

Supporting the Multiple Sclerosis Healing Journey with Transpersonal Therapy:  
An autoethnographic reflection and analysis of Ayahuasca's transpersonal wisdom and  
transformative healing abilities.

by

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## **Abstract**

This is an autoethnography that provides a thick description, analysis and reflection of my personal Multiple Sclerosis healing journey, supported by a transpersonal modality based on an ancient shamanic wisdom. This research explores Ayahuasca as a transpersonal therapy, which is facilitated by a spiritual plant that has been used for centuries by Indigenous Peoples in the Amazonian region for healing, rituals and medicinal purposes. This transpersonal therapeutic modality supported my healing through a facilitated process of individuation by transcending the mind as a means to connect with my spiritual nature, moving closer towards my authentic *Self*. The transpersonal benefits facilitated by Ayahuasca showed to be a liberating process that allowed me explore the mind-body connection of dis-ease, support my MS healing journey, and in becoming a more efficient social worker as I experienced an increased awareness of the interconnectedness of the personal healing process and that of humanity and Mother Earth.

## Acknowledgements

*Journal entry at 7:30am on July 18, 2013 con't – I feel so good... I feel joyful... I feel almost in full bliss and definitely content! I can now see how it is by practicing the eight limbs of yoga that I can move towards a feeling of oneness and pure love – and where there is love there is no fear. This newly found tool (facilitated by La Planta Maestra) that has the ability to support the essence of my being can indeed support my MS healing journey! I felt pure love and oneness last night. It was blissful. Not only was it love for another being but also for all the sounds that surrounded me and for all the things and people that make me feel blessed and that love me (i.e. vision, mobility, a home, community, friends, family...); how school, work and volunteering are all going very well; having the opportunity to be here; the opportunity to have a home where I can live on my own, up in the sky, being woken up by the sun and falling asleep to the moon; my mother who despite her heavy and draining energy at times (because of her own need to do inner work), loves me unconditionally and is now (unlike when I was a child) able to do so in a way that brings me joy and warmth to my heart; a brother who I know would do anything for me (the true godfather that he is!); having met a soulmate who (despite his own spiritual struggles) loves me, embraces me, and sees me as an angel – a man with whom for the first time I connect with at so many levels that are important and essential to me; having two cats that have nothing but unconditional love to give and to receive; a thesis supervisor and friend who supports my curiosities and with whom I feel so connected to and enjoy every moment with; a second reader who believes in me and inspires me like a wise elder who is connected to the mystical world that we can both relate to; a psychic counsellor who has taught me so much in my path towards developing and trusting my intuition; my yoga teacher, counsellor and friend who shares with me the wonderful wisdom of yoga; lovely close friends who've supported me through so many ups and downs, and whom I know would do anything for me; and all of my other friends and individuals with whom I've shared so many thoughts, laughter, and who have accompanied me throughout my life journey even if it was brief for some; and there is so much more to be grateful for, especially with regards to health and geographical safety (i.e. access to healthy food, not living in a war zone or harshly impacted climate and natural disasters, etc. etc. etc.).*

And a special thank you to Fazeela for editing my work; my wonderful neighbours for supporting me in the defence preparation; Carleton University faculty, staff and my committee (and audience/friends) for supporting my journey; to Luis for introducing me to Ronald; and to Ronald and his lovely family Señora, Haydee and Sofia for welcoming me in their home and for allowing me to experience *La Planta Maestra* and her wonderful teachings.

## **Foreword**

Explicar, compartir ¿qué es la ayahuasca? en una primera intención es a veces difícil porque las palabras, las razones son siempre insuficientes para trasmitir lo que verdaderamente es la gran experiencia con la medicina ayahuasca. Sin embargo luego de varias sesiones o experiencias con la medicina de los espíritus podemos plantear algunas explicaciones aproximadas sobre este fenómeno teniendo siempre presente que el mejor conocimiento será la propia experiencia o vivencia personal. Lo rescatable de todo este ejercicio intelectual es ir comprendiendo las regularidades o constantes que se produjeron en la mayoría de personas que participaron en los rituales con ayahuasca. Tiene muchísimo valor que el psicólogo, médico, biólogo, antropólogo o filósofo experimente en carne propia la experiencia de trascendencia con esta medicina amazónica y conciba sus más pertinentes explicaciones que por supuesto ayudarán en el plano intelectual a conocer un poco más, la ciencia de la ayahuasca.

La madre (espíritu) ayahuasca es una gran oportunidad en la vida para trascender. Es una gran oportunidad para descubrir nuestra esencia y el sentido de nuestra existencia. Se trata de una mística, un contacto personal del espíritu o energía de las plantas maestras con la energía o espíritu del ser humano. Es una comunicación con un lenguaje muy particular que rebasa la lógica y la razón. Cada persona va aprendiendo la manera más oportuna de relacionarse con las plantas que le van a enseñar, inspirar y revelar una sabiduría profunda para la vida. Tomar ayahuasca es un despertar de conciencia, es una vigorosa renovación de energías, una ampliación de nuestra mirada y entendimiento de la realidad. La ayahuasca activa nuestro sutil sistema de defensas, despierta nuestra energía auto-curativa e ilumina nuestra conciencia.

He tenido el agrado de recibir en mi casa de campo, en pleno bosque amazónico, a Lucille Villaseñor-Caron, con quien nos hemos imbuido en la dimensión espiritual de la ayahuasca y hemos logrado cosechar un aprendizaje respecto a su dolencia, a su tesis y a otros aspectos más que esta medicina puede ayudar a lograr. Es necesario que se analice más este tema y se valoren los testimonios personales. Un seguimiento riguroso de cada caso, hará posible el logro de un conocimiento general de esta medicina extraordinaria.

Es cierto que nosotros los amazónicos, hemos heredado un conocimiento valioso de la medicina tradicional de nuestros abuelos, sin embargo el conocimiento es infinito, y por lo tanto, cada persona que vivencia la experiencia y concibe una explicación, enriquece nuestro entendimiento sobre esta materia. Como curandero ayahuasquero estaré siempre abierto a aprender de la experiencia los demás y de la mía también. Salud.

RONALD RIVERA CACHIQUE  
Curandero ayahuasquero  
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## Introduction

Serious illness is a loss of the destination and map that had previously guided the ill person's life: ill people have to learn to think differently.

– (Frank, 1995, p.1)

*Sometime in October, 2006:*

*Lucille rational mind: "Luis, I lost my vision in my left eye! The neuro-ophthalmologist told me that I most probably have Multiple Sclerosis and should therefore see a neurologist upon my return to Canada to confirm the MRI results... I'm really scared."*

*Luis's whole-istic<sup>1</sup> mind: "Lucille, what is it that you do not want to see?"*

*Lucille's rational mind: "What do you mean?! Of course I want to see! It is my eye that can't see..."*

Albrecht (2005) argues that “one’s perspective on health is oriented by cultural values,” and defines being healthy as a metaphor for well-being where one is “of sound mind and body; to be integrated; to be whole,” while illness is referred to as an imbalance (p.267). Such definition works much better across cultures and various belief systems than when one links health to dis-ease, which “technically, means simply a biomedical measurable lesion or anatomical or physiological irregularity” (Sobo, 2004, p.3). Illness is different from dis-ease since it is the “human experience of symptoms and suffering” (Kleinman, 1988, p.3) and not “an alteration in biological structure or functioning” (p.5). Dis-ease is anchored in the body and something that is either cured and or not, while illness “may be seen as anchored in the mind” and refers to a variety of conditions cross-culturally (Sobo, 2004, p.3).

Many cultures attribute illness “to a psycho-physiological disequilibrium in the human organism, which may include a social element” (Fotiou, 2012, p.7). For instance,

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<sup>1</sup> Holistic is referred to as whole-istic in this research as a way to emphasize the wholeness element of the holistic paradigm.

*curanderismo*<sup>2</sup> – similarly to western transpersonal therapists – believes that “the root of disease is located in the spiritual as well as the social sphere. To treat illness, the *curandero* employs a variety of methods, such as prayers, icaros,<sup>3</sup> messages, sucking, blowing smoke, incense oils, perfumes, and plant essences” (Fotiou, 2012, p.7). Illness is “the culturally structured, personal experience of being unwell and it entails the experience of suffering” (p.3) – it is “the subjective state which is experienced by an individual, a feeling of ill-being” while dis-ease is “a pathological condition recognized by indications agreed among biomedical practitioners” (Stacey, 1988, p.171). Therefore, culture shapes how we understand and treat illness, and dis-ease is what the biomedical practitioners “create in the recasting of illness in terms of theories and disorders... the practitioner reconfigures the patient’s and family’s illness problems as narrow technical issues, disease problems” (Kleinman, 1988, p.5).

For the purpose of this research, health is conceptualized as a “holistic notion of individual well-being” (Albrecht, 2005, p.267) and illness as the result of imbalance (Albrecht, 2005; Brennan, 1988). More specifically, illness in this research is understood as “a signal that [I am] imbalanced because [I] have forgotten who [I am]... a lesson [I] have given [my]self to help [me] remember who [I am]” (Brennan, 1988, p.131). This view of illness is similar to the shamanic concept of “soul loss,” which comes from an animistic causation perspective of disease and health that Murdock (1980) and Albrecht (2005) define as one of the three general types of theories of supernatural causation

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<sup>2</sup> “Traditional folk healing practices,” such as Ayahuasca shamanism (Fotiou, 2012, p.26).

<sup>3</sup> Icaros are songs played by Ayahuasca shamans that support/guide the trance of an individual. It is said that the spirit of Ayahuasca teach and/or inspire their icaros.

(versus natural causation). Theories of supernatural causation include “causes such as mystical retribution (punishment by the gods for violating rules), animistic causation (soul loss or spirit aggression for violating rules), and magical causation (witchcraft, “evil eye”)” (Belgrave, 1998, p.35). While the Indigenous medical system is whole-istic in its approach (Poonwassie & Charter, 2005), it also often “takes into account both natural and supernatural causation of illness and misfortune” (Wolff, 2004, p.1033). In order to understand this research, I ask that you situate your paradigm of understanding illness within “a creative and imaginative shift, suspending any logical, rational, and objective mode of thinking beyond the limits of science and into alchemy” (Moodley, 2005, p.10).

Done? Now we are ready to delve into this journey together.

### ***Whole-istic and Intuitive Hopeful Healing***

Whole-istic healing is a “synergetic approach which deals with the combined physical, mental, emotional and spiritual aspects of human health and illness” (Gerber, 1988, p.536). Healing can be seen as the interweaving of both secular and spiritual teachings that include all aspects of life, and can be understood as “the quest for balance and restoration of harmony,” which includes either the body, mind, and spirit of a person or the physical, the emotional, the intellectual, and the spiritual (Poonwassie & Charter, 2005, p.18). Healing has also been described as “the use of one or more of the following: intuition; presence, inspiration; psychic; shamanic; altered states; (spiritual) healing methods; subtle energy work; mediumship; channelling; use of spirit guides; and transpersonal work” (West, 2005, p.39). Given the complex nature of the incurable

chronic disease and illness of Multiple Sclerosis (MS), I felt it was worth exploring how working *with* the MS community from a whole-istic perspective can support healing and provide the hope necessary when living with so many uncertainties that come along with the diagnosis.

While there has been “an ongoing struggle in the sociology of health to understand the interrelationship of body, mind and spirit” (Albrecht, 2005, p.273), the supernatural causations of disease are not recognized as valid by allopathic western medicine – where the treatment of MS is situated. In addition, given the reality of how knowledge is produced and marketed there is “a major problem of external validity and generalization,” which exists with any knowledge of health, illness, and medicine that is generated outside of western scholars (Albrecht, 2005, p.270). While the status quo of medicine’s knowledge, power and form of practice began to be challenged as of the later third of the twentieth century (Albrecht, 2005), those who are “interested in the spiritual dimensions of health and illness including belief in a higher being, ultimate meanings of existence, hope and feelings of detachment and peace are regarded with suspicion by those grounded in the ‘science’ of the body” (Albrecht, 2005, p.274). While this research draws on scholars and healers from around the world, it also speaks to the conversations that are currently happening in western literature on the sociology of health (Albrecht, 2005; Bolaria and Dickinson, 2002; Stacey, 1988) and the importance of narrative when telling the stories of illness (Charon, 2006; Frank, 1995; Kleinman, 1988).

Given that “discussions of pathology dominate the medical literature, social sciences point out that illness is culturally constructed and closely associated with the

dominant social, political and moral order” (Albrecht, 2005, p.268). There are also concerns around the need for medicine to be practiced within a framework of “narrative competence to recognize, absorb, interpret, and be moved by the stories of illness” shared from patients who feel unheard (Charon, 2006, p.vii) so that “rich and accurate interpretations of these stories, and [...] the plights of patients in all their complexit[ies]” can be understood by doctors, nurses and social workers (Charon, 2006, p.3). It is important to recognize the need for those diagnosed “to become storytellers in order to recover the voices that illness and its treatment often take away,” allowing them to heal (Frank, 1995, p.xii). It is important to include their judgements about “how best to cope with the distress and with the practical problems in daily living [illness] creates” (Kleinman, 1988, p.4). Not only does this narrative process have the ability to heal; hope can often be an outcome of having our voices recognized when sharing the experience of illness as a result of the dis-ease diagnosis.

While hope “is about finding a way to move through mourning and despair” it can be conceptualized as a “force which keeps us moving and changing – the renewal of life at each moment, or the ‘re-enchanting’ of life and politics – so that the future may be about how we come to live and hope in the present” (Zournazi, 2003, p.274-5). Hope remains a complex construct and the diversity of definitions and models “present a major research challenge” (Nekolaichuk et al., 1999, p.591). Barnard (1995) suggests that chronic illness brings forth “the very aspect of human existence that gives birth to hope, namely, that human beings are poised on the boundary between finitude and transcendence” (p. 38), and suggests that “people with chronic conditions are impelled at

once to defy limitations in order to realize greater life possibilities and to accept limitations in order to avoid enervating struggles with immutable constraints” (p. 39).

There are documented case studies that show a positive link between hope and health where the therapeutic value of hope is acknowledged, suggesting that “hope may promote healing, facilitate the coping process and enhance quality of life” (Nekolaichuk et al., 1999, p.591).

When living with an incurable dis-ease such as MS, some individuals chose to use alternative treatments as a means of providing hope and also due to “the lack of effectiveness of traditional treatments in bringing relief from symptoms” and in curing MS (Berkman et al., 1999, p.249). As an individual living with MS, I believe that the incorporation of transpersonal therapy as a spiritual health care modality into the curative views of allopathic medicine<sup>4</sup> is necessary when working with MS patients since it has the ability to provide the hope necessary to heal. Especially since there has been recent research linking spirituality to both emotional and physical well-being (Ironson et al., 2006; Laubmeier et al. 2004). While the fourth force psychology of transpersonal theory “does not attempt to supplant other psychological theories, but rather to complement and enrich them,” it continues to challenge clinical minds “that are steeped in the first three forces to transcend traditional boundaries to include the spiritual dimension, to honour the intuitive and trans-rational elements of practice” (Cowley and Derezotes, 2011, p. 553). Cowley and Derezotes (2011) provide a clear description of the four forces which consist of the *First Force* as the dynamic theory, which primarily focuses on pathology

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<sup>4</sup> This term will be used intermittently with conventional, modern and biomedical medicine

and dynamics/past;<sup>5</sup> the *Second Force* as the behavioural theory, which primarily focuses on social learning and the process of socialization;<sup>6</sup> the *Third Force* as the humanistic, experiential and existential theories, which primarily focus on human growth (vs. cure);<sup>7</sup> and the *Fourth Force* as the transpersonal theory, which primarily focuses on expanding thinking beyond traditional boundaries to include the phenomenological, the intuitive and the transrational.<sup>8</sup> Sadly, transpersonal therapy continues to live in the margins of mainstream western psychologies (First, Second and Third Forces), which lack the spiritual and transrational dimension.

### ***What brings me to this autoethnography? A Spiritual Healing Journey to Share***

An interest of mine has always been to listen and work with all forms of silenced voices and experiences towards emancipation and a sense of self-worth. During this autoethnography, I will refer to my voice experiencing illness as having been silenced within the mainstream biomedical healthcare system when it comes to my MS diagnosis. However, it was by shifting to what Frank (1995) calls a *postmodern experience of illness*, that I have been able to reclaim my voice and experience of living with this illness. This shift allowed me to move away from conventional modern medicine “where the chart becomes the official story of the illness” and the experience of illness is

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<sup>5</sup> Models of this theory includes drive psychology, ego psychology, object relations, self-psychology, Jungian, Adlerian, and Eriksonian.

<sup>6</sup> Models of this theory includes behavior modification, CBT, RET, reality therapy, task-centered casework, and redecision therapy.

<sup>7</sup> Models of these theories includes humanistic, person-centered, experiential, gestalt, existential, and logotherapy.

