainstream academic psychology and it is often regarded closer to the New Age movements. Szummer (2010, 2011a) emphasizes that it is not reasonable to mix the original Jungian psychology with the more superficial transpersonal alternatives, because the former was far more original than the latter. The post-Jungian Raya A. Jones (2007) shows that the contemporary psyche is a “narrative psyche” and in the contemporary *postmodern* period a human being can metaphorically be defined as “homo narrans”. Thus the self is essentially a “narrative self”, and the visual-imaginative workings of the mind (i.e. dreams, visions) are secondary mechanism in our civilized “lifeworld”. However, the evolutionary epistemologist Winkelman (2012) argues that the visual-imaginative modes of the mind are constantly accompanying consciousness. In fact, this idea refers to old philosophical traditions, since in the late nineteenth

century several theories of the unconscious emerged that argued for the all-encompassing presence of the subconscious workings of the soul/mind (Shamdasani, 2003, p. 182–197).

The transpersonal movement utilizes Jungian psychology as a framework to interpret the outcomes of psychedelic therapies. We can classify the methods of the controversial psychedelic therapies into two main groups. (i) *Psycholytic therapies*: in this respect the therapist's aim is to gain insight to personal psychodynamic problems, but it is worth mentioning that transcendent experiences could also emerge to surface. Besides, it is quite difficult to clearly demarcate the transcendent and personal experiences from first-person and third-person perspectives, as well. (ii) *Psychedelic method*: in this case the therapy is similar to a "horse-kick", that is, the aim of the therapy is to directly "catapult" the subject to the transpersonal realm. This radical (and disputable) view is that the subject will gain a greater opportunity to improve if a sudden "spiritual awakening" occurs, and – in this situation – he or she can "skip over" the individual psychodynamic problems. But let us hasten to add that psychedelic therapies of this kind are usually subjects to innumerable theoretical and ethical debates. The truth is that we have no general rule of the individual psychic development, there is no clear cut guarantee that some kind of "catharsis or wholeness" will follow the ego-dissolution process achieved by a high dose of psychoactive substance. There is a chance for paranoid, depressive, and other unexpected psychic episodes; this means that the subject is unable to integrate the shocking experiences into his or her personal belief-structure or he or she has suffered the attacks of repressed emotions. Another drawback could be the case when the subject gets stuck in the freezing state of ego-dissolution. It is an open question to what extent could the psychedelic therapy contribute to ego-development and facilitate adaptation. Moreover, the manifold of transpersonal terms (ocean consciousness, pure consciousness, omega experience, oversoul, etc.) is a clear sign of theoretical eclecticism that surpasses the Jungian frameworks. The phenomenal richness of unconscious images and symbols can be a great obstacle to discursive thinking; the theoretical frameworks never exhaust the varieties of psychic manifestations. For this reason, the acknowledgement of epistemological and methodological barriers may lead the way to the more sophisticated phenomenal investigations (Walsh and Grob, 2005c, p. 252). In conclusion, as we have seen above there are arguments that encourage us to mobilize certain phenomenological and psychological frameworks to approach the dilemmas of imagination, vision, and hallucination.

For a theoretical survey of psychedelic experiences, depth psychological and diverse transpersonal framework might be relevant, however, essentially, the main contextual dilemma henceforward is the contradiction between *universal* and *relativistic* approaches representing the main battlefield of contemporary critique. According to the postmodern movement of deconstructionism, arche-

typal symbols and images are not essential forms of the unconscious. Vernon W. Gras (1981) contends that it is merely a metaphysical speculation to preserve the concept of an unhistorical *universal mind*, which exists without concrete/cultural situatedness. These theoretical debates are reflecting the above-mentioned critiques of Jung's collective unconscious. According to the anthropological critiques of Jung, archetypes are not archaic vestiges of the mind and body, but culturally transmitted habits and symbols.⁷ The mythological themes and/or archetypal images are only certain features of a specific culture, there are no universal forms or the expressions of a transpersonal realm (i.e. the "objective psyche" in Jungian terms). However, Paul Kugler (2008), following a historic survey on the role of images in Western philosophical culture, re-established the role of images in our time. For him, the *images* (the products of imagination) are not only "historical constructions" or "universal essences" in the universal mind, rather the expressions of the trans-objective and trans-subjective unknown. Kugler reformulates and modernizes Jung's numinous experiences, when he argues that the images and visions are the awe-inspiring bridges to the *sublime*. The sublime, as an aesthetical and not a universal metaphysical category, is a direct expression of the *unknown depths* and *heights* of the psyche. The sublime is on the verge of discursive thinking:

"Psychic images signify something that consciousness and its narcissism cannot quite grasp, the as yet unknown depths, transcendent to subjectivity. And this depth is to be found in both the world of objects and the world of ideas, history and eternity. What the image signifies cannot precisely be determined, either by appeal to a difference or universal." (Kugler, 2008, p. 89.)

