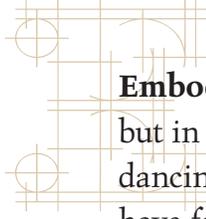


## Psychedelics and **the Embodied Feminine**

By Lily Ross



**Embodiment isn't always easy:** not simply in its difficulty to obtain, but in what lingers, waiting to be found. Shadows flicker amidst the light, dancing in the body's depth, awaiting a gaze deep enough to penetrate. I have felt the undying bliss of dying in my self only to encounter my greatest Self. And yet, as Alex Grey has suggested, to be connected to all beings is to be connected to the suffering of all beings. Shaken in the face of unfathomable sorrow, touched and caressed by the hand of grace, I have come to learn that within this body are held the wounds as well as the gifts of my ancestors, my people, across time and space, at a depth immeasurable; these treasures percolate to the surface, infuse every thought, feeling, and action. Sometimes it takes the hand of a trusted teacher. For me it's Ayahuasca medicine, which unearths the multitudes of wisdom enveloped within flesh.

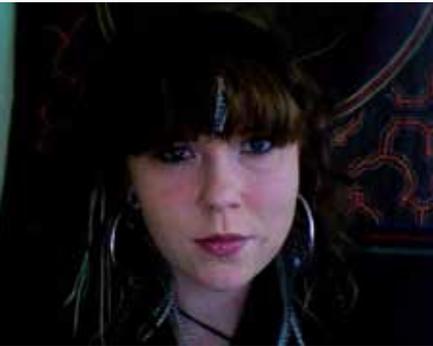
Of Ayahuasca's two primary constituents, the brew derives its name from the MAOI-containing *Banisteriopsis caapi*, the vine of souls. Paired with the foliage of Chacruna or Chaliponga, it renders the DMT of *Psychotria viridis* in a bioavailable form. The brew's magic ascends us to the heavens, although it is the vine which actually has a physically grounding effect. It applies gravity to a brew which would otherwise leave its drinkers floating somewhere near the furthest galaxy. The effect of combining these two plants is a simultaneous expansion skyward and earthward, ascending and descending within and beyond.

As above so below. We pray, we drink, we ascend and descend and somewhere along the way we locate ourselves within the cosmos, and the cosmos within ourselves. Connecting to Earth Mother through this brew has illuminated the silencing and stifling of the feminine as it manifests within my own experience. To be clear, I speak not solely of women, but of the feminine in general. The shadowed mystery, the sensual Goddess who births and destroys, the Earth who turns in time with Father Sun and brings great bounty and great scarcity with the seasonal cycles.

We are the heirs to a long history of imbalance, as evidenced most vividly by wide-sweeping exploitation of the Earth, a being honored and worshipped by numerous wisdom traditions as feminine. The world's monotheistic religions, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, as they are commonly practiced, focus strongly

on the masculine Sky Father while neglecting the Earth Mother. The resulting notion and ethic is one in which the Earth, our collective body, is no more than a resource, to be exploited in humanity's undying effort to know the divine – in this context that is understood as the Sky Father above.

Another way to understand this is through Western culture's obsession with the mind, and its assumed location within the brain. "I think therefore I am," wrote Rene Descartes in the 17th century. His philosophy was that the body was no more than a vehicle for carrying the mind, understood to be the rational intellect, carried within the head. His perspective denied the intelligence and wisdom of the body, the teachings of the senses and intuition. I question the notion that the mind is singularly located within the confines of the skull. Scientific advancement in neuroscience



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and systems theory supports the idea that the intelligence of this mighty creation is decentralized, permeating our individual bodies and the Body of the Earth. Experience with plant medicine, with Ayahuasca medicine, has led me to locate intelligence throughout the body. Ayahuasca instructs me in listening to the wisdom therein.

Our epoch is particularly exciting. The speed with which we obtain new knowledge and the exponentially accelerating rate of our society make the effects of many of our underlying assumptions about the world glaringly apparent. Viewing ourselves as separate from our bodies, the Earth, and one another has devastating outcomes, from environmental crisis to social injustice. Forced to reflect upon our collective history (or herstory) and acknowledge those blessings and wounds passed down through many ages, our tacit, often unquestioned presumptions of a separate mind and body are highlighted for examination. We recognize our assumption that the Sky is somehow superior to the Earth, that it is upward we must focus at the expense of the land beneath our feet.

As above so below. I have seen, I have felt, I know now, the urgency of reclaiming my body as divine. And there are countless others, many who have made this leap in understanding and perspective long before I have, paving the way with guidance and inspiration in slowly sinking into the luscious and sensual wonders and wisdom of the body. Healing blossoms. We nourish the soil as one.

In the darkening days of Autumn 2009 I dove into a bodily depth so deep it felt transported through and beyond my body. It was among the most frightening moments of my life. In the course of a few hours I experienced intense, embodied visions of birthing myself into this world. I felt the veils thin as I reached into the great unknown to grab the pre-

vious hand of a being waiting to be born. In birthing I felt my body closer to death than I had ever known, knew the power of my womanly body to bring life into this world, and touched the very real danger and power that such a process entails – a danger well known to midwives and mothers since time immemorial.

The medicine whispered to me as I labored that this is the

ongoing process of creation. Always birthing, always dying, always taking on a new form hitherto unknown, reaching into the mystery, risking all life to continue moving forward. The process is life: mystifying, frightening, and profoundly visceral. It never ceases. It balances precariously upon the edge of a knife. Yet it is life's hanging by a single, fraying thread that makes it sacred. As a creative, deeply sexual process it requires masculine and feminine, dancing in harmony to carry it forward. We have work ahead of us to reclaim this balance.

We are blessed to be alive at this time. Challenged and gifted, we carry the seeds, walk upon the blessed soil, are warmed by the sun. We have everything we need to bring about a change, to dance the dream into being. This sacred process is contingent on deeply inhabiting our bodies and

our Earth Body, by any and every means available. The vine which grows ever skyward is rooted in the Earth, ever reaching toward the within and beyond. As above so below. At last, let us continuously feel it as so. •