<sup>8</sup> Models of this theory includes psychosynthesis, self-creation, holotropic, full-spectrum, Jungian, process-oriented, and *transpersonal social work*.

“overtaken by technical expertise, including complex organizations of treatment” (Frank, 1995, p.5). This *postmodern experience of illness* can be an empowering one since it allows for the honouring of individual voices as ‘experts’ and “begins when ill people recognize that more is involved in their experiences than the medical story can tell them... when the capacity for telling one’s own story is reclaimed” (Frank, 1995, p.6-7).

Vocies have been silenced for decades (if not centuries) by the cultural hegemony. For instance, there was a time when women healers who worshipped nature through the adoration of many gods were labeled as witches and burnt to death in the name of ‘Enlightenment’ and reason (A&E, 1996; Campbell, 1978). There was also a time when Aboriginal peoples who healed through sacred wisdom were colonized in the name of civilization and could no longer self-govern within the parameters of their own world-views. Western and Aboriginal thought differ in their perception of one’s relationship with the universe, and while “Christian European Canadians believed that they were meant to dominate the earth and its creatures,” the Aboriginal peoples “believed that they were the least important creatures of the universe and that they were dependent upon the four elements (fire, water, earth and air) and all of creation for survival” (Poonwassie & Charter, 2005, p.17). While there is no fixed Aboriginal approach to healing, similarities exist between groups in contrast to Western thought.

While Western worlviews is based on “the physical, explicit, scentific, and objective journey for knowledge”, Aboriginal world views are founded on a search for meaning from a metaphysical, implicit, subjective journey for knowledge based on the premise of skills that promote personal and social transformation; a vision od social change that leads to harmony with rather than control over the environment; and the attribution of a spiritual dimension to the environment”. (Poonwassie & Charter, 2005, p.16)

The 18th century ‘Age of Enlightenment’ marked a significant paradigm shift from traditional and mystical thought to rational and positivist insight (Honneth, 1987), which continues to be experienced not only through systemic racism in Canada but also within the biomedical model of treating dis-ease and illness that are based on anthropocentric, empirical and unidimensional understandings of human health. In recent decades, Indigenous Peoples “have suffered from the consequences of some of the most destructive aspects of global “development”” and these changes, as a result of colonization, have affected present health practices of the dominant society (Solomon & Nathani Wane, 2005, p.52). Conventional health care has much to learn from Indigenous ways of healing, which have often been silenced. While it is important to understand that Indigenous approaches to healing are not homogenous, there is a “communal ideology and unique worldview” between and among Indigenous world-views and approaches to healing are similar in nature (Solomon & Wane, 2004, p.54). They are whole-istic in their approach and quite often, incorporate the use of spirituality in healing journeys (McCormick, 2005).

By incorporating spirituality as an integral element of my healing journey, I found a sense of hope and support for the healing process of an illness associated to a dis-ease that has no biomedical cure. It is important for me to heal so that I can be an effective social worker since without health, it will be difficult for me to not only facilitate the healing process for others, but also be an effective participant of social change. Thus, prior to fully engaging in any form of healing and advocacy work with others as a social worker, I recognize the importance of focusing on my health in order to have the strength

and awareness to do so. This is what I call my healing journey, a journey where I can feel empowered as I reclaim my voice and thus heal by allowing myself to explore preventative health care and healing modalities that are rooted in a whole-istic paradigm. It is my hope that by shifting paradigms, I can not only heal but also prevent this autoimmune dis-ease from possibly attacking my nervous system any further.

As part of this journey, spirituality plays an important role in my healing. Spirituality is a component of human experience and can be understood as “a sense of meaning and morally fulfilling relationships between oneself, other people, the encompassing universe, and the ontological ground of existence” (Canda, 1988, p.13). In order to understand the healing benefits of spirituality – based on ancient wisdoms, traditions and rituals – it is necessary to shift one’s process of understanding and explaining from our mainstream biomedical paradigm that is often based on a “mechanistic model of the human body,” which operates according to individualists, logical inferential and causal scientific beliefs (Bolaria & Dickinson, 2002, p.4). Instead, mainstream health care could move towards equally validating individual intuitive meaning and honouring a-causal and ancient wisdoms that are based on a whole-istic approach to treating an individual. Intuition and spirituality are linked in that through the development of spirituality, intuition is experienced as an outcome of an increased awareness (Krishnakumar & Neck, 2002; Mauk, 1998). Intuition involves “not only the brain and its cognitive processes but also the whole body-mind-spirit” (Derezotes, 2006, p.14).

Not only is there a lack of research into the intuitive process, but what does exist does not seem to offer any consensus into the meaning of intuition (Shirley & Langan-Fox, 1996). In both social and cognitive psychology, intuition has been extensively researched. For instance, Rea (2001) refers to it as “the ability for a rapid understanding and knowledge, or meaningful insight arrived at without the conscious use of reasoning or deliberation” (Ringel, 2008, p.19). In other fields, intuition has been conceptualized as a means to knowledge (Fitz, 2002), a way of knowing connected with mysticism and spiritual matter (Vaughan, 2002), and a tool used for decision-making or problem solving (Khatri & Ng, 2000), to name a few. A recent literature review by Jeffrey (2008) also found there to be no unified consensus in the postulated definitions; however, the literature seemed to point to intuition as “one main source of knowledge” (p.30).

In the field of social work, there has been an evolving context for intuition as a critical tool – for both the social work professional and the recipient of professional assistance – to be found in the literature on the spiritual dimension in social work practice, transpersonal theory, and practice wisdom; however, intuition has not been elaborated upon in the social work practice literature and is rarely a direct focus in mainstream social work literature (Ringel, 2008; Luoma, 1998). For instance, Luoma (1998) believes that “intuition can become a critical tool in the process of accessing more of the self to provide a more comprehensive approach to the issues being presented” (p. 37), and that a “larger transpersonal understanding of human nature needs to be incorporated into the practice of social work as well as into the educational process to be passed on to the next wave of future social workers” (Luoma, 1998, p.36). Furthermore,

intuition is often nonverbal and often experienced as spontaneous, immediate, sensed differently, and is as important as scientific ways of knowing in guiding and informing social work practice (Derezotes, 2006). Therefore, this study will understand and incorporate intuition as a way of knowing that can provide a much deeper understanding of the situation/experience of illness. Intuition will be used as a way of knowing like any other psychological function such as sensation, feeling, and thinking (Vaughan, 1979) that is not contrary to reason, but rather as something outside the province of reason/rational thought (Jung, 1934) since intuition involves “the ability to access thoughts and feelings that reflect an inner knowing or understanding” (Sollod, 2005, p.275).

Intuition is a valuable source of information that resides in our unconscious psyche, and thus outside of our conscious and rational awareness. Throughout this personal journey, intuition will be used intermittently with the concept of the unconscious psyche, which consists of the unknown in our inner world (Jung, 1969). Since everything that does not pass through the ego is “unconscious” (i.e. not known to us), the ego will be referred to as “the subject of all personal acts of consciousness... to which all conscious contents are related... the empirical personality” (Jacobi, 1967, p.49). If you return to the initial conversation in this text between Luis and I when I had my first MS symptom in October 2006, you can see a disconnect between my rational ego and unconscious psyche/intuition. This marked a significant moment as I slowly began to expand my views of understanding and explaining life – and illness leads to that shift (Frank, 1995). I started to tap into the world of the unconscious and its psychic and intuitive content, including the supernatural causations of illness. As I began expanding my worldview and

experiencing different ways of knowing and healing outside the cultural hegemony, I began to see the benefits of exploring the inner realm of my unconscious psyche as a means of changing my conscious ego's outlook, in turn supporting the healing of my MS.

### ***Overcoming Cultural Hegemony: Reclaiming My Voice***

In addition to my personal healing, I can also share my story with others living with MS as a way for them to vicariously experience the dis-ease through a whole-istic paradigm, and to facilitate a sense of empowerment, an awareness of the powerful healing benefits of reclaiming our voices from the biomedical paradigm, and the sense of hope that can be generated by exploring models to ‘treating’ MS outside of cultural hegemonic practices. Please note that throughout this journey, I will not be referring to non-conventional healing practices as ‘alternative medicine’ since the concept of “alternative” implies the meaning of being secondary (Frank, 1995). This would imply that I support biomedical medicine as the authoritative medical knowledge. Therefore, this work is situated within a cultural hegemony where the only hope to live a healthy life lies in finding a cure while – if accessible – treatment *tries* to mitigate the progression.

It is estimated that 55,000 to 75,000 Canadians have MS, an incurable dis-ease that causes the destruction of myelin and the protective sheet around the nervous system throughout the body, leading to progressive physical and cognitive disability (Ubelacker, 2013). While the World Health Organization (2008) reports Canada as having one of the highest estimated prevalence of MS, the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada<sup>9</sup> reports

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<sup>9</sup> Canada's only national voluntary organization in Canada that supports MS research and services

that every day, three more people in Canada are diagnosed with MS; that MS is the most common neurological dis-ease affecting young adults in Canada; that women are more than three times as likely to develop MS as men; and that very little is known about the causes of MS. What is known about MS is that MS is a chronic dis-ease with unpredictable progress, severity and symptoms, and is “often [a] disabling disease” (National MS Society, 2012). And so, since the goals of an autoethnography are both social change and personal healing (Tamas, 2011, p.48), I decided to reclaim my voice/narrative in experiencing this illness through this methodology so that I could not only support my healing journey, but also share my journey with others living a similar experience within a cultural context in which my dis-ease has often been silenced due to the modern (and normative) view of illness (Frank, 1995).

*Journal entry sometime in 2007 after my first symptom of temporarily losing my left eyesight, an MRI and then almost losing my right eyesight – I've been officially diagnosed with MS. I feel like my world has been completely turned upside down. I just visited both the Québec and Ontario MS specialists and they both told me that my only option is to take costly non-curative medications, which have many disempowering and debilitating side effects. Due to the little hope that conventional medicine is providing my diagnosis, I am feeling an enormous sense of disillusionment and hopelessness.*

My neurologists have continuously reminded me that my only hope of living a healthy life lays in the hands of pharmaceuticals, even when I suggested my intuitive need to search for answers through more whole-istic modalities that recognize the mind-body connections of illness and auto-immune diseases. They viewed anything outside of the biomedical field as pseudoscience and quackery and that their knowledge was the only way to *possible* health.

*Journal entry sometime in 2008 – I ran into a book today, which has introduced me to the mind-body connection hypothesis of dis-ease. After reading that psychoneuroimmunology has found “scientific proof that thoughts affect your immune response...and over time, negative thought pattern create disease” (Boroch, 2007, p.84), I feel hope and am ready to embark on an MS healing journey. It seems as though emotional and psychological stress can have a role to play in the onset and progression of MS!?*

Structural social work views empowerment as being about taking charge and becoming an active player in our own lives; “a process that enables the transition from a state of passivity to one of activity and control over one’s life... involv[ing] the psychological, education, cultural, and spiritual natures involved when individuals are helped to understand their oppression and to take steps to overcome it” (Mullaly, 2007, p. 299). Therefore, it is by using a *personal narratives* approach to conducting an autoethnography that allowed me to be empowered as I reclaim my voice by moving into the *postmodern experience of illness* (Frank, 1995). In doing so, the stories became about seeing myself as the phenomenon as I wrote in evocative narratives (Ellis et al. 2011), specifically focused on my personal life living with MS. This process of storytelling allowed me to understand myself living with MS as it intersects with the limitations of conventional allopathic medicine, and the hope that multidimensional whole-istic healing models provide. Therefore, *doing* and *writing* this autoethnography has been both a healing and an empowering process as I reflected on my own experience of living with the uncertainty of this dis-ease within a conventional biomedical paradigm.

### ***The Question***

*Journal entry sometime in January 2013 – My MS has progressed further, I need to return to the healing journey drawing board. I think I will re-embark into my explorations of preventative health care and whole-istic healing paradigms, which focus on the mental,*

*emotional, spiritual and physical dimensions of my being. I should reconnect with Luis. Last time I spoke to him he no longer pursued his career within the United Nations Environment Program as he decided to focus on the essence of his being, which was to heal. I heard that he has been doing healing work with individuals throughout Latin America. I also remember his brief mention of the transformational and healing experience he had in working with Ayahuasca, and now as a therapist who incorporates Ayahuasca in his work. Since Ayahuasca is illegal in Canada, I wonder if he can connect with the shaman he worked with in Peru. At this stage, I really have nothing to lose.*

Conventional modern medicine tends to view individuals as unidimensional beings and to depend heavily on pharmaceuticals as a method of dealing with dis-ease. I often wonder: “shouldn’t we seek to understand an individual’s health and well-being, beyond this symptomatic perspective since humans are multi-dimensional beings?” Indeed, humans can be examined from at least five dimensions, which are the physical, the affective/emotional, cognitive, psychosocial, moral, and spiritual (or religious) (Cowley and Derezotes, 2011). Also, given the intricacy and complexity of human functioning, there has been increasing evidence (Cowley and Derezotes, 2011) in our current cultural hegemony, based on a biomedical paradigm, that we “can no longer treat a single dimension without regard to the interaction of each dimension with the other” (Westgate, 1996, p.75).

While the biomedical community remains skeptical of the “public widespread belief that psychological stress leads to disease” (Cohen, 2008, p.1685), fortunately there is growing evidence that psychological and emotional stress are linked to immune function and the physical manifestation of dis-ease (Byrne-Davis & Vedhara, 2008; Eden & Feinstein, 2008; Kern & Ziemssen, 2008; Littrell, 2008; Boroch, 2007; Cohen et al., 2007; Vivetta et al., 2005; Maté, 2004; Salovey et al., 2000; Tolle, 1999; Stewart-Brown,

1998; Brunner, 1997; Solomon, 1969). This is one of the key hypotheses I held going into this work. Given my experience with emotional stress prior to (and throughout) my MS diagnosis, I thought that this thesis was an opportunity to explore how they might be linked in my life, and if so, whether they could be healed by connecting with my spiritual nature – spiritual nature being one's basic nature and the process of finding meaning, purpose and direction (Carroll, 2010). The means I will use to access this spiritual nature throughout this research will be by exploring an ancient transpersonal therapeutic modality that is aimed at facilitating a process of individuation<sup>10</sup> towards the authentic *Self*.<sup>11</sup>

*4pm July 20, 2013 – During the 5th day of our seminar, Ronald told me that La Planta Maestra (i.e. Ayahuasca) helps one overcome fears, misbalances, and to understand many things about oneself. She can even help us discover how to be human and to understand what it is that one is looking for (authentic Self?), what one wants in life and where one needs to go and how to go about it. He said that an Ayahuasca ceremony is like psychotherapy but through a spiritual entity (i.e. the spirit of Ayahuasca: La Planta Maestra, the mother of all plants and their spirits). We also discussed how La Planta Maestra has helped me connect more deeply with the spiritual dimension of my being through her transpersonal therapeutic modality. He mentioned how spirituality and healing go hand in hand, something I became more aware of as I read in isolation through Ayahuasca.*

As an aspiring social work therapist living in a globalized-world that is experiencing a spiritual malaise<sup>12</sup> – which is linked to our disconnect to one another and

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<sup>10</sup> Carl Jung defined individuation as “the moment when the finite mind realizes it is rooted in the infinite” (Keutzer, 1982, p.76 in Cowley, 1993, p.530). In transpersonal therapy, this occurs when an individual achieves fulfillment of their potential (Carroll, 2010), which is also referred to as their true/true *Self*.

<sup>11</sup> Carl Jung referred to the *Self* as the central archetype of the psyche, which is connected to our spiritual nature (Cortright, 1997). For contemporary transpersonal psychology, the concept of the *Self* is distinct from the personal ego (i.e ego self) and is the source of inner harmony and wisdom (Guest, 1989).

<sup>12</sup> Transpersonal theorists/therapists/psychologists view the spiritual void of our current paradigm as a “modern-day malaise of the soul,” which is believed to possibly be at the root of many psychological problems and physical diseases (Cowley, 1996, p668).

*La Pachamama* (i.e. Mother Earth), and facilitated by the current materialist culture and individualist hegemonic ideology – I strongly believe that it is important for me to explore whole-istic healing modalities that are multidimensional, cross-cultural and flexible in order to better support the current world of increased interconnectedness and flow of information, people and world-views. Transpersonal therapy is such a modality.