Kugler tries to navigate between the Scylla of metaphysics and the Charybdis of relativism by means of the notion of sublime; the aesthetical and affective experiences are the golden means to transcend these unbearable psychic opposites. To our mind, this reasoning is an eloquent alternative to apply the metaphysical independency of the phenomenological stance. To what extent can we fathom the diabolic features of altered states of consciousness? Phenomenology gives as an ontologically independent method to analyse the spheres of Being where the scientific schemas could be too narrow or one-sided. . In the case of ayahuasca visions, the psychological and aesthetical effects may imply profound lively experiences which can be experienced as vivid as the perceptual experience. It is not without reason to suppose that visions have special features that

⁷ The concept of archetype was not the only that were criticized, but also Jung's theory about tribal cultures. In 1927, the contemporary anthropologist Paul Radin argued that both Lévy-Bruhl and Jung, as his follower, have seen the tribal cultures as misty vision of the western mind; full of sentimentality and plain ignorance, shaped Jung's view about the "primitive". Shamdasani, 2003, pp. 328–29.

can be investigated by means of the subjective accounts and key concepts of *consciousness* and *phenomenological field*. Our main concern is are there any innovative frameworks to reinterpret the psychedelic journeys besides the above mentioned transpersonal and depth-psychological alternatives?

3. “MORE REAL THAN REAL” – THE PARADOXICAL PHENOMENOLOGY OF VISIONS

The famous and provocative psychonaut, Terence McKenna (1992) argues that visions possess the characteristics of an independent “spectacular language”. Apart from this, however, the DMT state is definitely an “intellectual black hole”; it is a very challenging situation to make sensible statements about these pre-linguistic experiences:

“This hallucinogen induced phenomenon isn’t like that; it’s simply a brain state that allows the expression of the assembly language that lies behind language, or a primal language of the sort that Robert Graves discussed in *The White Goddess*, or a Kabbalistic language of the sort that is described in the *Zohar*, a primal “Ursprache” that comes out of oneself. One discovers one can make the extra-dimensional objects—the feeling-toned, meaning-toned, three-dimensional rotating complexes of transforming light and color. To know this is to feel like a child. [...] It seems to me that either language is the shadow of this ability or that this ability will be a further extension of language. Perhaps a human language is possible in which the intent of meaning is actually beheld in three-dimensional space.” (McKenna, 1992, pp. 34–35)

In the unusual state of tryptamine hallucination not only a unique fusion of perceptual modalities can be observed, but the paradox nature of *affection* comes into sight, as well. If we try to observe our emotional tones in our daily routines, we realize that our actual mood is happiness, regret, sadness, melancholia, and so on. We are prone to imagine a better future while going to our office, or ruminating on childhood memories on the train, or just fantasizing about a Hawaiian holiday in the midst of a winter storm. Contrary to the normal waking state, during DMT visions the different modalities of consciousness produce a synesthetic experience that is filled with – in Jungian terms – feeling-toned complexes, seemingly ancient (archetypal) memories, and fractal-like, geometrical forms. While our phenomenal experiences are more or less predictable in waking states, a formidable chaos begins to rule in visionary states, which is dominated by emotional (or perhaps numinous) experiences:

“But the experience must move one’s heart, and it will not move the heart unless it deals with the issues of life and death. If it deals with life and death it will move one

to fear, it will move one to tears, it will move one to laughter. These places are profoundly strange and alien. (McKenna, 1992, p. 34.)