Transpersonal therapy is based on transpersonal theory, which is a multidimensional, integral and transformative theory. During my healing research, I discovered how it can complement the structural approach to social work in its goal of social transformation, while also filling a gap by simultaneously supporting personal transformation versus helping people become aware of social problems and structural oppressions. A structural approach aims to move away from dichotomizing person and situation towards understanding the transactions between people and specific social, political and economic situations – and to better assess “the relationship between a client’s “personal” problems, dominant ideology and his material conditions in the class structure” (Moreau, 1979, p.78). Structural social workers acknowledge the importance in “working with individuals and families as much as working with institutions” (Moreau and Leonard, 1989, p.23), and approach their analysis through the divisions of class, gender, race, age, ability/disability and sexuality alongside each other since they are seen as “the most significant social relations of advanced patriarchal capitalism” (Moreau and Leonard, 1989, p.1). However, there seems to be a fundamental gap that remains in order to ensure societal transformation. While an increased awareness of how “social inequalities are mainly structural in nature” (Mullaly, 2007, p.249), its approach to

understanding the interdependence between individuals, society, systems and structures remains fairly anthropocentric and disconnected from the various existing dimensions of the human being – and ways of explaining and understanding that lay beyond the human ego. Therefore, I also took this opportunity to explore how I could integrate transpersonal theory into my social work therapeutic modalities and structural lens since it allows to view and respect an individual's uniqueness and current developmental dimension(s), while keeping in mind the inherent interconnectedness of all that exists (i.e. other human beings, *La Pachamama*, and the cosmos) as well as the various interwoven structural barriers that exist within our current neoliberal capitalist paradigm.

It is difficult to document, analyze and theorize how MS impacts the lives of individuals living with the dis-ease, let alone the healing process itself. Since it is experienced differently, I do not think that would be fair to write/describe the realities of others living with MS since it would inevitably be based on my own experience. Therefore, I can only write, analyze and reflect on my own journey, to explore some important ideas and answer some key questions that can inform my practice as a transpersonal therapist. My research is situated within the theoretical framework of transpersonal theory, which is somewhat in the margins of mainstream social work despite its integral and multidimensional approach of acknowledging human beings and its honouring of all Western, Eastern and Indigenous wisdoms/psychologies. As a transpersonal therapeutic modality, which is “the branch of psychology that studies states of consciousness, identity, spiritual growth, and levels of human function *beyond*<sup>13</sup> those

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<sup>13</sup> the “beyond” emphasis is a key characteristic of transpersonalism (Strohl, 1996)

commonly accepted as healthy and normal” (Strohl, 1996, p.397), I chose to embark on an Ayahuasca journey as a process that could lead me to connect with my spiritual nature as a means of supporting my MS healing journey. Therefore, this thesis intends to use an autoethnographic approach to explore:

- *whether, and if so how, ancient Amazonian shamanic wisdom, traditions and rituals can support my MS healing process.*

The following sub questions were explored as part of the broader work:

- 1) *whether, and if so how, this therapeutic modality can enhance my intuitive insight, self-reflection, increased awareness and self-transformation as integral elements to my MS healing process;*
- 2) *whether, and if so how, accessing my spiritual nature through this ancient transpersonal therapeutic modality can facilitate a process of individuation towards my authentic Self as another integral element to my MS healing process; and*
- 3) *whether, and if so how, I can integrate transpersonal theory into my social work therapeutic modalities and structural lens – looking at how spirituality and social change can be linked by incorporating transpersonal theory and modalities into the structural social work paradigm.*

In order to investigate these question, I intend to conduct an autoethnographic reflection and analysis about my experience of living with MS and then link this to:

- *wider cultural, political, and social meanings and understandings of illness and the root causes and curative beliefs of this dis-ease; and*
- *a comprehensive reflection on how transpersonal wisdoms can be integrated into contemporary structural social work therapeutic context, and contribute to social justice.*

This research also seeks to discover possible new therapeutic tools to be incorporated into conventional social work, the field of counselling and psychotherapy. If therapists are to “work competently... in a way that validates their client’s spiritual

concerns” (Westgate, 1996, p.33), it is vital to the therapeutic context that as a therapist I work through my own spiritual issues prior to working with individuals (Strohl, 1998). While this research supports my healing process and help me be a better counsellor, it also intends to contribute to literature on the possible benefits of investing in spiritual health care research, policy and delivery in Canada’s health care system around chronic dis-eases such as MS.

The research provides a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973, p.10) of my experience of living with MS as I search to heal from a dis-ease that has no cure, and so can often be experienced (and viewed as per my experience) as a death sentence. Upon receiving news of a further progression of my dis-ease, and knowing how stories in themselves can heal (Frank, 1995), I decided to enhance my healing by *doing* and *writing* an autoethnography of my transpersonal experience with a transpersonal therapeutic modality that acknowledges the healing benefits of Indigenous wisdom – and also since transpersonal research:

does not confine itself to only the most recent offering in any area. Rather than review only what has recently been published – within a typical temporal window of 5 years or so—older and classical writings can be consulted, with rich rewards. Wisdom has no expiration date, and older findings—if they were gathered carefully in the first place – do not suddenly cease to be true or relevant after a short, or even long, passage of time.  
(Braud, 1998, p.14)

Years after my initial dialogue with Luis about my first symptom – and once I had broadened my lens – Ronald Rivera was recommended to me by Luis as an excellent Ayahuasca shaman to work with. Therefore, I decided to experience the Amazon and the spirits that inhabit its jungles through a shamanic apprenticeship and healing journey with

an Amazonian shaman who works with the medicinal plant of Ayahuasca; the Mother of all plants and their spirits (i.e. *La Planta Maestra*).

*July 6, 2013 – So the journey begins (or shall I say, continues?) I am currently in Toronto waiting for my first international flight to depart. First stop, San Salvador. Second stop, Lima. Third stop, Pucallpa. During these past few days I have been feeling extremely weird... a good weird... a powerful weird... an energetic and different feeling I have never experienced before. Perhaps this is what mindful transformation feels like? That is, being aware of the changing nature of my being? What I do know is that I am on my way to an adventure that will allow me to grow in what way that I have yet to experience it. I am feeling happy and excited. Perhaps this is contentment in the blissful context? Take off!*

### **Theoretical Framework: locating my autoethnography through an integral lens**

After 100 years, traditional Western psychology was being challenged to deal with levels of consciousness that go beyond ego, and it was found lacking. What was needed was a new paradigm that would recognize and legitimate spiritual or mystical experiences as attributes of the healthiest individual.

– (Cowley, 1993, p.531)

Transpersonal theory differs from Western psychological theories in that it is creative, whole-istic, multidimensional and integrative, as well as acknowledges intuition, personal experiences and incorporates the spiritual nature of contemplative Eastern psychologies (Cowley and Derezotes, 2011). Despite its continued marginality within the field of social work, there has been some movement to integrate transpersonal theory to social work literature and training (i.e. Cowley and Derezotes, 2011; Carroll, 2010; Derezotes, 2006; Canda & Smith, 2001), which “reflects a shift in reality perception within the field from an exclusively materialist-positivist view towards increasing openness to a metaphysical reality, which is not always amenable to research by traditional means” (Shahjahan, 2005 in Birnbaum and Birnbaum, 2008, p.88). Social workers now want “to know how to incorporate spirituality into their practice with specific populations and problems” (Derezotes, 2006, p.2). Therefore, this autoethnography about my experience working with a particular Amazonian shamanic wisdom, uses a transpersonal lens to explore the possible benefits that a model of transpersonal therapy has to offer to my personal MS healing journey as I undergo a spiritual process of individuation towards healing.

As the narrator, it is my experience that is at the core of the autoethnographical story, which allows to “demonstrate the numerous layers of consciousness as a way to

connect the personal to the cultural” through “action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality, and a sense of self-consciousness” (Raab, 2013, p.2). Since transpersonal experiences usually occur during an altered state of consciousness, which lead to “increased awareness, self-discovery, and ultimately transformation” (Raab, 2013, p.2), it is important to note that as you seek to understand my autoethnography through a transpersonal lens, a transrational shift in paradigm is required – a shift beyond the minds tendency to rationalize understanding.

*January 23, 2014 – I've finally located the source of the Achterberg quote I enjoyed reading in the article Ronald sent me prior to my departure. It was by a woman living with MS and who shared her experience about her healing journey with Amazonian shamanic wisdoms and rituals, one of which was Ayahuasca! The quote she began her article with was from Jeanne Achterberg (1988) who once stated that “soul loss is regarded as the gravest diagnosis in the shamanic nomenclature, being seen as a cause of disease and death. Yet it is not referred to at all in modern western medical books. Nevertheless, it is becoming increasingly clear that what the shaman refers to as soul loss – that is, injury to the inviolate core which is the essence of a person's being – does manifest as despair, immunological damage, cancer, and a host of other very serious disorders. It seems to follow the demise of relationships with loved ones, with careers or other significant attachments” (p.121-2). I can begin to see how this view of dis-ease relates to transpersonal theory, which views the spiritual void of our current paradigm as a “modern-day malaise of the soul,” and is believed to possibly be at the root of many psychological problems and physical dis-eases (Cowley, 1996, p.668). Could this be the healing method for my MS experience?*

### ***Why transpersonal theory? The historical context and ‘evolution’ of transpersonal theory***

Transpersonal theory is an integral theory (Cowley and Derezotes, 2011; Almendro, 1994) that was born out of a reaction to the “decay of moral values evidenced in a drugged and violent society and the helplessness experienced by many in this age of nuclear threat, acquired immune deficiency syndrome, homelessness, ecocide, and dis-

spiritation [i.e. dispirited society]" (Bugental and Bugental, 1984 in Cowley, 1993, p. 528). The "dis-spirituation" of modern day society that has been fuelled by industrialization, is further disconnecting us from the "sacred meaning of existence" (translated from Almendro, 1994, p.187). And so, as proposed by Frances Vaughan (1991), the transpersonal movement has the ability to "liberate us from the tendency towards destruction that prevails in our society, not by trying to impose a new system of beliefs or other metaphysics but rather to discover the relationship between existing worldviews, integrating both ancient and modern wisdoms" (translated from Almendro, 1994, p.187). Since the current neoliberal capitalist paradigm that we currently live in continues to further alienate us from one another as a collective species, from nature and the universe at large (e.g. cosmos), applying this multidimensional and integrative lens that views the micro, mezzo and macro as being interconnected seems appropriate to use as a theoretical framework for my transpersonal autoethnography.

In order to understand how transpersonal theory links to my autoethnographical research, it is important to understand the four western psychological theories that have emerged out of their own historical context – by doing so, important insight can be provided into the dimensions of human growth and development (Cowley and Derezotes, 2011). Western psychology progressed through "successive stages emphasizing instincts and unconscious drives (psychoanalysis), environmental influences (behaviorism), self-determination and free choice (humanism), and transcendence and spirituality (transpersonal)," which also resembles "the stages of psychological growth and development a healthy person encounters" (Strohl, 1998, p.398). The *Fourth Force*

transpersonal theory differs from the other Western psychologies in that it is a creative, whole-istic, multidimensional and an integrative theory that adds the spiritual nature of contemplative Eastern psychologies. What makes transpersonal theory an integral theory is its acknowledgement (vs. disapproval) of the importance – and inclusion – of the other three forces of psychologies and their various models of intervention.

### ***Spirituality in transpersonal theory***

In order to comprehend the spiritual nature of transpersonal theory, the conceptualization of spirituality is important. For instance, the spiritual nature that is included in transpersonal models to therapy is not to be mistaken with religion; however, if an individual prefers to work within the religious dimension, it can be included in a transpersonal approach. Several authors (i.e. Ortiz, 1991; Titone, 1991; Dudley & Helfgott, 1990; Hess, 1980; Joseph, 1988; Siporin, 1985) seem to have an overarching view of spirituality “as the human search for meaning in life or a purpose of life” (Carroll, 2010, p.7). Meaning in life, which continuously changes throughout a lifetime exposure of belief and value systems, can be defined as “the cognizance of order, coherence, and purpose in one’s existence, the pursuit and attainment of worthwhile goals, and an accompanying sense of fulfillment” (Recker and Wong, 1988, p.221).

Specific to social work and spirituality, Canda (1988) found that the perspectives on spirituality shared seven recurrent themes: (1) an intrinsic and irreducible aspect of the person; (2) is expressed through individual development and relationship with the environment; (3) integrates all aspects of the person; (4) involves the search for meaning

and purpose; (5) involves loving relationship with all which exists; (6) provides a way of understanding human suffering and alienation; and (7) integrates the everyday worldly aspects with the transcendent aspects. Based on these findings, Canda (1990) went on to define spirituality as “a person’s search for a sense of meaning and morally fulfilling relationships between oneself, other people, the encompassing universe, and the ontological ground of existence” (p.13). However, when social workers “partialize or deny the spirituality of their clients, the fulfillment of people's potential for wholeness and creative transformation is restricted” (Carroll, 2010, p.10). Transpersonal theory provides this space “to honour our most generous premises about spiritual potential” (Cowley & Derezotes, 2011).

Carroll (2010) contends that the meaning of spirituality “is best conceptualized as both the essence and a key dimension of human nature” (p.11), and provides a clarification of social work's conceptualization of spirituality as having two different meanings: spirituality-as- essence and spirituality-as-one-dimension. The view of spirituality-as-essence refers to “a core nature which provides the motivating energy toward meeting the potential for self-development and self-transformation” and the view of spirituality-as-one-dimension refers “specifically to one's search for meaning and relationship with God, the transcendent, or ultimate reality” (p.11). For this research, a focus will be placed on the concept of *spiritual healing*, which will be conceptualized as an ongoing process of becoming whole and increasingly conscious of our interconnectedness (Peck, 1987) through a process of individuation towards “one's basic nature and the process of finding meaning and purpose” (Carroll, 2010, p.2).

### ***Models of Transpersonal Theory***

There are several transpersonal approaches that have emerged under the broad umbrella of *Fourth Force* theory. Even though Carl Jung was the first to use the term *transpersonal* to refer to the *collective unconscious*<sup>14</sup> – and whose emphasis in analytic psychology was that of “the relationship between the individual and a higher self, which he referred to as “God within” or the “inner deity” (Campbell, 1975 in Cowley, 1993, p. 529) – the term *transpersonal psychology* was coined in 1968 by a group of psychologists and psychiatrists consisting of Abraham Maslow, Viktor Frankl, Stanislav Grof and James Fadiman (Guest, 1989). However, it is Maslow – an american psychologist who also read extensively in Eastern literature – who is considered to be the philosophical father of both humanistic and transpersonal theories (Cowley and Derezotes, 2011).

In 1968, Maslow called transpersonal psychology the *Fourth Force* psychology, which emerged from mainstream psychology and religious studies (Strohl, 1996). Maslow believed that as human beings we have “a universal longing to transcend our aloneness and feel a connection to others and to the cosmos” (Cowley, 1993, p.530), and that even if all of our secular needs have been fulfilled, we want to feel and experience a cosmic connection (Bradshaw, 1988, p.228). Prior to his death, he had made a call for a fourth psychology that would be “transpersonal, transhuman, centered in the cosmos rather than in human needs and interests, going beyond humanness, identity, self-actualization, and the like” (Wittine, 1987, p.53). Ever since, the definition of transpersonal theory has evolved to reflect its historical context. Some transpersonal

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<sup>14</sup> Upon examining a rich variety of symbols in legends, myths and folklore, Jung discovered universal themes from the personal and *collective unconscious*, which he called archetypes (Guest, 1989).

models are: Robert Assagioli's model of *Psychosynthesis* (1965); Jacquelyn Small's *Self-Creation* model (1982); Stanislav Grof's *Holotropic Breathwork* model (1985); Ken Wilber's *Full Spectrum* model (1986); and Au-Deane Cowley's *Transpersonal Social Work* model (1996).

***Linking transpersonal theory and autoethnography: how the theoretical frame, methodology, methods and analysis are linked.***

The transpersonal paradigm entails highlighting the experiential facets of experiences, which can be easily documented in auto ethnographical format through personal narrative, memoir, narrative poetry or fiction. This form of communication can be therapeutic and healing in that the information presented by the autoethnographer involves self-discovery, self-awareness, and a sense of empowerment.

– (Raab, 2013, p.2)

Transpersonal theory has the ability to expand research methods “in the two ways suggested by the prefix *trans* in *transpersonal*” (Braud, 1998, p.9). Braud (1998) describes the first meaning as *through* in its emphasis of the “interconnections or tying together of what presently comprises us and our world,” and the second meaning as *beyond* in that it “reminds us of the *something else*, the *more* of ourselves and of the world what we have not yet fully glimpsed, actualized, or understood” (p.9). The latter meaning “suggests other forms of knowing, being, and doing beyond those conventionally recognized – beyond what is available to us if we remain wedded solely to an ego-centric view of our nature and possibilities.” (p.10). In addition, one of the main responsibilities of transpersonal psychology is the “democratization of knowledge” in that it charges “to take its findings directly to those who can most use them, rather than have these findings languish in dusty journals read only by professionals” (p.16). Transpersonal studies honours the human experience of the researcher as a valid source

of data, which can in turn have a transformative impact not only on the researcher but the reader as well. Autoethnographies have a similar intent and as claimed by Ellis (2004):

people respond to it [autoethnographical study]. I can count on one hand how many people ever wrote to me about my more orthodox social science work, but I have gotten hundreds of responses to my autoethnographic stories. (p. 35)

Similarly, Raab (2013) argues that in addition to the process of empowering the researcher, an autoethnography – like memoir writing – has the ability to transcend a person's account by linking the story to broader social implications and contexts. For instance,

in view of the recent surge in memoirs in the trade book market, it is apparent that the general public enjoys reading about the personal lives of others. Getting up close and personal to a lived experience has a tendency to move the reader emotionally, while helping the researcher to embody the experience. (p.3)

Raab's (2013) autoethnographical study highlights that “for the most part, the transpersonal relevance of an auto ethnographical study encompasses the idea of fostering self-awareness and self-discovery, which may lead to transformation” (p.14). This study also addresses how an autoethnography can be performed using transpersonal psychology as a model. It demonstrated how an autoethnographical study can benefit from the use of transpersonal theory since it allows for it to move beyond the walls of anthropological research and into the field of psychology and mental health. Raab's (2013) posits that there is “a natural blend between the autoethnographical method and the work of the transpersonal psychologist” given that “the core of transpersonal psychology is the concept of self-discovery and transformation – two benefits derived from sharing stories through narrative” (p.17). Therefore, given that transpersonal theory is a comprehensive and inclusive approach that complements the healing potentials of

sharing personal narratives – the use of this theory as a lens of exploring my inward subjective healing journey through an autoethnography is complementary.

## **Literature Review: situating my transpersonal autoethnographical journey**

*8am July 11, 2013 con't – Ronald went on to explain that Ayahuasca may not always be for everyone since it can be through another plant, yoga, family love, etc. However, it still has some effect even though it may not necessarily be an awakening moment. Even just observing or being in the same room as someone taking Ayahuasca is self-healing, he says. This is interesting since I feel the same with the therapeutic process – the reciprocity of learning and healing that I experience when working with clients. Really, Ayahuasca is a process just like conventional western therapy. One session may be enough; however, often more are required. Especially if there is a disconnect with one's inner voice. And so, I will venture onto another ceremony in a few days, after I spend some days in the jungle's isolation accompanied of my books, dreams, journal, yoga practice and the jungle's orchestra.*

The various forms of spiritual, wisdom, and Indigenous traditions are “rich in transpersonal content” (Braud, 1998, p.14). As a form of Amazonian Indigenous wisdom, tradition and ritual, an awareness of the existence of Ayahuasca (also known as *La Planta Maestra* [spanish term for *the Female Master Plant*]) became known to western civilization in the 1950's and is now being used by westerners for healing purposes (Beyer, 2012). While Ayahuasca has been used for centuries, its use has been “globalized significantly and is being integrated more and more into contemporary contexts,” such as its use in psychotherapy and personal growth (ICEERS, 2012). Given the long history of using Ayahuasca as a transpersonal healing modality, this research explores the therapeutic potential of working with *La Planta Maestra* in a contemporary society, and in the context of healing my MS. As my personal research intends to contribute to the literature on the sociology of health and the benefits of spiritual health care, the current section explores the existing literature on the healing benefits of Ayahuasca, the mind-body hypothesis in relation to MS and the role of spirituality in the healing process, and the healing benefits of transpersonal therapy.

### ***Ancient Amazonian Shamanic Wisdom: Healing with the spiritual health care of Ayahuasca***

Ayahuasca is like thirty years of psychotherapy in 3 hours... what happens is that it brings up all the layers of one's personality, one's psyche. It's formatted and brought up so that you can access it, feel it, and perhaps deal with it. It can be, and it very often is, very effective in dealing with psychological problems that would take much longer to get into standard talk therapy, if they ever surfaced at all.

– (Wilcox, 2003, p.178 quoting Jack, the assistant of the Shaman she worked with)

Literature on Ayahuasca acknowledges it as a botanical mixture that has been used for centuries by Indigenous Peoples in the Amazonian region for healing, divination, and medicinal purposes, amongst other ritualistic activities and that continues to play a central role in these cultures' world views (Rivera, 2013b; Beyer, 2012; Fotiou, 2012; ICEERS, 2012; Rivera, 2012a; Schmid et al, 2010; Shannon, 2002a). As a botanical mixture, Ayahuasca can be conceptualized as "a psychological catalyst that unfolds different fields of sociocultural ideas," which is mostly used in ritualized settings for the purpose of healing (Schmid et al., 2010, p.189). The *International Center for Ethnobotanical Education Research & Service (ICEERS)*(2012) describes some of the benefits of Ayahuasca as having the ability to: bring up recollections and images of one's past; bring to the surface repressed memories; allow individuals to work with these images and memories, restructure related thoughts and emotions, and integrate them in their current way of living life; and include archetypal, transpersonal, mystical and perinatal content.

Healing is an essential element for Amazonian shamans that will often take place in Ayahuasca ceremonies, and it is "not only one of the most commonly quoted motives for Westerners for participating in Ayahuasca ceremonies, but most elements of an Ayahuasca ceremony are aimed to heal and protect" (Fotiou, 2012, p.6). Fotiou's (2012)

ethnography on healing narratives with Ayahuasca found that the cultural construction of healing with Ayahuasca in the amazon shows that dis-ease is perceived “to have physical, psychological, and spiritual natures, and healing is a complex process that takes place in and outside of ceremony.” Furthermore, Fotiou (2012) found that personal crisis is one of the most important elements that address the three dimensions of dis-ease. The element of crisis was found to often occur “before a successful healing [including physical, psychological, and spiritual healing] and negative experiences become a catalyst for healing and positive transformation” (p.35). In addition, healing was found to be seen as a process rather than a singular event, in which the individual seeking to be healed, carries a big part of the responsibility of their own healing.

The *Institute for Medical Psychology* at the University of Heidelberg provides an example of the subjective healing effects of Ayahuasca with particular chronic dis-eases in a study that was conducted with 15 participants who underwent “Ayahuasca (self-) therapy” for a particular illness (Schmid et al., 2010). In this study, participants were interviewed twice about their subjective concepts and beliefs on Ayahuasca and healing. The study found that most participants “were convinced that Ayahuasca had influenced their illness positively or improved their coping with their illness,” resulting in the enhancement of their well being in general (Schmid et al., 2010, p.188). Participants also reported that:

Ayahuasca enhanced their emotional and mental states, so that they would not only be able to “see” the true cause of their illness. Some also stated that Ayahuasca had supported them in actively influencing their illnesses and life conduct in many different ways. For most of them the positive changes related to their illness were just a sideline of the intended process of changing their self-concepts or conduct of life. (p. 202)

In addition to “getting cured” or not (p.197), Schmid et al. (2010) found the following nine categories, which contributed to the well-being of participants of unspecific improvements attributed to the effects of one or several Ayahuasca experiences: (1) a change in health behaviours including diet and also often giving up alcohol or cigarettes, (2) enhanced clarity, recognition, and sensibility, (3) increased physical well-being, (4) energy, power, and strength, (5) better coping with problems and “daily hassles” (6) confidence and tranquility, (7) a renewed sense of happiness, love, and joy, (8) a change of life orientation sometimes including a strive for non-materialistic values, and (9) improved social competences (p.198).

Shannon (2002a), a cognitive psychologist offers a systematic phenomenological analysis of Ayahuasca experiences in terms of content, theme and typological structure. He identifies the rewards of Ayahuasca experiences and why people continue to work with it as:

- (1) the pleasure of the experience and the joy gained through it, a joy that outweighs the often excruciating physical and psychological discomfort one may also experience; (2) the quest for knowledge and the revelation of truth that Ayahuasca may impart; (3) the gift of deep personal insight and self-understanding; (4) the possibility of psychological insight and healing of the psyche; (5) the general sense of well-being and possibly for healing the body; (6) personal transformation; (7) the experience of transcendence and heightened spirituality. (p.324-28)

Lastly, Ayahuasca was also found to have an effect of inducing a “heightened sense of intuition and enhanced psychological sensitivity” (p.258). In brief, Ayahuasca experiences allow for “deep personal insight and self-understanding,” “psychological insight and healing of the psyche,” “personal transformation,” “the experience of transcendence and heightened spirituality,” and even “the general sense of well-being and possibly for healing the body” (Shannon, 2002a, p.258).

Echenhofer (2012) conducted research concerning the experiences with Ayahuasca and the findings were consistent with prior research literature in that the brew that has its origins in shamanism, elicits “imagery narratives” that are “often related to psychological and physical healing, problem solving, knowledge acquisition, creativity, spiritual development, divination, community cohesion (p.61). Similarly, Gabor Maté (2004) – who explores the mind-body connection between how the stress created by our culture makes us physically sick (e.g. MS) – believes that “there are various modalities of healing that are outside the Western medical canon which are very effective” (What is your position now in terms of Ayahuasca treatments to treat addiction?, para. 1 in Thomson, 2013). For example, he found Ayahuasca to be a helpful and harmless modality that allows for the plant medicine to help an individual no longer have to use any medicines or pharmaceuticals at all. Even though his assertions raise some dogmatic concerns, it fuelled my interest in further exploring the healing abilities of approaches outside of allopathic medicine such as spiritual health care modalities (i.e. transpersonal approaches to healing).

Despite the several benefits described in literature as to how Ayahuasca has the ability to heal, Beyer (2012) contends that before the influence of foreign medical models and expectations, Ayahuasca “was not itself a healing medicine but rather a diagnostic tool” since shamans and their patients did not drink Ayahuasca for healing but to get information such as the “identity of the seducer of an unfaithful spouse, the secret dealings of a business rival, the location and nature of the malignant darts within the patient’s body.... Ayahuasca was used to screen the disease and to search the treatment...

Ayahuasca tells you how, but by itself it cures nothing directly” (p.3). However, Beyer (2012) does contend that there has been “an increasing number of reports of spiritual transformation, healing of psychological wounds, changes in personality” when ingesting Ayahuasca (p.3). This is of particular interest to me; my research can contribute to bridging this gap since it has an overarching theme of the mind body connection of healing MS, so if Ayahuasca is not able to heal at a physical level as argued by Beyer (2012), then it could possibly be argued (from a mind-body connection perspective of healing the physical body) that Ayahuasca has an indirect impact on the physical healing if it does in fact heal at the psychological level.

*4pm July 22, 2013 (seminar) – Ronald shared from his book that is currently being published “El libro Arte con Ayahuasca” (spanish for “the culture and aesthetics of Ayahuasca”) the following: in our Amazon it is traditionally conceived that in nature, water, stones, earth, animals and plants there exist a latent anima (Mother), a soul that sustains them. This attitude towards nature is conceptualized by some scholars as “animista” (Ronald defined this term based on the Philosophical Dictionary by Jose Ferrater Mora, meaning that everything is animated and vivified by the vital principle that is the soul). But out of all these animas, the anima of the largest dimension is “the Mother (Spirit) Ayahuasca” who is the Mother of all mothers, Spirit of all spirits. And so, Ayahuasca is not only just a plant and a medicinal drink, but above all, a supreme and powerful spiritual entity. This mystical stance could also be related to the concept of pantheism, which unifies nature with God and where God is the soul of all reality (Rivera, 2013b, p.11).*

Ronald Rivera is an Amazonian shaman and healer, philosopher and researcher, who works with the extraordinary states of consciousness that Ayahuasca produces. He facilitated my experiences as well as shared his wisdom with me during this personal journey. He described the advantages and benefits of Ayahuasca in terms of medicinal, personal development and mystical. From a medicinal perspective, he believes that our first contact with *La Planta Maestra* requires us to heal, and to overcome our physical

and mental ailments. Ayahuasca is an excellent medicine for the body, mind and spirit; a sacred purge, which occurs through vomiting, evacuation, perspiration, breathing, crying, laughing, etc. – and produces a deep cleansing and revitalization of all our organs. He suggested that personal development occurs through revelations or the awakening of consciousness during the Ayahuasca trance – or in the following days, weeks or months – the consciousness grows, matures, develops, and an authentic personal development begins to solidify itself in the emotional, marital, family, social, occupational, and spiritual-mystical-personal aspects of life. This practice and/or learning leads to the discovery of the full meaning of personal existence. Lastly, in terms of mystical advantages and benefits, the development or personal growth that is being achieved through the use of Ayahuasca, is the most authentic manifestation of our personal spirituality, which is achieved through a life with more meaning and fulfillment without blinding dogmas, disturbing obscurantism, and fanatical and sickly rigidities. Ronald believes that this spiritual maturity implies tranquility, balance, stealth, wisdom, humility, tolerance and wide-ranging wisdom. “God is in oneself; our spiritual practice, is the real contact with our inner teacher” (Rivera, 2012a).

Each body/mind/spirit seems to respond to inner and outer life in a unique way, weaving thin or flaring up here or there. I would submit that besides the typically Western way, there are other ways of looking at disease that are more apt to identify causes. The shamanic emphasis on seeing disease in terms of the key concepts of disharmony, fear, and soul loss is on such way. For instance, as shamans have long recognized, dis-ease is inevitable if life loses meaning and one forgets the feeling of belonging and connection (disharmony). Similarly, a chronic sense of fear will cause a person to lose the love, joy, and trust which are the basic foundations of health and without which the force of life itself seems to begin withdrawing from the body. (Achterberg, 1988, p.121)

### ***MS and the mind-body hypothesis: can spirituality play a role in the healing process?***

In relation to overall well-being, the role of spirituality and the process of healing are interconnected to one another. For instance, a recent study explored how many theorists such as Jung (1958), May (1975), Frankl (1978), Allport (1960), Maslow (1971), Seligman (1990), and Brink (1993) not only “argued for the valid and vital role of spirituality in human growth and actualization, but they also have suggested that a link exists between a lack of spirituality and lower levels of mental health, including increased feelings of hopelessness, meaningless, and depression” (Westgate, 1996, p.27). Another study, which used several meaning measures, examined the relation between meaning in life and psychological well-being (which included the non-presence of depressive behavioural states) and found that “there is a substantial and consistent relation between meaning in life and psychological well-being” (Zika and Chamberlain, 1992, p.142). This study provides credibility to psychotherapies that “view the attainment of meaning in life as an essential goal in the therapeutic process” (Zika and Chamberlain, 1992, p.143), which can often be done through transpersonal therapy since it acknowledges (and supports the awakening of) the spiritual nature. Therefore, perhaps it is by finding a sense of life purpose and hope through transpersonal therapy that I can decrease my vulnerability to depression and hopelessness - a possible mind-body connection in the manifestation of my MS. If so, then can it be healed through a spiritual awakening since this might allow me to transcend the ego’s tendency to habitualize negative thought?

More recent research is also increasingly showing a link between spirituality and wellness (Ironson et al., 2006; Laubmeier et al. 2004) – including increased levels of

functioning and enhancement of coping skills for individuals living with MS (Pakenham, 2008). For instance, the Government of Manitoba (2012) recently released their *Spiritual Health Care Strategic Plan* that envisions “a fuller integration of all health care disciplines under the common goal of healing and well-being” (p.14). Its researchers found that bio-psycho-social-spiritual well-being were positively related to less distress and better quality of life regardless of diagnosis (Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, 2009; McCoubrie & Davies, 2006; O’Mahoney et al., 2005; Mueller et al. 2001; Grof & Grof, 1991). Furthermore, researchers have also found that there is a positive link between spiritual well-being, hope, subjective well-being and overall quality of life – lowering levels of measured depression and anxiety (McCoubrie & Davies, 2006; O’Mahoney et al., 2005).

Specific to MS, a study investigating sense making in MS and relations with illness, religious-spiritual beliefs and life adjustment found that MS patients who reported having a religious-spiritual belief were more likely to report sense making, which was found to be related to lower levels of disability, dis-ease severity and depression (Pakenham, 2008). Research has also found that MS patients “have a higher incidence of emotional disorders relative to other patient groups with comparable degrees of physical disability” and that depression is a particularly serious problem since the reported suicide rates for individuals living with MS is 7.5 times that of the general population (Eeltink and Duffy, 2004, p.283). Therefore, given all this information, I feel that as a member of the MS community – a community that is vulnerable to depression and to experiencing a sense of hopelessness given the uncertainty of the dis-ease – exploring the mind-body

connection of my MS through a spiritual awakening could possibly help me heal and prevent the further progression of the dis-ease.

Research on the link between spirituality, mental-health and overall well-being are important to acknowledge in this research that seeks to heal my MS through an increased spiritual awakening. Especially since many of the impacts of trauma, spiritual struggles and ‘mental dis-eases’ have the ability to manifest themselves into physical health issues (Grof & Grof, 1991). I believe that transpersonal therapy as an integral aspect of spiritual health care that can facilitate my process of accessing my inner wisdom, achieve inner harmony and experience a sense of hope through spirituality; possibly supporting the prevention of not only the often depressive response that comes along with the diagnosis of MS, but also heal any suppressed trauma, which could in turn decrease the number of attacks onto my nervous system.

### ***Transpersonal Therapy***

Transpersonal psychology is the title given to an emerging force in the psychology field by a group.... who are interested in those ultimate human capacities and potentialities that have no systematic place in...behavioristic theory, classical psychoanalytic theory, or humanistic psychology. The emerging transpersonal psychology is concerned specifically with...ultimate values, unitive consciousness, peak experiences, ecstasy, mystical experiences, awe, being, self-realization, essence, bliss, wonder, ultimate meaning, transcendence of the self, spirit, oneness, cosmic awareness...and related concepts, experiences and activities.