In these visionary altered states the subject leaves behind his habitual patterns and his own identity in some cases may undergo a radical transformation in a symbolic cycle of life and death. The loosening of identity makes a vacuum in the subject's mind, and more profound inspirations and affections about personal life come to the surface; metaphorically speaking, strongly suppressed existential dilemmas and traumatic memories may imbue the phenomenal field. Long forgotten elements of the personality could be reintegrated into a new form by means of a heightened conscious-awareness owing to the eruption of subconscious contents into the sphere of the phenomenal field. Naturally, the profound, or occasionally shocking, experiences are not enough *per se*, for a self-transformation, the interpretation of visionary states is a therapeutic – interpersonal – process. The experience is only one step of the development but not the ultimate aim. The visionary state is not a “miracle” by itself rather a significant stage in the process of integration of the split-off aspects of personality. Winkelman (2002) considers this binding mechanism to be a very powerful and ancient brain function. The synthetic connection of perceptual modalities seems to be a very new phenomenon to modern man, but this is an illusion, because in archaic tribes this mode of “symbolic thinking” was well known and eagerly cultivated. Winkelman, after Hunt's work, came up with the term “presentational symbolism” to signify the phenomena of visionary world. In doing so, he made a qualitative distinction between visionary experiences and hallucinations. He argues that visions can be interpreted as full-blown dream sequences penetrated into the sphere of conscious awareness. The *presentational symbolism* differs from the *representational contents* of the mind, which are perceptual and linguistic mental states. The former mode of cognition can be correlated with the function of *limbic structures* of the brain. However, the current neuroscientific studies are constantly changing and as a result it is possible that besides the limbic structures the *frontal and temporal brain structures* have significant role in the genesis of altered states as well. For instance, in case of out-of-body experiences the *temporo-parietal-junction* is one of the most distinctive brain area. All in all, according to Winkelman, the archaic limbic system can be understood as the very basis of intuitive knowledge acquisition, which operates with metaphors and archetypal images (Winkelman, 2010, p. 20).

Benny Shanon (2003) approaches ayahuasca visions in a cognitive-psychological way, and emphasizes the polysemy of visions based on his own and others' phenomenal accounts. In the realm of visionary states, the duality of meaning-constitution (or interpretation) and perception can be conjoined into an intriguing oneness:

“Following the philosopher Merleau-Ponty (1962) and the psychologist Gibson (1979), I believe that it is impossible to draw a clear-cut line dividing between naked, interpretation-free sensory inputs and interpretative processes that are subsequently applied to them so as to render these inputs into meaningful percepts. In the spirit of Heidegger (1962), I maintain that cognition is always ‘laden with meaning.’” (Winkelman, 2010, p. 20)

Shanon implies that Merleau-Ponty – among other philosophers – has shown unambiguously that every conscious intention has an inherent meaning and, in line of this thinking, visions have intentionality, as well. In a very delicate manner he tries to make a radical phenomenological distinction between hallucination, perception, and vision. He attests that visions stand closer to *perception* as compared to hallucinations in a manner that visions have meaning and are able to induce *ontological commitment*. Shanon claims that visions possess such powerful, meaningful, and figurative features that they are almost able to mimic perceptual reality and they can compete with the vivacity of our ordinary life. Shanon comes up with a useful analogy to exemplify the workings of perceptual experiences. Suddenly, when we wake up from a dreamless sleep, the whole world opens up in front of our gaze with its own totality and complexity. In this respect, we never reflect upon the elemental features of colour perception and *Gestalt*-constitution. For example, in the midst of the observation of a flower the interwoven relationship of perceptual world and bodily self-affection⁸ constitutes the horizon of the world with an embedded ontological certainty. If I suddenly turn my gaze to a perceptual object, the very object stands in front of me as a *perceptual fact*, there is no room for doubt; I unabashedly believe in the reality of the object of my conscious intention. However, the cases of altered psychological states (e.g. hallucinations) or radical philosophical scepticism might lead us to disbelieve in our perception. Shanon took great pains to demonstrate that the phantasmagorical sphere of visions can be as lively and animated as the objects of perception. One can promptly find oneself in a distinct, virtual world where new, independent laws rule: “However, in its totality the experience transcends the visual and is felt to be a reality in which the drinker is immersed. For this reason I refer to it as a ‘virtual reality.’” (Shanon, 2003, p. 92)

A strange, self-referential paradox appears when we attempt to seek for an appropriate metaphor in order to describe such a conscious state, which itself fundamentally consists of metaphorical and symbolic manifestations. Nonetheless, Shanon follows this line of thinking to show and demonstrate the narrative and visual features of ayahuasca experience to the people who have never experienced such non-ordinary states. Shanon claims that ayahuasca visions can