– (Goleman, 1988, p.159-60)

In social work, practitioners with a transpersonal perspective “seek to help clients expand their consciousness, deal with issues related to finding a sense of meaning, purpose and direction in life, and legitimize their transpersonal (transrational) experiences” (Cowley, 1996; p.672). If an individual *feels* as though these have been achieved, the therapeutic work was effective. Transpersonal therapy is more experiential

than many other existing approaches (Strohl, 1998) and intends to “promote transcendence of the conscious mind, enabling it to explore the unconscious and reveal a deeper (transpersonal) level of being called the *higher self*, *true self* or *inner self*” (Rama, Ballentines and Ajaya, 1979; Williams, 1980; Wittine, 1993 in Strohl, 1998, p.400). However, in order to understand the authentic *Self* within a transpersonal context, conceptualizing its meaning is essential. For example, Jung referred to the *Self* as:

the origin and fulfilment of the ego...and it appears to be the origin of the ego because the ego as a “part” of the Self, is the centre of the field of consciousness through which alone we experience and perceive... The ego is, however, also the “fulfilment” of the Self, since it is the only authority in the psyche which can know of the Self, relate to it, and remaining constant, living connection with it. A strong, consolidated ego is fed not only by the material of consciousness but also from the source of the Self, having a share in both realms. (Jacobi, 1967, p.49)

Similarly to Jung, Guest (1989) argues that:

beyond this illusory self is the real, true self, the transpersonal centre, the self that is experienced during an ego-less, transcendent, altered state of consciousness, the source of inspiration and inner wisdom... This self is responsible for what is often called the ‘still, small voice within’ but it should not be confused with the popular conception of conscience which frequently is just another unconscious programme communicating itself through the personal ego. (p.63)

The concept of the *Self* in transpersonal psychology is distinct from the personal ego (i.e ego self), and is the source of inner harmony and wisdom (Guest, 1989). In transpersonal therapy literature, there are several strategies posited for accessing the inner wisdom that lays within the *Self*. For instance, this process can often be facilitated during “a state of relaxed reverie or in meditation and prayer” (Guest, 1989, p.63) through various techniques and transpersonal tools (Cowley and Derezotes, 2011; Ajaya, 1997; Hutton, 1994; Boss, 1980), which can support a client’s journey towards accessing their spiritual nature, which can be defined as one’s basic nature and the process of finding meaning, purpose and direction (Carroll, 2010) – what I like to refer to as the authentic

*Self*. This transcending process also validates the intuitive abilities of an individual, which support the process of transformation and growth. In order to increase access to this wisdom that allows for inner harmony and the transformation towards one's authentic *Self*, an individual must work to transcend their *shadow*, which Carl Jung referred to as the negative, hateful and frightening aspects of the psyche (Guest, 1989). The *shadow* has "the most disturbing influence on the ego" (Jung, 1969, p.8). Ultimately, it is believed that encountering the *Self* is "ecstatic because it gives man the experience of a trans-subjective reality that bursts the bounds of his ego" (Jacobi, 1967, p.57) and thus its *shadow*.

In order to help individuals access their spiritual nature, transpersonal therapy literature demonstrates that tools such as prayer, meditation, contemplation, ritual, scripture study, use of the natural environment as a healing context, as well as dreams and imagery can be used for working with a wide range of consciousness states (Cowley and Derezotes, 2011; Ajaya, 1997; Hutton, 1994; Boss, 1980). These states are linked with spirituality and spiritual growth since they help facilitate "the developmental process of the client's moving toward connecting with all which exists - with self, others, and God or the transcendent" (Carroll, 2010, p.9). This new awareness during therapy can often come as "a sudden flash of insight accompanied by a temporary transcendence of the ego while still contemplating the new perspective" where "these altered states are usually referred to as 'peak' or ah-ha' experiences" (Guest, 1989, p.66). For instance, the literature in transpersonal therapy posits that these sudden intuitive leaps where the individual transcends the ego – even if it is just for a few seconds – allows for direct

contact with their inner voice, which can provide a new understanding or awareness (Guest, 1989) as well as provide them with “critical guidance as they begin to move forward in the direction that is right for them” (Birnbaum and Birnbaum, 2006, p.97). This is also known as moving towards one’s authentic *Self* – one’s true essence through a process of individuation, which is a process of self-realization and the overall objective of transpersonal therapies.

Jacobi (1967) posits that the goal of life is “the most complete and comprehensive development of the personality. It is that which gives life an incomparable value that can never be lost: inner peace, and therewith the highest form of “happiness”” (Jacobi, 1967, p.17). In order to do so one must undergo a process of individuation whether it be natural (i.e. occurring naturally and without the participation of consciousness) and/or artificial (e.g. aided through analysis and one’s consciousness). Cowley (1993) argues that a social worker has the ability to support an individual work through their suffering (e.g. *shadow*) that is blocking them from being their authentic *Self* through the use of transpersonal therapy. Whereas suffering often arises “from blocked growth due to difficult life events,” supporting the awakening of an individual’s intuition and facilitating the process of self-reflection, awareness and transformation can help her/him gain “new understanding about how the socialization process has blocked growth” (Carroll, 2010, p. 10). This can also help them discover new meanings so that the difficulty being experienced – in whichever dimension – can be transformed into a growth opportunity (Carroll, 2010). Thus far, the literature is suggesting a process of individuation can be facilitated through the use of transpersonal therapy.

As a psychological development, the process of individuation represents “the step-by-step maturation of the human psyche to the point where all its potentialities are unfolded, and the conscious and unconscious realms are united by integrating its historical roots with present-day consciousness” (Jacobi, 1967, p.132). However, the individuation process “cannot be grasped in its deepest essence, for it is a part of the mystery of transformation that pervades all creation. It includes within it the secret of life, which is ceaselessly reborn in passing through an ever renewed “death”” (Jacobi, 1967, p. 133). It is a transformational process by undergoing deaths and rebirthing experiences, and “it is not the goal but the striving towards this goal that gives our life content and meaning” (Jacobi, 1967, p.134). In essence, the “individuation process [is] a growing of the ego out of the Self and as a re-rooting in it” (Jacobi, 1934, p.42). Thus individuation is an ongoing process of the psyches self-actualization through transformational experiences of non-physical deaths and re-births.

Transpersonal therapy literature describes the goals of transpersonal therapy to include symptom relief, behaviour change, and for appropriate individuals, optimal work at the transpersonal level (Walsh & Vaughn, 1980). For individuals who decide to work with the transpersonal dimension, a vital component of the therapeutic context includes an “active process of surrendering control of the self within” (Westgate, 1996, p.33) and “trusting one’s inner wisdom to direct one’s life” (Strohl, 1998, p.402). In essence, transpersonal therapists view the process of becoming whole as being complete only once an individual has awakened to their deeper levels of human existence (Wittine, 1993), and “promote the *greater* potentials available to those who have already achieved a

satisfactory level of everyday functioning” (Strohl, 1998, p.400). However, while spirituality is an important dimension to recognize in social work therapy, clients may also need to work on symptom relief and behaviour change and these aspects therefore should not be excluded. In essence, the transpersonal therapy literature situates the goal of transpersonal therapy as helping an individual become a spiritually well person – someone who “finds meaning and purpose in life and operates from an intrinsic value system that guides both life and decisions” – with a transcendent perspective who can appreciate “the sacredness of life and of the mysteries of life and the cosmos” (Westgate, 1996. p.33). By accessing one’s spiritual nature through the use of transpersonal tools, an individual is able to transform their *shadow* through a process of individuation towards their authentic *Self* while also building a sense of awareness of the interconnectedness of all that exists.

In this personal research journey, the *Self* is intuitive, lays *beyond* the ego, and refers to the central archetype of the psyche, which is connected to our spiritual nature (Cortright, 1997). I will refer to the *Self* intermittently as the essence of who we are, our true nature and the authentic *Self* as we delve into my MS healing journey – transcending my *shadow* (i.e. embracing and transforming it) through an Amazonian shamanic transpersonal wisdom, tradition and ritual. This process involves a moving towards awakening my intuition and accessing my inner wisdom, as well as facilitate self-reflection and an increased awareness for the purpose of healing and self-transformation (i.e. individuation) towards my authentic *Self*. Thus integrating the shadow within a process of actualizing the *Self*.

### **Methodology: the thinking that informs my method**

Because stories can heal, the wounded healer and wounded storyteller are not separate, but are different aspects of the same figure.

– (Frank, 1995, p.xii)

*8pm July 15, 2013 – I am really enjoying (1) the document Ronald developed to use in our seminar on “How to Become an Ayahuasca Shaman;” (2) the book he lent me by Wilcox (2003) about her own personal experiences in moving away from the intellect and into the spiritual world of Ayahuasca (experiences that reflect the ones I am undergoing); (3) all of the educational dialogues I’ve been having with Ronald along with his educational videos on Ayahuasca; and (4) my journalling and reflections of this experience. I find that by watching and reading others experiences with Ayahuasca, I am better able to understand my experience and better grasp the benefits of Ayahuasca in helping me heal.*

Ronal Rivera is an “Ayahuascólogo” because he philosophically researches the various manifestations of ecstatic delirium and the benefits of this traditional drink (Ayahuasca Sabiduría, 2012b). What brings me to Ronald is that his healing practices with Ayahuasca pay special attention to the inner world of each person, which I hope is a key piece in my healing. By working with *La Planta Maestra* and his guidance, the opening and growth of my consciousness helped heal the deep psychological ailments (i.e. trauma, fears, spiritual disconnect), which could have been connected to the physical manifestation of my dis-ease (Ayahuasca Sabiduría, 2012b). This mind-body and spirit hypothesis within the world of Ayahuasca, is of particular importance to me as I search to heal from my MS.

During my time with Ronald, I participated in a seven day seminar entitled “Para ser Ayahuasquero: Ayahuasca, Medicina, Mistica y Desarollo de la Conciencia” (Spanish for “To be an Ayahuasquero: Ayahuasca, Medicine, Mystic and Consciousness Development”) as well as the ceremonial retreat entitled “Ayahuasca, Planta Maestra de

Sabiduria y Poder Espiritual" (spanish for "Ayahuasca, Master/Teacher Plant of Wisdom and Spiritual Power), which took place over two and half weeks. In addition to experiencing several Ayahuasca ceremonies, I also had the opportunity to learn about and understand Ayahuasca from both a traditional and an academic perspective through the seminar, which had the exclusive goal to focus on the body of knowledge of shamanic wisdom and ancient Amazonian traditions that have been used for centuries by Ayahuasca shamans, as well as the body of knowledge of contemporary shamanic wisdom that various neo-shaman specialists, therapists, psychologists, doctors, etc, have been achieving in various parts of the world (Ayahuasca Sabiduría, 2012b). The overall objective of this seminar was to provide transpersonal therapists, psychologists, doctors, psychotherapists, shamans, neo-shamans, healers, mystics, esoterics, and anyone interested in transpersonal therapy, a sufficient set of traditional and contemporary knowledge to ensure the effective process of developing consciousness, psychic and physical healing, and the comforting and full realization of a personal mystical experience (Ayahuasca Sabiduría, 2012b). The ceremonial retreat was intended for individuals who are looking for personal development, growth and evolution through the discovery of the meaning of his/her existence, the awakening of his/her consciousness, and the use of personal healing power to overcome and/or resolve psychological or physical difficulties (Ayahuasca Sabiduría, 2012a). Together, both seminar and ceremonial retreat contributed to answering my thesis question of whether and if so how, this ancient Amazonian shamanic wisdom, tradition and ritual could support my MS

healing journey by enhancing intuitive insight, self-reflection, increased awareness and self-transformation as integral elements to my MS healing process.

### ***Autoethnography***

In order to investigate the benefits of an ancient Amazonian shamanic transpersonal wisdom, tradition and ritual may have in supporting my MS healing journey, I decided to conduct an autoethnography of my personal MS healing journey. In doing so, I was also able to reflect and connect my experience of living with MS to wider cultural, political, and social meanings and understandings of the root causes and curative beliefs of this debilitating dis-ease. Writing this autoethnography gave me strength as it supported the continuation of my healing process through my own work. By *doing and writing* this autoethnography I was able to find not only reclaim my voice of how I experience and understand MS, but I was also able to increase my understanding of the possible causes of my diagnosis and what can help me heal as a means of providing me hope that I can live a healthy life.

An autoethnography is a “radical democratic politic – a politics committed to creating space for dialogue and debate that instigates and shapes social change” (Reinelt, 1998, p.286). According to Ellis et al. (2011), an autoethnography seeks “to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience,” to challenge “canonical ways of doing research and representing others,” and “treats research as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act” (History of Autoethnography, para. 1). In addition, it is an approach to research and writing that is

both process and product as it combines principles of both autobiography and ethnography in order to do and write an autoethnography (Ellis et al., 2011; Mills et al., 2010). Therefore, *doing* an autoethnography becomes the process while the *writing* becomes the product that is aimed at challenging and disrupting the status quo normative views on a certain subject, which for me was in relation to the normative views of the *modern experience of illness* within conventional allopathic medicine in relation to MS. In my experience living with a chronic dis-ease, these views that focus on curing as a means for hope (vs. healing), often silence personal experiences, voices and intuitive knowledge since these elements are seen as inferior to the authoritative knowledge of conventional medicine. Frank (1995), who is a cancer survivor, argues similarly in that the medical narrative's story of illness "trumps all other in the modern period [...] the story told by the physician becomes the one against which others are ultimately judged true or false, useful or not" (p.5). Thus, I hope that by sharing my personal experience with a transpersonal healing modality that honours these 'inferior' elements, I can challenge and/or disrupt this normative view as well as create dialogue, debate and change that supports ownership of a complex experience of illness and the benefits of spirituality in healing MS.

This research is a healing journey of self-discovery through the process of writing, and an opportunity to look at institutional issues that emerged from this experience (Brookes, 1992). For instance, this process allowed me to realize how much the conventional biomedical model has had the ability to silence my voice, especially when undermining my curiosity in seeking non-conventional and multidimensional

modalities to treating MS. I chose a *personal narratives* approach to conduct this autoethnography because it allowed me as an individual living with an incurable dis-ease to experience hope and empower myself from a process that allowed me to reclaim my voice by seeing myself as the phenomenon and write evocative narratives that “propose to understand a self or some aspect of a life as it intersects with a cultural context, connect to other participants as co-researchers, and invite readers to enter [my] world and to use what they learn there to reflect on, understand, and cope with their own lives” (Ellis, 2004, p.46). Since this type of research method seeks to connect my personal experience to wider cultural, political and social meanings and understandings (Ellis et al., 2011; Holman Jones, 2005; Maréchal, 2010; Mills et al., 2010; Ellis, 2004), it is particularly relevant as a means to create dialogue and debate as to whether the use of transpersonal healing modalities – such as the spiritual healing rituals and traditions used by Amazonian shamans, which are based on ancient transpersonal wisdom – have any benefits when supporting the personal healing process of individuals living with MS in a postmodern society by choosing to reclaim their voice and be empowered. This is the overall intent of wanting to share my journal entries and reflection from my Ayahuasca journey in the jungles of the Peruvian Amazon.

### ***Process: Doing a Personal Narrative Autoethnography***

As a process, I recorded my experiences and reflections in a journal as data while working with an Amazonian shaman, his wisdom and his guided transpersonal experiences along with my epiphanies in contrast to the experience of living with MS

within a conventional biomedical paradigm. According to Ellis et al. (2011), an element of *doing* an autoethnography is to “retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a culture and/or by possessing a particular identity” (par. 4). Furthermore, an epiphany in this type of research requires one to “remember moments perceived to have a significantly impacted the trajectory of a person’s life, times of existential crises that forced a person to attend to and analyze lived experience, and events after which does not seem quite the same” (Ellis et al., 2011, par. 2). This is the autobiographical component of the autoethnography. In my case, I speak as *a* member of the MS community and how *my* experience of living with the dis-ease in our current health care system and societal views on the dis-ease itself has had a significant impact on my life, pushing me to re-assess my road map of life and ways to heal and find hope.

In addition to talking about my experiences and epiphanies, *doing* an autoethnography requires the analysis of my experiences through the use of methodological tools and research literature as well as considering ways in which others with MS may experience similar epiphanies (Ellis et al., 2011). The ethnography component of my autoethnography required that I study “a culture’s relational practices, common values and beliefs, and shared experiences for the purpose of helping *insiders* (cultural members) and *outsiders* (cultural strangers) better understand the culture” (Ellis et al., 2011, par. 2). In doing so, my personal experience can hopefully illustrate facets of my reality of living with MS within the conventional biomedical model of understanding

the dis-ease and how this paradigm had facilitated a sense of disempowerment for me, as a member of the MS community.