⁸ In this context, the bodily *self-affection* refers to the visceral, volatile, formless, changeable inner body-experience that can be interpreted in the phenomenological tradition as the body-subject or lived body (“Der Leib”).

be interpreted as a stage-play that is quite assimilative to the unsuspecting viewer:

“Yet it seems to me that phenomenologically it is very clear: When a vision is grand, there is no question about it, it is grand. Applying again the cinematographic jargon, I would say that the difference between a scene and a grand scene is analogous to that between a video clip and a veritable cinematographical or theatrical masterpiece.” (Shanon, 2003, p. 92.)

At the beginning of the trip, the drinker of the brew experiences the regular enthralling visions. However, time to time, the visions become more powerful and the scene becomes similar to a stage-play in which the players come down from the stage closer to the viewer. Furthermore, a more disturbing effect begins to form: the viewer becomes the part of his vision as a member of the visionary players, and in the extreme, the viewer is the player and the director of his visions at the same time. For Shanon, it is expedient to say that *the visionary experiences are not only seemingly real, but in a bizarre manner, they can be “more real than real”*. In this respect, *reality* can be equated with the ordinary states of everyday life. Ayahuasca’s powerful effect lies in the so-called *presentations*, which means that “Ayahuasca may act as a kind of time machine whereby we may observe past and perhaps future events perceptually, as if they were taking place in the present.” (Shanon, 2003, p. 203)

Shanon is inclined to think that visions facilitate the capacity of *intuitive pre-verbal* knowing, which can be the underlying layer of perceptual reality, as well. Furthermore, regarding this intuitive-cognitive knowledge, it does not matter if we consider the visions as hallucinations or fictions.⁹ The Visions, thus, are similar to perception because they bear some kind of self-evident knowledge for the subject. However, they do not appear as some sort of representational knowledge – as ordinary perception does – rather they *present* their meaning inherently in their images and symbols. Shanon argues that ayahuasca experiences are fully transparent from the first person point of view, the *qualitative content* of the visions is – at the same time – the main source of meaning, as well. In the case of visions, aspects of *meaning, interpretation, and the figurative elements* are strongly interwoven (Shanon, 2003, pp. 242–56.) Shanon presents innumerable first person accounts about how can be the simple figurative elements (e.g. iconographic pictures, dynamic visions) infused with the thematic elements of personal, emotionally-filled memories. It seems that the pictorial sphere of visions are not only the product of imagination, but also some kind of meaning constitution takes place by means of the mixture of figurative ele-

⁹ Shanon asked a ceremony leader for a definition of intuition. The leader answered: “Knowing things in that manner that is ordinarily encountered in perception.” Shanon, 2003, p. 203.

ments and memories. Of course, imagination still has a dominant role in the visionary realm but in this state of mind one cannot discriminate sharply between the intentional states of imagination, affection, or perception. We are bound to concede that in visionary states a profoundly entangled meaning-constitution takes place. Or we can also say that a *very intense* form of sense-creation happens in the climax of the psychedelic trip. In our ordinary life affection, emotion, thoughts can be differentiated in introspection, but in the realm of visions these basic functions tend to make up chaotic, undifferentiated contents.

Shanon contends that during an ayahuasca trip the symbolic meaning transforms into the literal. *This means that the vision is such a figurative visualization, which possesses a direct semantic content.*¹⁰ We tend to see figures in clouds in our ordinary states, but in the world of perception we are aware the fact that these figurative elements are nothing but products of our own consciousness or imagination. Nevertheless, in case of visionary states the above-mentioned *schematism becomes so powerful so that the tripping subject is unable to decide which figurative elements are real and which are the products of his imagination. Unfortunately, due to the very nature of such visions, a series doubt is cast on the possibility of examining the aspects of object- and meaning-constitution which would be a clear-cut phenomenological project. Visions are dominated by the confusion and perplexity of the perceptual and visionary information:*

“What has impressed me very much in ayahuasca induced seeing-in is the richness of the hallucinated figures and the complexity of their features. When examining the details of these figures, again and again I was stupefied. On the one hand, these details fitted so well with the figure of my imagination while, on the other hand, they are seemed to be generated from the texture of the real array actually in front of my eyes. Later, when the intoxication had ended, I would approach the array and inspect it closely and I would not be able to fathom how the imagined figure arose from it.” (Shanon, 2003, p. 254)