### ***Product: Writing a Personal Narrative Autoethnography***

As a product, this autoethnography will illustrate new perspectives on my experiences based on personal epiphanies – through storytelling – intending to fill a gap in existing and related story lines in an aesthetic and evocative manner that engages readers (Ellis et al., 2011). My product is based on my personal experience and epiphanies as data in my journal while working with a transpersonal modality, reflecting on how it relates, fills a gap and complements our conventional allopathic medical health care curative beliefs and methods to treating MS – while also contrasting it with existing research on the role of spirituality in supporting the healing process of chronic dis-eases, particularly MS. Thus, hopefully making my personal experience meaningful, engaging and accessible so that I may be able to also reach the wider audience that traditional research usually disregards, making this research able to support personal healing for more people living with MS.

### ***Benefits***

Since our conventional allopathic medical model continues to depend on pharmaceuticals as a method of dealing with MS and has yet to discover a means of stopping its progression, let alone cure – the writing of my experience as a method of inquiry will not only be therapeutic and empowering for myself, it could also be so for others living with MS as they read about my experience. In doing so, this research

becomes a socially-just act, which is the overall intent of doing and writing an autoethnography.

An example of how an autoethnography can benefit others living within a similar lived experience is that of feminist Betty Friedan (1964). In the 1960s, Friedan turned to writing to introduce and share the stories of white, middle-class women who were not allowed to engage in personal development as they could not work outside the home in equal and supportive working environments (Wood, 2009). By doing so, many women in similar situations no longer felt alone and thus her writings not only “came to function as therapeutic for many women, but also motivated significant cultural change in our understanding of and public policies towards women’s rights” (Ellis et al., 2011, par. 2). This type of research is particularly useful for individuals living with MS who often experience the sense of isolation that often comes after being diagnosed with an illness (Frank, 1995). Therefore, as a witness of living with MS, I can not only “work with others to validate the meaning of their pain, but also allow participants and readers to feel validated and/or better able to cope with or want to change their circumstances” (Ellis et al., 2011, par. 4.2), as well as create an environment in which others living with MS can feel empowered to reclaim their voice and thus move from Frank’s (1995) conceptualization of *modern experience of illness* to a *postmodern experience of illness*.

### ***Challenges***

A major challenge when conducting an autoethnography is with regards to the concept of *relational ethics*. *Relational ethics* arise due to the reality that an

autoethnography is based on personal experience and therefore others who were close to me may be implicated in that they could be easily identified (Ellis et al., 2011). This is not the case with my thesis since my research involves an inward journey through transpersonal experiences. However, it is my responsibility to share what I have written about my experiences with the Ayahuasca shaman that I worked with prior to publishing.

### ***Critiques***

An autoethnography can be largely criticized for being “insufficiently rigorous, theoretical, and analytical, and too aesthetic, emotional, and therapeutic” (Ellis, 2009; Hooks, 1994; Keller 1995 in Ellis et al., 2011, par. 5). In addition, autoethnographies have also been criticized for being “biased, navel-gazing, self-absorbed, or emotionally incontinent, and for hijacking traditional ethnographic purposes and scholarly contributions” (Mills et al., 2010, p.45). However, according to Ellis et al. (2011), it is important to understand that an autoethnography attempts “to disrupt the binary of science and art” (par. 5) and values the personal experience as a “critical intervention in social, political and cultural life,” which can “move writers and readers, subjects and objects, tellers and listeners into this space of dialogue, debate, and change” (Holman Jones, 2005, p.763-4). Furthermore, while an autoethnographers value the need to write and represent research in evocative and aesthetic ways, they believe that research can be both rigorous, theoretical, and analytical *and* emotional, therapeutic, and inclusive of personal and social phenomena (Ellis et al., 2011). The debate about whether their research is a valid process and product is irrelevant to them since it is “not issue(s) to be

resolved, only” but “difference(s) to be lived with” (Rorty, 1982, p.197). The focus of *doing* and *writing* an autoethnography should be on whether it can be viewed as a socially-just act and not on the accuracy element of it since “the goal is to produce analytical, accessible texts that change us and the world we live in for the better” (Holman Jones, 2005, p.764). This product will become a socially-just act when/if others living with MS, and feeling a sense of hopelessness, experience my story as an empowering one.

### ***Reliability, Generalizability and Validity***

The *reliability* of my autoethnography requires my credibility as a researcher and my ethical responsibility to provide accurate information on my lived experiences as they were being written. By doing so, readers will view the autoethnography as a truthful account and not a fiction, which then relates to the question of *validity*. For an autoethnography to be valid it must create a feeling in readers that the experience described could be true (Ellis et al., 2011). Therefore, the *validity* of the autoethnography will be based on “whether it helps readers communicate with others different from themselves or offer a way to improve the lives of participants and readers or the [my] own” (Ellis et al., 2011, par. 4.4). Thus, my intention is to make my personal story accessibly coherent and ensure that it has the ability to connect to the lives of others living with MS. This is being done by focusing on my healing journey that experiences a marginal healing modality that has also allowed me to overcome the sense of

hopelessness that often comes along with the uncertainty of the manifestation of MS – providing me with an anchor in my storytelling type of narrative.

Lastly, as argued by Ellis & Bochner (2000) and Ellis & Ellingson (2000) in Ellis et al. (2011), the concept of *generalizability* is an important aspect of an autoethnography in that it must be “tested by readers as they determine if a story speaks to them about their experience or about the lives of others they know” and by “whether the (specific) autoethnographer is able to illuminate (general) unfamiliar cultural processes” (par. 4.4).

*8am July 11, 2013 – Ronal shared how while Ayahuasca works with the unconscious, the soul and the spiritual world; the protagonist in the journey is one's unconscious and what occurs is not possible for the conscious mind to understand. Therefore, since it is a process that is not possible to explain empirically since it is irrational, I am doing my best intent to share what has occurred through a process of consciousness writing within this journal. Letting the spirit of Ayahuasca that has permeated every cell in my body to bring into consciousness what is occurring within me through my pen and onto this paper.*

*The images that I had may not have had a medicinal impact; however, perhaps Ayahuasca was slowly trying to ignite(?) me into the irrational world of the unconscious psyche by first showing me the playful and colourful images and sensations? Ronald did mention that Ayahuasca can help increase awareness and face blockages, as well as increase the energetic vibration to heal since she can help change ones software in order to enter into a healing process that is transformative. For me, this was the realization that I have everything I need in order to heal (dreams, moon and yoga). That I just need to have patience and live it – experience it versus reading and rationally writing empirically about it. I realize that I am a product of a society that seeks quick fixes and where we have a tendency not to take the time necessary to finish a process before starting another. And so, I see that when it comes to my health, I often am continuously searching for another avenue without finishing the first as I do not realize it since I do not give it time to manifest itself.*

### ***Doing and writing an autoethnography as part of my healing journey***

Given that an autoethnography is a form of self-reflective writing based on personal subjective experience where the process is healing in itself, this seems to have

been the most appropriate method for me to experience a transpersonal healing modality as a means for healing a dis-ease that has been overtaken by the *modern experience of illness* based on the beliefs and practices of conventional allopathic health care.

## **Healing the mind-body connection of MS through spirit: Understanding the wider cultural, political, and social meanings of MS**

### ***Introduction to Theme One***

One of the re-occurring themes I found when thoroughly reviewing my journal entries, which I used as data for this autoethnography, which resonates with the literature I had read about the mind-body connection of dis-ease – and possibly MS – was that healing the mind-body connection of dis-ease can be achieved by transcending the mind through spirituality. This journey allowed me to delve deeper into the role spirituality can play in calming the mind and so possibly supporting the progression of my MS. Questions that I often reflected upon during this inward journey in isolation were as to whether I can support the healing of my MS by connecting my mind and body through spirit; whether I can heal my body by first healing my mind and if so, what is the process; and whether this could be beneficial for my community that is exposed to a curative paradigm that offers little hope due to a lack of understanding of what MS is (apart from knowing that it is an autoimmune dis-ease) and why it manifests itself in humans, especially women. Keeping those overarching questions in mind, I now invite you into my introspective journey.

### ***Shifting from Curing to Healing MS: An intuitive journey begins (or continues?)...***

Healing and curing are distinct ways of looking at dis-ease. In a healing process, the physical disorder often remains present; however, it no longer blocks the individual “from getting on with his or her life in a normal or practically normal

fashion” (Winchester et al., 2012, p.209). This is particularly important for individuals living with MS given the lack of a cure and how the dis-ease can often continue to slowly disable an individual without a timeframe. Upon my diagnosis in 2006, I was blocked from fully moving forward with my life since doctors and the media kept promoting (and reinforcing) a one-sided and unidimensional view of treating MS that continues to be the normative view based on positivist, biomedical and curative beliefs. To this day, I continue to be torn about the curative model of understanding MS as being the only hope. I also often wonder “how ethical is the marriage of the pharmaceutical industry and allopathic doctors?”

The pharmaceutical industry and the medical profession are entwined as the industry continuously funds continuing education while it “literally wines and dines doctors... and fl[ies] doctors to meetings in expensive resorts and pay[s] for their food and rooms” (Bolaria and Dickinson, 2002, p.400). This creates a feeling of unease within me as I can see how and why there would be such a dependency on pharmaceuticals since no other alternative has been acknowledged by doctors (who are seen as the knowledgeable experts) to the MS community. Since it is often the physician who “becomes the spokesperson for the dis-ease, and the ill person’s stories come to depend heavily on repetition of what the physician has said” (Frank, 1995, p.6), individuals living with an dis-ease depend on their doctor for the answers...and thus their hope solely depends on the doctors and its pharmaceutical spouse. For example, I often see this sense of dependency when I attend meetings organized by the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada. I observe a sense of desperation as individuals are hoping that the ‘MS experts’

will give us some hope. Frank (1995) would call this the “*modern experience of illness*,” which is when “popular experience is overtaken by technical expertise, including complex organizations of treatment” (p.5). Furthermore, Frank (1995) argues that it is the medical narrative of dis-ease that:

trumps all others in the modern period... the story told by the physician becomes the one against which others are ultimately judged true or false, useful or not... the physician becomes the spokesperson for the dis-ease, and the ill person’s stories come to depend heavily on repetition of what the physician has said. (p.5-6)

However, in sharing my story with you, not only am I recovering my voice but I become “a witness to the conditions that rob others of their voice” (Frank, 1995, p.xii-xiii). More and more I am realizing that my experience of being diagnosed by the doctors has robbed me of my voice and that of my community. In reflecting, I realize that every time I brought forward an alternative modality to healing my MS, which could even potentially cure it, it has been shunned by my neurologists and and I am told to be wary of MS cures outside of biomedical medicine. I am continuously reminded by them that my only hope as an individual living with this degenerating dis-ease is to take medications that have an approximate cost of \$20,000 per year and that come with several side effects, which include depression, flu-like symptoms, heart-attack like symptoms (e.g. heart racing, tightening of the chest, and trouble breathing), to name a few (Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada, 2013). The medications that currently exist can only *try* to help decrease the progression speed of this auto-immune dis-ease while having secondary effects that I have experienced as disempowering and frustrating.

Since the expensive dependency of a substance that does not cure nor halt the progression of the dis-ease, and due to the possible negative symptoms, my

pharmaceutical journey for MS was short lived. Through my Ayahuasca journey in the jungle, I chose to shift towards a *postmodern experience of illness* (Frank, 1995), which allowed me to reclaim my voice/experience from the conventional biomedical model as a means of empowering myself to honour what my body tells me by listening to it, spending time turning inwards as a means of self-reflection, and listening to my intuition for insights on how to heal.

*July 6, 2013 (on the plane to Pucallpa, Peru) – The start of my Ayahuasca journey began several days prior to my arrival in the jungle. I began to feel strong energetic sensations that I unfortunately am unable to describe. However, it felt (and continues to feel) different and energetically powerful. After various years of struggling for answers within the normative medical model of viewing MS from a curative lens, my intuitive self feels quite strongly that this healing experience in the Amazonian jungles can help support my MS healing journey. I need to discover for myself, if this intuitive feeling I've had throughout the years, is in fact real.*

Even though *just knowing* based on intuition is not a scientifically valid explanation for human behaviour, basis for guidance, or action to be taken in modern society – there has been an increasing shift towards understanding life purpose and finding a sense of meaning and direction through spiritual and intuitive world-views that transcends the personal or social dimension (Cowley and Derezotes, 2011). The integration of intuitive Eastern contemplative psychologies and Indigenous wisdom into Western therapeutic modalities to healing and discovering the authentic *Self* (e.g. transpersonal psychology) demonstrates this current shift towards re-accepting the validity of ancient wisdoms and intuitive approaches to healing. Therefore, since the *postmodern experience of illness* is “an experience, a reflection on body, self, and the destination that life’s map leads to” (Frank, 1995, p.7), my life map and intuition led me

at this point in time to the jungles of the Peruvian Amazon so that I could explore whether and if so how, Ayahuasca as an ancient transpersonal therapeutic approach based on Amazonian shamanic wisdom could support my MS healing process.

*July 6, 2013 – I am currently flying to Lima and completed reading a story written by a woman living with MS who explored various Shamanic healing rituals, one of which was Ayahuasca. Her experience seemed to have been an awakening and healing experience as she returned from her journey no longer feeling her symptoms of fatigue that often caused her emotional distress. I can relate. I feel as though this article sent to me by Ronald two nights ago, and the fact that the author is a female who also suffered emotional abuse as a child and rape (like myself), that this is not a coincidence...it is synchronicity.<sup>15</sup> I shall remind myself of journalling, reflecting, and keeping my eyes open to what surrounds me and what the universe brings forth towards me. So many thoughts crossing my mind, especially my connection with my transpersonal-psychic counsellor who always reminds me that the universe has big plans for me; however, I seem to resist and fall into old patterns that I am now starting to think (after reading this article) may be based on fears?*

Through this intuitive experience I sensed possibilities that could be inherent to the manifestation of my MS that I had not yet realized and so bringing about an increased or new awareness, opening the way to inner freedom, which could then “be expressed in personal choices and decisive action” (Vaughan, 1979, p.40). At this point, I began to feel the importance of transformation as a means of healing, but more specifically the possible link between the role of emotional traumas and fears that may have been a barrier to my healing and growth. This awareness led to a sense of comfort in that my ongoing search to heal my MS could possibly be linked to the mind, where the psychological and emotional stresses I have experienced may have contributed to the physical manifestation of my dis-ease. And so, I had a very strong intuitive feeling that Ayahuasca was going to

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<sup>15</sup> Synchronicity “transcends the ordinary space-time framework of our world” (Metzner, 1992, p.8), is “an empirical idea arising from the lack of phenomena impossible to account for by cause and effect” (Hamaker-Zondag, 1990, p.19) since it is acausal (Jung, 1960).

be able to help me heal the mind element possibly contributing to the physical manifestation of my dis-ease. But how will I become aware of the emotional traumas and fears that are blocking me from healing?

### ***Understanding the link emotional distress and MS***

Emotional and psychological stress play a powerful role in the onset and progression of dis-ease and illness (Government of Manitoba, 2012; Byrne-Davis & Vedhara, 2008; Eden & Feinstein, 2008; Kern & Ziemssen, 2008; Littrell, 2008; Boroch, 2007; Cohen et al., 2007; Vivetta et al., 2005; Maté, 2004; Salovey et al., 2000; Tolle, 1999; Stewart-Brown, 1998; Brunner, 1997; Solomon, 1969). Even without having to link MS to emotional traumas and fears, the fact of being given the diagnosis can often create emotional distress in itself – increasing the chances of further progression. For instance, the uncertainty of the dis-ease is associated to increased depression, diminished hopefulness and more negative mood states independently of the actual functional limitations of MS patients who have “a 50% lifetime prevalence of depression” (Sadovnick et al., 1996, as cited in Eeltink and Duffy, 2004, p.283). Upon my diagnosis, I felt like one of these statistics; however, my work with Ayahuasca as a transpersonal healing modality allowed me to experience a sense of *hope* as I embarked in this transpersonal journey towards healing. This was an empowering moment.

This transpersonal journey provided the hope that conventional medicine has not been able to offer me since I became aware that I could possibly heal by exploring the mind-body connection of my MS. I am hopeful that I can decrease my emotional distress

by connecting with my spiritual nature – facilitated by *La Planta Maestra* as an experiential step within my non-conventional healing journey. If I continue to place my hope in the hands of my neurologists to find a cure, which has fostered a sense of hopelessness and uncertainty within me, then the *modern experience of illness*, which is based on a biomedical and cure-oriented approach, could rob me of my voice. This could then interfere with my ability to listen to my inner wisdom and of sharing my story of how I experience MS, which could in itself also heal. This theft could also make me even more vulnerable to mental and emotional depression – adding to emotional distress. During this journey, I began to connect more deeply with my inner wisdom, which led me to intuitively feel that emotional distress and fear may have contributed to the manifestation of my dis-ease.

*3pm July 8, 2013 – After settling into my little room where I will be spending most of my days reading and sitting in contemplation, Ronald and I spent hours talking about our month ahead; Carl Jung, dreams and symbols; my current training in Yoga as another transpersonal modality to healing; and Ayahuasca as a transforming, liberating and healing process. He mentioned that it is very important that one is guided during an Ayahuasca ceremony, especially when starting to explore it and/or when drinking it in larger quantities. We also talked about the curing and healing abilities of Ayahuasca in the circumstances of many mental and physical health problems since it works on several levels. This makes me think about how the Canadian government has made Ayahuasca illegal despite a 2006 Health Canada study “which found no serious health hazards to using Ayahuasca; instead it reported health promotion and spiritual benefits.”<sup>16</sup> Maybe due to the interconnectedness between governments, doctors and pharmaceuticals that Ayahuasca is illegal because if Ayahuasca ever became legal, pharmaceuticals would no longer be profitable since dependency would no longer be created?*

*Ronald also talked about how Ayahuasca is usually beneficial to those seeking self-growth, self-understanding, transformation, and both mental and physical healing. He also mentioned that Ayahuasca can be seen as a spiritual awakening that heals on*

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/health-and-fitness/bc-doctor-agrees-to-stop-using-amazonian-plant-to-treat-addictions/article4250579/>

*several levels, and that has an auto-curative element to it that is experienced individually. For example, maybe once person has cured themselves of cancer; however, that does no necessarily mean that Ayahuasca cures all cancers. We also talked about how Ayahuasca facilitates an environment to raise our own consciousness, and that Ayahuasca is called La Planta Maestra because it is a plant that teaches you what you need to know. All this I shall explore after tomorrow's cleansing ceremony where I will be drinking Tobacco as a means of detoxifying my body so that the following day I can begin my first Ayahuasca ceremony.*

My journey continues to honour my inner wisdom and truth that tell me to continue to adopt a mind-body perspective through a spiritual path facilitated by transpersonal modalities. Knowing that the link between psychological and emotional stress to the physical manifestation of auto-immune dis-eases is slowly moving into normative discourses (Government of Manitoba, 2012; Byrne-Davis & Vedhara, 2008; Eden & Feinstein, 2008; Kern & Ziemssen, 2008; Littrell, 2008; Boroch, 2007; Cohen et al., 2007; Vivetta et al., 2005; Maté, 2004; Salovey et al., 2000; Tolle, 1999; Stewart-Brown, 1998; Brunner, 1997; Solomon, 1969), I can reclaim my voice by focusing on a healing-oriented approach of dealing with my dis-ease. In doing so, I am able to direct my life map and find ways to “control the modifications [and restrictions] of the mind” (Satchidananda, 2012, p.4), which could possibly (as previously stated) have a negative impact on my immune system. Will moving into an empowered state of mind through the support of a spiritual journey facilitate a declining impact on my levels of emotional stress and fears, and thus stop my vulnerability towards the biomedical model’s ability to fuel fear and emotional distress by experiencing a sense of hopelessness?

### ***Can spiritual health care heal the mind-body connection of MS?***

*8pm July 15, 2013 – At dinner Ronald shared a glimpse of the Ayahuasca knowledge and how it can support the mind-body connection of healing. He said that “self-awareness cures at an energetic level, which can also have an impact on the organic level as well... self-awareness has more than a mental impact.” He continued on to say how Ayahuasca can work in very subtle ways. You don't necessarily need to go through a trance with visions (which is common) and then an internal dialogue with your consciousness and Ayahuasca (which this aspect may take various ceremonies to encounter, or it can occur during the first). This is when you have those ah-ha moments (self-awareness); whether it be during a trance or much later (e.g. days, weeks, months...) I find this to be very interesting, especially given all of the subtle emotions I've been feeling, and self-awareness and intuitive moments I have been experiencing this week after my first Ayahuasca session. I feel that I had minor visionary effects the night I drank and subtle intuitive leaps (re: feeling that I already have all the tools that I need to heal at my disposal). The majority of the Ayahuasca work from this first ceremony seems to have been done during the following day since, as discussed during a debrief of my first session with Ronald, it was through the releasing of tears the whole afternoon that the purging and cleansing took place while it was in my dreams and the time and space to self-reflect, which led to an increased self-awareness and ability to connect with the inner wisdom that my intuition has to offer without doubting or over analyzing like I would normally do.*

Our health care system in Canada is primarily reactive, directive and interventionist while wellness and preventative healthcare approaches – which view health care from a whole-istic perspective – tend to be subordinate to treatment and cure (Bolaria and Dickinson, 2002). Thus, an example of a more whole-istic view of dealing with dis-ease is that of Indigenous spiritual healing, which is what drew me to Ayahuasca. Indigenous cultural world views of mental health and well-being believe that this is achieved through “a balance of the body, mind, emotions and spirit which is maintained through good relationships within oneself, with others, within the community and Creation” (Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, 2009, p.4). Indigenous spiritual health believes that the major difference between our current model of health care and that of

Indigenous Peoples is “the role that spirituality has in the healing process” (Hammerschlag, 1988; Locust, 1988; Medicine Eagle, 1989; Torrey, 1986, in McCormick, 2005, p.294). Also, spirituality does not need to be a religious endeavour “but rather a way to transcend the self and connect with something greater than oneself,” and through such connections many groups of Indigenous Peoples “have obtained perspective, comfort, empowerment, and support” (McCormick, 2005, p.295). Since spirituality is central to the healing process for many Indigenous Peoples, why not explore the benefits this view may have on my experience of living with an dis-ease since for nearly 200 years the causes and cures of this mysterious dis-ease continue to “bedevil scientists, health-care workers and victims” (CBC, 2010, para. 10).

*8pm July 8, 2013 – After a long nap, Ronald and I had dinner (we are cleansing slowly as we prepare for the Ayahuasca sessions) and more continue our interesting dialogues.. not only about the healing ability of Ayahuasca even after just one session, but also to develop or enhance intuition, awaken consciousness, bring about clarity, and also change one’s energetic field since it works at the mental and physical level through energy vibration, changing the energetic field of an individual through spirituality – allowing to have a positive impact on a client (if one was a therapist working with Ayahuasca) without saying anything specific and without being directive. It can be with anyone in our lives as well (e.g. personal, professional, etc.) For example, this energy can have an impact through one’s way of looking at an individual, talking, touching, or even by just being in the same room as someone and having drank Ayahuasca can have an energetic impact on the other individual.*

*When I asked about whether my daily yoga practice would have an impact on my experience, he said that I should wait until I experienced Ayahuasca a few times since it can heighten the experience, based on his own experience as well as previous with clients who practice yoga. He suggested that I first explore Ayahuasca alone since yoga seems to also open up channels, thus intensifying the transpersonal experience – makes sense! We will however experiment and combine Ayahuasca with yoga postures, breathing techniques and meditations. I’m very excited to explore these two transpersonal therapy modalities together! What struck me the most of this conversation is that both yoga and Ayahuasca provide the space to self-reflect, turn our senses inward, and develop consciousness. Like Ayahuasca, yoga too supports self-healing, enhances one’s*

*understanding of how the mind work, and helps transcend its tendencies so that our authentic Self (as opposed to the ego “self”) can shine and lead the way (Gouin, 2012). Therefore, at this point I am really feeling good about this experience I’m about to embark on since I have been taking a yoga teacher’s training course since May, also as a means of supporting my MS healing journey. At this point though, I need to continue resting, eating the specific diet and cleanse with a tobacco ceremony tomorrow. Everything Ronald talked about this evening was about what Ayahuasca is and has been for others (e.g. very individual experience; however, what links all stories are how Ayahuasca is a liberating experience that brings about clarity and intuition). For some it may take more than one session before feeling it as well. It all depends on the blockages, or even maybe if person is ready to receive the teachings of La Planta Maestra Ayahuasca.*

Since spirituality can heal and provide several benefits to an individual’s physical and mental well-being (Rivera, 2013a; Rivera, 2013b; Ironson et al., 2006; Laubmeier et al. 2004; Maté, 2004), one of the key hypothesis I held going into this journey was that by undergoing a process of becoming whole (i.e. process of *individuation*) through spirituality, my MS healing process could be supported. I felt even more supported in reading that the Government of Manitoba released their *Spiritual Health Care Strategic Plan* in 2012 where they envision “a fuller integration of all health care disciplines under the common goal of healing and wellbeing” (p.14) since bio-psycho-social-spiritual well-being is positively related to less distress and better quality of life regardless of diagnosis. It also found that research in the discipline of spiritual health care found a close link between positive religious involvement and positive spiritual understanding in supporting better health outcomes and longer life expectancy (Mueller et al., 2001). In addition, higher levels of spiritual well-being, a sense of inner meaning and peace were reported to be linked with lower levels of measured depression and anxiety (McCoubrie & Davis, 2006; O’Mahoney et al. 2005). There is nothing specific to MS; however, since MS is an

autoimmune dis-ease similar to HIV, I wonder if the mind-body hypothesis in the progression of HIV that is exemplified in another study, which was conducted on HIV patients (Ironson et al., 2006), can be applied to MS. The study discovered that there was an increase in spirituality/religiousness after diagnosis, which also predicted slower disease progression. If this is the case, and since MS is an auto-immune that is often linked to mental and emotional distress – and given that MS patients have “a 50% lifetime prevalence of depression” (Sadovnick et al., 1996 in Eeltink and Duffy, 2004, p. 283) – perhaps access to transpersonal therapy, which can allow for exploration of the spiritual nature, provides a sense of hope during the unpredictable process/unfolding of the dis-ease as spiritual plays a critical role in dealing with illnesses (Kaye & Kumar Raghavan, 2002; O’Neill & Kenny, 1998). Otherwise, a feeling of hopelessness and uncertainty could create additional mental and emotional distress, which – based on the mind-body hypothesis – would contribute to the further progression of the dis-ease?

*8pm July 8, 2013 – After my conversation with Ronald over dinner about how Ayahuasca is a healing and cleansing experience, I am realizing that Ayahuasca can support me in my healing journey since it can awaken my ability to feel compassion in a balanced and healthy manner. Ronald mentioned that even though one may experience moments of death (a symbolic death), Ayahuasca is always a positive experience in the end. I am hoping that if this is the case, that it will be the death of an old identity that is led by emotional traumas and fears. He mentioned that the fears or negative thoughts that can be experienced during the Ayahuasca journey are not an experience of them coming inward, but it is the fears and/or negative thoughts that are already within me that are purging themselves outwards. If this is the case, then Ayahuasca may be a healing experience for me as I cleanse my mind and body by purging any fears and negative thoughts that could be blocking me.*

Byrne-Davis & Vedhara (2008) also found that “there is good observational evidence that certain psychological and social factors can influence the onset and

progression of disease” (p.761); however, “whether or not these variables can influence the course of a disease is a difficult question to answer given the multifactorial nature of disease aetiology (p.759). Vivetta et al. (2005), also found that “as evidence continues to accumulate within the field of psychoneuroendocrinology and psychoneuroimmunology, the brain has truly an overarching role in health and disease” (p.502). For instance, an optimistic mind and positive emotional states have been found to play a role in enhancing the immune system functioning and in a healthier body (Salovey et al., 2000). Therefore, if there is a mind-body link to dis-ease and health, does the stress created by our culture and one’s individual emotional makeup play a role in an array of common dis-eases such as MS?

Soon after returning from my Ayahuasca journey, I decided to connect with Gabor Maté. In speaking with him on August 13, 2013 we discussed his views on spirituality as a process of becoming whole and where the use of Ayahuasca as a spiritual Amazonian shamanic wisdom and ritual have (in his experience) the ability to help an individual heal through the use of Ayahuasca. Maté (2004) found that the effects of chronic stress on the immune system posits that both real or perceived helplessness “is a potent trigger for biological stress responses” (p.37), which then manifest themselves in physical dis-ease due to the impairment of the immune system that is caused by the psychological and/or emotional stress. His literature review identified “three factors that universally lead to stress: uncertainty, the lack of information and the loss of control...all three are present in the lives of individuals with chronic dis-ease” (p.34). I have experienced these factors upon my diagnosis and so perhaps in order to heal and protect myself from “the hidden

stresses that create a risk to health" (p.30), I need to develop and regain emotional competence, Maté (2004) describes emotional competence as "the ability to deal in an appropriate and satisfactory way with one's own feelings and desires" (p.38). Therefore, this process of connecting with my spiritual nature could possibly heal the hidden stresses and distresses that are caused by my external world but also my mind, which may in turn be negatively impacting my physical dimension? What is comforting to know; however, it that "psychological factors such as perceived stress or threat, influence immune function" (Kern & Ziemssen, 2008, p.15) and that there is research documenting how some types of autoimmune diseases are exacerbated by stressful emotions (Littrell, 2008). However, while "an increasing amount of research points towards a close relationship between the experience of stress and MS relapses, still little is known whether psychosocial factors also translate into disease progression and disability" (Kern & Ziemssen, 2008, p.15). Regardless of this lack of clarity, there is still hope:

Stress and emotional distress may influence the function of the immunologic system. Thus, environmental and psychologic factors might in some circumstances be implicated in the pathogenesis of cancer, the resistance to which growing evidence finds immunologic in nature, as well as of infections and of autoimmune diseases, which seem to have an association with states of relative immunologic incompetence. There are considerable data to link personality factors, stress, and, particularly, failure of psychologic defenses to the onset and course of cancer and of infectious and autoimmune diseases. (Solomon, 1969, p.340)

### ***Preparing for the spiritual health care of Ayahuasca: An energetic cleanse of the body***

Prior to beginning the Ayahuasca ceremonies, I participated in a tobacco cleansing session with the aim of discharging energetically. This energetic discharge was the physical cleansing and discharging of stress, tensions and anguish, which Ronald mentioned could bring about memories and feelings. He also mentioned that individuals with dis-eases such as MS have deep energetic blockages (e.g. emotional knots) that often

slow down (or even prevent in some cases) the cleansing process. After about an hour of my drinking the tobacco mixture while Ronald played his icaros and checking-in with me from time to time to inquire as to how I was feeling and whether any thoughts were coming to mind, I was finally able to purge the tobacco mixture and the three litres of water that I had to swallow.

*PM July 9, 2013 – After my ongoing awareness of my purging process, now nothing seems to come to mind. I am (for the first time in my life) very present “in the moment” as I embrace all sounds around me without thinking – something that is very difficult for me to do (i.e. shut down my thought process).*

During the ceremony when I admitted to having no thoughts that were coming to mind, Ronald asked if there were any possible past traumas that I could be holding onto. Automatically, I responded

*PM July 9, 2013 – “I’m in the process of forgiving my past hurts regarding the loss of my father (that had created a sense of abandonment); what I interpreted as a child regarding my mother’s emotional abuse and lack of love (that created emotional stress); and both losing my virginity to rape in early adulthood and the ‘infidelity’ of the ‘first love’ I experienced (that created a sense of betrayal and that contributed to my fears and lack of trust in men).” [silence]. It is at this point in time, where I begin to associate these major elements as the energetic blocks and mental stressors that I need to heal and transform into positive energy during my journey in Peru.*

The following day of my tobacco ceremony I found myself feeling extremely mindful of everything that I was doing (e.g. making bed, washing face, etc.). It was as though the effects of the cleansing ceremony allowed me to feel inner peace despite my physical tiredness due to the intense vomiting session of the previous night. My inner self felt contentment, something I had not necessarily experienced in the past, let alone understood. However, thanks to my yoga teacher’s training prior to my Ayahuasca experience, I learned that contentment means “just to be as we are without going to

outside things for our happiness. If something comes, we let it come. If not, it doesn't matter" (Satchidananda, 2012, p.137). Prior, I always thought that contentment was a mediocre manner of living life, letting the status quo be the meaning of life. However, after having experienced this sense of contentment, and now reflecting upon it, I realize that it is a great way to experience life as it means "neither to like or dislike" and so by experiencing contentment, "supreme joy is gained" (Satchidananda, 2012, p.137). As I was experiencing this sense of contentment, and being reminded of its meaning that I had learned during my yoga teacher's training, I experienced a desire to sneak in a yoga practice (something Ronald recommended I halt at first but later supported since it has the ability to intensify the energetic vibration produced when ingesting Ayahuasca). I mean, if this sense of contentment is beneficial to the mind-body connection of my MS since I would be experiencing supreme joy and thus no fears or emotional trauma, then why not incorporate it to my journey? But, how can I then ensure that I experience this supreme joy?