Of course, from the perspective of psychology, these visions can also be considered as hallucinatory experiences, for instance, Shanon saw running panthers or hanged people on a tree in a forest, which were obviously not present in the perceptual field from the viewpoint of another person. However, these “hallucinatory experiences” have a strange relevance from a phenomenological perspective. We can find an opportunity to examine the “dialectical” relation between consciousness and its objects in the constitution of meaningful experience. Evidently, several visionary experiences have the effect of self-dissolution that is similar to a psychotic breakdown or other hallucinatory experiences, but

¹⁰ Shanon 2003, p. 254.

the features of vision might be discriminated from the pathological in some respect. “Vision” and “hallucination” are relatively well separated concepts if we take into account the specific phenomenological features of the experience. In case of low dose inebriations, despite the radical change in sensory modalities, the subject’s basic experience is that he actually is aware of having a vision, and – at least partially – remains conscious about things related to both the *reality-here-and-now* and the *reality beyond* (i.e. he operates in two, or more *realities* or *worlds* at a time). A typical example is based on previous reports: during the healing rituals, the drumming or psychedelics make the subject – although still operating in the visionary world – stay connected to his body and physical reality. In moderate ayahuasca ingestion a level of self-reflection and motoric ability is still working. The subject knows that he “travels”. This particular cognitive situation also allows him to accurately remember and then reconstruct the details of the lived experience (e.g. a traditional shaman brings information, teachings from the world of spirits). In contrast, hallucinations – per definitionem – are always completely realistic in every sense and cannot be separated from the lived experience of physical reality, since it is completely built in the subjects’ phenomenal field (Farthing, 1992, p. 209.). While a hallucinatory experience is more or less frightening and disturbing, visionary experiences usually have *fascinating aspects*, which can be theoretically equated with Jung’s feeling-toned or numinous unconscious archetypal images. The fascinating vision can easily alter the subject’s inner bodily experiences and it can also cause sublime aesthetical experiences. In ayahuasca experiences, Shanon argues, a new world – some kind of *animistic world* – rises to the surface, in a sense of a more common metaphor, we can say that a new layer of “reality” is superimposed onto the perceptual phenomenal field, which is able to prove its *ontological independency* to the viewer’s mind by means of the affective and visually stunning features of the experiences.¹¹

What are the consequences of the relation emerging between fantasy and vision? The most common concept of fantasy can be explained as a deficient mode of perception (Ullmann, 2012). In our ordinary waking state we can recognize the lively presence of an outer object by means of our perceptual modalities, but in the case of fantasy we find ourselves among the shallow, foggy images of our imagination. Daydreaming is a concomitant phenomenon of everyday life, but fantasy images in this case have no ontological status from the viewpoint of perceptual strength. If we turn our attention to the disparate nature of perception and daydreaming, thereby we can determine a clear-cut distinction between the perceptual objects and phantasmagorical shadow-images.

¹¹ “While I have been concerned with philosophy for years, ontology has never been of special interest to me. In fact, my basic position was that psychologists should not bother with ontology at all, and that when engaged in cognitive research they should not be concerned with ontological questions. The Ayahuasca experience forced ontology on me.” Shanon, 2003, 165.

On the basis of Shanon's descriptions we can speculate that the sphere of visions could function as an independent field of phenomenological investigations.

At first glance, it might be argued that visionary experiences are some kind of fuzzy states between perception and fantasy, but the already mentioned ontological pressure of the experience might raise the possibility that a *vision* is a unique, independent mode of consciousness ruled by features of *presentational symbolism*. We propose the idea that visions are *independent phenomenological realms or dimensions* that are relatively but not ultimately separable from fantasy and perception. In a sense, a simple daydreaming is also capable of encapsulating the subject from his perceptual surroundings counter to the constantly stimulating environment. Besides, in ordinary daydreaming or in a dream (especially during lucid dreaming) we can realize in some cases that we are simply in a dream, but this recognition actually happens in the middle of a dream or a fantasy sequence. However, in case of visions, this kind of "sliding" takes place in an instant with *heightened awareness* and with shocking vividness. The special feature of an ayahuasca vision is the already mentioned conscious awareness, which can open the door to the realization of shifts between perceptual and imaginative reality. Shanon argues that the best contemporary interpretation concerning ayahuasca experiences is to consider the *unlimited possibilities of imagination and creativity*. A curious, disturbing aspect of these visions is the fusion of self with others, or the fusion of the inner and outer worlds:

"With ayahuasca, the boundary between the inner and the outer reality may dissolve. One may feel that one's I is blended with that of others, that one immerses oneself in the world and becomes united with it, that there is no neat distinction between one's internal mental world and one's perceptions of the external world." (Shanon 2003, p. 200)

Regarding the types of self-dissolution scenarios, we could consider a remarkable form of ayahuasca experience: the transformation experience. There is a useful distinction in phenomenological literature between the "organic body" (*der Körper*) and the "lived body" (*der Leib*). The basic distinction comes from Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, but similar definitions e.g. body-schema, body-image, are useful explanatory tools in the literature of embodied cognition (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2012). The reinterpretation of self-dissolution and transformation experiences with the phenomenology of lived body might be an innovative and novel philosophical approach. "Lived body" refers to the lively but elusive inner feelings and kinaesthetic experiences of the body. The peculiar characteristic of the phenomenal or lived body is that it is not equal with the intentional body image (the image in the mirror), but by means of its proprioceptive and interoceptive feelings it also has a significant role in constituting a bodily self.

The organic body, naturally, is the subject of anatomy and other biological sciences that investigate the body from third-person view. Here we speculate that the phenomenological investigation could be extended to examine altered states of consciousness (e.g. ayahuasca visions) concerning the vague feelings of the interrelation of the self and the world. While in these cases the organic body remains naturally intact, the lived body, the subjective, obscure, formless body feeling is very malleable. Merleau-Ponty was interested in the cases of phantom limbs and other pathologies of bodily-representation. To our mind, the transformative ayahuasca and self-dissolution experiences could be incorporated into this phenomenological framework. This radical shift means that *in the imaginative realm of visions the lived body is capable of mimicking the other gender's and other species' inner body states in a very vivid, realistic manner.* The transformation of the lived body involves body-image distortion as well that was observed in Grof's classic LSD-experiments as well (Grof, 2008, p. 144) Drinkers of ayahuasca, including Shanon himself, reported subjectively observable changes in the lived body and the body-image at the same time. The body-phenomenology framework can describe the classic shamanic journeys and transformations – that are generally understood as some kinds of mystical, spiritual phenomena – in a very detailed way, without any radical ontological commitment. This theoretical step is not the *demystification* of shamanic cosmologies, rather an expansion of Shanon's culturally neutral phenomenological investigation.

Shanon specified several examples of transformational experiences: an ayahuasca drinker experienced himself as a baby, another one felt that he transformed into his own mother, Shanon himself felt the inner bodily feelings of an elephant. In another case, he found himself in the midst of an ant colony or transformed into a cheetah. He and other users felt the experiences very real and enjoyable (Shanon, 2003, pp. 211–20). We can also find ridiculous accounts: one drinker transformed into a nymph, others transformed into a statue or plants. The most general pattern is to transform into some kind of animal. The sceptical eye sees these extraordinary accounts as playful fantasy-games, and in a certain manner, it is right. Shanon does not stress the mystical reincarnation option, rather he is also prone to advocate an explanation based on *imagination and empathy*.

If we want to stick to our phenomenological neutrality, we cannot plunge into ontological speculations. The transformation interpretations by the term of lived body do not mean that these experiences can be reduced to body-image deformations of the organic-body (i.e. neurological malfunctions). Merleau-Ponty's merit was exactly to transcend the psychopathological, mechanical explanations, and following Merleau-Ponty's intentions, Shanon was able to describe the changes in the felt lived body in a very fine-grained manner. On one occasion, he was frightened by a vision during which he saw and felt his arms turn-

ing into a jaguar's palm. However, in another case, the transformation completed and he found himself in a grand vision of a forest, hunting amongst a jaguar folk. Another person experienced a metamorphosis into a cheetah and in this new visionary body he began to hunt a deer (Shanon, 2003, p. 213). Let us examine Shanon's description about the "calibration" of the lived body:

"Associated with identity transformations are changes in the calibration of one's body. Thus, when undergoing animal metamorphosis one may feel that the very texture of one's body changes. This may be coupled with visualization. For instance, as mentioned above, I once felt and saw my palm and arm turning into the heavy and hairy paw of a puma. Radical changes in calibration are also experienced in conjunction with perceived self-death. In this context, the experiences of paralysis and of numbness were reported to me by several informants. Changes in the texture of the face and the skin were also reported." (Shanon 2003, p. 214.)

It seems that the ego-death is some kind of preliminary stage of the transformational experience, but Shanon is reluctant to consider a definite regularity in these chaotic experiences. It may be that these metamorphoses can be explained as intricate workings of the lived body. Actually, this model may serve as an outline or framework for these experiences, but the chaotic and undetermined features of this imaginary world still remains a mystery. Apart from this, we propose that the basic phenomenological concepts are useful tools to reinterpret these kinds of alien experiences. Nevertheless, Shanon's phenomenological investigations are good examples for the need of "practical phenomenological investigations" in the discourse of consciousness studies and embodied cognition.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, practicing a sort of phenomenological self-criticism, let us bring forth the question of psychointegration again. Since the key feature of visions is the shattering of habitual self-image and that of the ordinary phenomenal field, the psychopathological viewpoint – not surprisingly – sees the syndromes of psychosis in these formidable experiences. However, as we have shown in the first part of this paper, ego-dissolution is only a transition in the experience, for a reintegration process always follows the de-integration. When traumatic experiences appear in these vision, the subject can "re-live" or "re-integrate" those emotional disturbances. This "cathartic" function of visions significantly differentiates them from the disturbing experiences of hallucinations. In this argument, however, we must be very careful since the psychological dilemma of *psychointegration* is a very complicated topic. The term psychointegration can be seen in the Jungian literature, as well. In Jungian terms, there is a mysteri-

ous process in the unconscious, the so-called *transcendent function*, which can integrate the diabolical contents of unconscious into the conscious mind. Psychointegration means some kind of adaptation that takes place in case of the radical one-sidedness of consciousness. Psychointegration, as the heart of the unconscious compensation process, is one of the basic building blocks of personal development and adaptation. However, there is a common dilemma in the discourse of both analytical psychology and psychedelic therapy. There is no way to find a universal method for psychointegration, and there is no substance that could be called the perfect psychointegrator. Ingestion of traditional psychedelic decoctions, such as ayahuasca, in the proper ritual setting has already been suggested as a possible mean of psychointegration including many other positive cognitive effects (Frecka & Luna, 2006; Frecka et al., 2012). Nevertheless, we would like to emphasize here that, from a phenomenological point of view, in most of the cases, the bizarre experiences obtain their sense from the personal and cultural context. Shanon (2003) and Winkelman (2002) argue that the so-called *presentational symbolism* is some kind of intuitive knowledge that gives its very meaning to the subject directly, but from the perspective of phenomenology and hermeneutics we have to bear in mind that it is the *interpretation* that always *helps to integrate* the experience. Shanon strongly argues that metamorphoses and other visionary experiences have the effect to amplify one's ability to practice *empathy* and *understanding*. The visionary world can be considered as a virtual theatre in which we can put on the garment of other persons' and beings' lived body. In these situations, the gap seems to be closing between two subjects: "*The vision made the informant understand her friend's psychology from a new perspective, one which she found insightful.*" (Shanon, 2003, p. 212.) However, it would be a very far-fetched analogy to state that in the visionary realm there are definite rules or laws similar to the seemingly very stable phenomenal field of perception. One of the main concerns of phenomenology is to explore the *pre-conscious* aspects of perception. In this respect, the investigation of altered states would be a fruitful exploration, as well.

In this paper, our aim was to point out to the special dynamics between consciousness and its experiential contents (that could be either a "real" outer object or a visionary, mythological one). We brought forth the Jungian and psychedelic interpretations of altered states and the transformation of the lived body especially in ayahuasca visions. We prefer to approach the topic in a special phenomenological way continuously bearing in mind that the usual distinctions between veridical perception and imagination are hardly useful in the phenomenological description of *grand visions*. Altogether, we propose that the mobilization of classic and basic phenomenological concepts might be a completion of the naturalist, scientific investigation. In the interdisciplinary research of altered states, first-personal accounts and classic-philosophical phenomenology may give theoretical frameworks in which the investigator tries to

be as close to the lived experiences as possible, and this collaboration can be seen as a new kind of phenomenological investigation beyond the range of ordinary perception.

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