### ***Self-healing by transcending the mind: clarity and peace of mind through introspection***

*12pm July 13, 2013 – Over lunch Ronald and I spoke and agreed to begin the seminar on "How to Become an Ayahuasca Shaman" as a means of sharing the teachings about Ayahuasca with me. He talked about the self-healing element of transcending the mind, which can be done through transpersonal therapeutic modalities such as yoga, dream analysis and Ayahuasca since they can bring about clarity and peace of mind. In addition, he mentioned how it is also beneficial to temporarily isolate or remove ourselves from the hectic aspects of contemporary and industrialized living as a way to have the space for introspection and self-reflection as well as to revalue or re-evaluate life and appreciate what we have and the people in our life. He is sounding like my yoga teacher... perhaps I should delve into my yoga practice a little deeper, and even explore my dreams.*

For approximately two months prior to my Ayahuasca journey, I had been training in two schools of Hindu-based yoga: Hatha Yoga (the forceful yoga with a purpose of awakening our *Kundalini*<sup>17</sup> through the cleansing of the body) and Raja Yoga (the science of the mind and an approach towards expanding consciousness through meditation, philosophy and practice by studying and practicing the *Sutras of Patanjali*).<sup>18</sup> The actual meaning of yoga is the science of the mind since Hatha Yoga was “primarily designed to facilitate the real practice of yoga – namely the understanding and complete mastery over the mind” (Satchidananda, 2012, p.xi). After the practice I had sneaked in the day after my cleansing ceremony, I intuitively felt the need to dedicate myself to a daily yoga practice as it felt complementary to my Ayahuasca journey, especially with the mind-body connection of healing.

My yoga practice is a universal, interfaith and all-encompassing practice based in the Hindu philosophy, which accepts everything and anything that leads me to my truth – and which believes that it is by experiencing and realizing the unity of everything that will allow me to heal and achieve my full potential (Gouin, 2012). Similarly to Ayahuasca, the science of yoga is thousands of years old and draws together the mind, body and the spirit into a unified whole (Kirk, 2006). Even though Ayahuasca and Hatha yoga both have the ability to heal by unifying the mind and body through spirit, they both differ in their process. The realization of their similarities came to me throughout my

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<sup>17</sup> Kundalini resides in every cell of our being. The emblem is like the medical sword with two snakes which means: she who is coiled or curled lock of hair. It is when we awaken our kundalini energy that we can begin to get in touch with the wisdom necessary to experience self-realization (i.e. the essence of who we are).

<sup>18</sup> The primary text of Raja Yoga.

Ayahuasca journey, which in the end allowed me to experience two forms of transpersonal therapeutic modalities that complement each other, and which together helped me transcend the minds and experience a spiritual awakening.

Similarly to Ayahuasca, yoga is often practiced as a means of bringing clarity, gaining balance in life and to self-heal, which can often bring up and cleanse emotions that are locked up (Ronald, 2013a; Gouin, 2012). While in Hatha yoga there is an emphasis on the physical self and in strengthening the nervous system, the overall goal of all forms of yoga is to become aware of our deepest and true nature by turning inwards and connecting with our inner wisdom so that the clutter of our minds no longer own/control us, and thus allowing us to experience self-realization (Satchidananda, 2012; Gouin, 2012). Since self-realization (i.e. authentic *Self*) is also an outcome of experiencing *La Planta Maestra*, perhaps by experiencing Ayahuasca and delving deeper into my yoga practice, I can help prevent the mind of misleading my body with emotional traumas and fears.

*AM July 20, 2013 – My body feels stronger and my mind feels even more still as I embrace every moment, sound and breeze. I am amazed at how nature (the jungle in this case) has supported my ability to be in the moment instead of my usual tendency to think in the future when I am in the fast paced society that I normally live in. Even though I have been working on becoming more present in the moment prior to arriving to Peru, especially since I have begun my Hatha yoga teacher's training in May, this particular moment I am experiencing seems to me to have been the longest time lapse of being “in the now” that I have ever experienced.*

Since “most illnesses creep in when [we] are not paying attention” (Tolle, 1999, p. 124), I was no longer focusing on past traumas or fears that could lay in the future ahead. I was just *being* and living what *is* so that “the more consciousness [I] bring into the

body, the stronger [my] immune system becomes” (Tolle, 1999, p.123). Tolle (1999) describes this process of inhabiting the body by being present as a means of strengthening both the physical and psychic immune systems, which is also a form of self-healing and so by inhabiting the body I can be protected since it raises the frequency vibration of my total energy field, so that “anything that vibrates at a lower frequency, such as fear, anger, depression, and so on, now exists in what is virtually a different order of reality. It doesn’t enter [my] field of consciousness anymore, or if it does [I] don’t need to offer any resistance to it because it passes right through [me]” (p.124). That same evening, I discussed with Ronald what I was experiencing and he assured me that what I was feeling was in fact a ‘side effect’ of the tobacco cleansing ceremony. My body was cleansing and beginning to heal by raising the frequency vibration of my total energy field.

*AM July 20, 2013 – I am now realizing that my fears of abandonment and betrayal are the emotional stressors in my life that could possibly have contributed to the mind-body connection of my dis-ease. I need to heal them by surrendering to the present moment, letting go of the past and what does not serve me well, and trusting life by embracing what is while still having a flexible vision of the future.*

In addition to experiencing the teachings of *La Planta Maestra*, the physical and mental isolation in the jungle also supported my need to turn my senses inward and reflect into where my fears stemmed from as I spent much of my time journalling and reading books that support the study of *Self*. Even though I seemed to already know what they were prior to my Ayahuasca journey, I still had difficulty letting them go. With the help of *La Planta Maestra* I was able to trust that what is meant to be, will be, and so living the present with presence. I learnt to trust that the universe (my own spiritual belief ‘system’) has nothing but good and big plans for me – something I intuitively

experienced during both my tobacco and Ayahuasca ceremonies. At this point in my Ayahuasca journey, I knew that I needed to let go of what did not serve me well in order to see whether I could in fact heal the mind-body connection of my MS. The fears that had been created by my mind, which had no evidence or facts to back those feelings/emotions, had to transform into affirmative thoughts or be let go of. And so the intention I set out into the universe for the remaining of my journey was to stop worrying, trust and live in the moment without fears and with presence – and with purpose... but what is this purpose?

### ***Integrating self-study into the Ayahuasca journey***

*12pm July 21, 2013 – What I do know and have been learning through my self studies with the Yoga Sutras is that I completely associate with the psychology of yoga, especially to focus on one or two things at a time. Makes sense, if I would like to master and experience the benefits of a healing modality. I can thereafter start adding others as they come instead of doing many at a time with little attention.*

During my journey, Ronald had requested that I read books that would enhance self-knowledge. I found his request quite interesting since in yoga, self-study through spiritual books is an essential element of the practice. For instance, in Raja yoga it is said that “anything that will elevate [my] mind and remind [me] of [my] true Self should be studied...this means study that concerns the true Self, not merely analyzing the emotions and mind as the psychologists and psychiatrists do... In reading the scriptures, we slowly rise up, expanding and enlarging the mind...” (Satchidananda, 2012, p.77). And so, one of the books I had brought to the jungle and that I found to be very useful in exploring the

mind-body hypothesis was that of the *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*.<sup>19</sup> This is the primary text of Raja Yoga,<sup>20</sup> which is a school of Hindu-based yoga that refers to the mental science and is an approach towards expanding consciousness through meditation, philosophy and practice (Satchidananda, 2012).<sup>21</sup> Traditionally, the word *yoga* by itself “refers to Raja Yoga, the mental science” and the primary text is called the *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*” (p.xi), and in Hatha Yoga there is Raja Yoga.

*Ipm July 20, 2013 – Satchidananda (2012) has taken every opportunity to “bring together people of various tradition to see the oneness in all spiritual endeavours” (p.xiii) and felt that “yoga should stand for, and exemplify, the message of respect for all the different paths and that all sincere seekers should realize their common spirit and the universality of their goal” (p.xiii). This is also the overall objective of Ayahuasca as taught to me by Ronald. Perhaps Ayahuasca is best used for those who have not been led to the path of yoga? It is a quick awareness without having to start the work or maybe Ayahuasca and yoga actually complement each other in the sense that Ayahuasca can provide the initial boost/reminder/awakening of consciousness while yoga can support the work to be done in transforming one’s shadow towards one’s authentic self and the oneness with all that exists.*

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<sup>19</sup> Written by a single person (*Patanjali*) or several persons using the same title of *Patanjali*, there almost 200 *sutras* that are divided into four sections, and are believed to range from 5,000 B.C. to 300 A.D. The first section is the Portion on Contemplation (*Samadhi Pada*), which “gives the theory of Yoga and a description of the most advanced stages of the practice of *samadhi* (i.e. contemplation)” and is believed to be the first section provided for the purpose of inspiring the student to begin the practice (Satchidananda, 2012, p.xii). The second section is the Portion on Practice (*Sadhana Pada*) and is a section which includes philosophy “but of a more practical nature” (p.xii). This section also includes the first five basic steps out of the traditional eight limbs of Raja Yoga and their benefits, obstacles to their accomplishment and ways to overcome the obstacles. The third section is called the Portion on Accomplishments (*Vibhuti Pada*) and “discusses the final three inner steps of Raja Yoga plus all the powers and accomplishments which could come to the faithful practitioner” (p.xii). The fourth and final section is called the Portion on Absoluteness (*Kaivalya Pada*) and “discusses Yoga from a more cosmic, philosophical viewpoint” (p.xii).

<sup>20</sup> Raja Yoga “refers to *Patanjali’s* popular eight-fold path of ethical living, practice, and meditation” (Gouin, 2012, p. 17). *Patanjali* did not ‘invent’ Raja Yoga, “but rather systematized it and compiled the already existing ideas and practices” (Satchidananda, 2012, p.xii).

<sup>21</sup> The translator and commentator of the *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, Sri Swami Satchidananda (2012), is considered a pioneer in the interfaith movement as he “took every opportunity to bring together people of various traditions to see the oneness in all spiritual endeavours...[and]... felt that Yoga should stand for, and exemplify, the message of respect for all the different paths and that all sincere seekers should realize their common spirit and the universality of their goal?” (p. xiii).

The *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* became a fundamental text in which I began to associate with since it offers a thread (i.e. *sutras*) of meaning, ideals and methods through a systematized compilation of existing (thus not invented) ideas and practices that are universal, interfaith and all-encompassing upon which I could expand by adding my own “beads” of experiences (Satchidananda, 2012, p.xi). I delve into these general principles that use specifics only as examples (Satchidananda, 2012) since it is “a unique philosophic worldview, which unlike most teachings, moves beyond philosophy to provide us with a method for self transformation” (Gouin, 2012, 17). I found the eight limbs of yoga, which “refers to an eight-fold path of ethical living, practice, and meditation” (Gouin, 2012), to be well-suited to my current reality. My relationship with yoga had been supporting my transformation and only began to realize how powerful my practice was until this experience. As I began to explore these *sutras* in more depth, I started to connect with the universality of its ethics and its ability to question myself, self-reflect and heal.

*PM July 10, 2013 – After reading several pages of the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, I am realizing that it can help me reflect as I am realizing that the physical, mental and spiritual benefits of steadyng the mind and in burning out impurities through pain, which in the end would bring about happiness and vital health. I feel that this text will nicely complement my Ayahuasca journey as I search to heal my MS by discovering my authentic Self through a spiritual awakening that could help me transcend my fears (i.e. shadow).*

At this point in my journey, I kept finding myself re-reading *sutra 2.1* since it describes discusses how yoga in practice constitutes “accepting pain as help for purification, [the] study of spiritual books and surrender[ing] to the Supreme Being” (Satchidananda, 2012, p.75), and in order to access the authentic *Self* (i.e. self-

actualization) one needs to transcend the mind and remind ourselves that “nothing can equal experience” since “all that [we] know through the mind is limited and conditioned” (Satchidananda, 2012, p.77-8). Satchidananda’s (2012) comments on this *sutra* are that “the Self cannot be known by theory alone” and that it is “only when you transcend the mind can you understand it” since no one has ever understood the Self – which is beyond the mind – by only thinking (p.78). As I was reading this *sutra* and its commentary while preparing/cleansing for my journey into the spiritual world of Ayahuasca – a world which lays beyond the mind – it felt like a moment of synchronicity and a reassurance that what I was embarking upon was the right thing to do.

Throughout my stay and as I reflected on *sutra 2.1*, I began to realize that yoga may in fact be my spiritual path as it provides guidance as to how one can achieve self-realization but also reminds me that while self-study through texts and theories are useful, I must experience. Experience what? I asked myself at times. However, as time went on and as I read more, I realized that the practice of yoga and the eight limbs led to an experience, which no textbook or person could teach me. It is by embodying the eight limbs – which can be painful at times mentally, physically, spiritually and emotionally – that one begins to experience change within oneself in several dimensions, as well as one’s surroundings given that our thoughts begin to change and thus our emotions, actions and physical selves.

*PM July 10, 2013 – I am now realizing after the cleansing tobacco ceremony that by transcending the mind with the help of Ayahuasca that I may be able to move towards discovering my authentic Self... my true nature... the essence of my being – and that by doing so my mind will no longer be able to contaminate(?) my physical health through its negative chatter.*

### ***Conclusion to Theme One***

In choosing to embrace what Frank (1995) calls the *postmodern experience of illness*, I was able to honour my inner wisdom that was leading me to explore a healing journey (versus curing). Not only did it allow me not to feel the need to wait for a cure, which can often lead to a depressed state of mind, but it allowed me to consider the possible healing benefits of exploring the mind-body hypothesis of dis-ease. In doing so, I was able to delve deeper into my yoga practice, a tool I have at my disposal that helps with “self-reformation, self-control and self-readjustment” (Satchidananda, 2012, p.9) and in “watching [my] own thoughts and analyzing them” (p.11). This is particularly important to me as an individual living with MS due to the lack of a cure and how the dis-ease often continues to slowly disable without a timeframe – creating a negative chatter in the mind. This experience allowed me to discover ways in which I could overcome emotional traumas and fears, allowing me to move towards connecting with the essence of who I am, which will be explored in the following chapter in which I describe in more depth my process of individuation and healing by accessing my spiritual nature.

I also discovered the power of introspection through self-study and its ability to bring peace of mind and clarity, which I will also be exploring in more depth in the next chapter as I share in more depth my individuation process with Ayahuasca, my deepened yoga practice and my dreams while *La Planta Maestra* leaves her energetic vibrations circulate throughout my being throughout this journey. Seeing that a western form of mindfulness based on a clinical psychology paradigm has been popularized in

conventional health care settings (Murdock, 2013) and that Governments such as Manitoba are incorporating spiritual health care into their strategic planning, makes me hopeful that a deep spiritual practice in supporting one to transcend the mind as a means of healing the mind-body connection of dis-ease can become a mainstream form of both preventative and reactive ‘medicine’ for individuals living with MS. My mind is now telling me: “Lucille, focus on the now and not the future of spiritual health care!” So... now onto the healing process of individuation by connecting with my spiritual nature through Ayahuasca ceremonies...

## **Can I heal my MS by accessing my spiritual nature through transpersonal therapy?**

### **A process of individuation towards my authentic Self**

Illness is the result of imbalance. Imbalance is a result of forgetting who you are. Forgetting who you are creates thoughts and actions that lead to an unhealthy lifestyle and eventually illness. The illness itself is a signal that you are imbalanced because you have forgotten who you are. It is a direct message to you that tells you not only who you are in imbalance but also shows you the steps that will take you back to the real self and health. This information is very specific if you know how to secure access it... Illness can thus be understood as a lesson you have given yourself to help you remember who you are.

– (Brennan, 1988, p.131)

### ***Introduction to Theme Two***

A second reoccurring theme I discovered throughout my journal is that of undergoing a process of individuation – facilitated by *La Planta Maestra* – as I connected with my spiritual nature. Throughout the process, I became aware of the healing benefits of deepening my yoga practice and acknowledging my dreams. Both became essential to the process itself as it enhanced my intuitive insight and ability to self-reflection during this healing process of transformation and self-realization (i.e. individuation). My journey began with an increased awareness and understanding of the possible mind-body connections in the manifestation of MS on my nervous system – and how accessing my spiritual nature through transpersonal therapy could help me heal. And so I began to move from a sense of hopelessness fuelled by the allopathic model of curing dis-ease, towards a sense of hope that integrative and whole-istic transpersonal modalities can offer. By facilitating a process of connecting with my spiritual nature so that I could undergo a process of individuation that transpersonal therapy could support the process of my healing by transcending the ego and connecting to all that exists (Cowley and Derezotes, 2011).

Since more and more people are being diagnosed with depression each year (Westgate, 1996), finding a sense of meaning, life purpose and hope, which is often an outcome of spirituality, helped me decrease the possibility of feeling depressed and hopeless. Even though not all perspectives on meaning in life need to be related to spiritual matters, religious and spiritual involvement “is often cited as a primary resource for promoting and sustaining a person’s sense of meaning” while both meaning and purpose are “usually included as fundamental elements of spiritual wellness models” given that “feelings of hopelessness and meaninglessness are among the best documented elements of depression in the clinical literature” (Westgate, 1996 in Savolaine and Granello, 2002, p.184-5). Ayahuasca, yoga and dreams were integral to my spiritual awakening process and now that I have embraced what Frank (1995) refers to as the *postmodern experience of illness*, I am ready to explore my spiritual nature as a means of healing. I feel the sense of hope it has given me, which seems to be fuelling my ongoing sense of optimism.

I will be sharing with you throughout this chapter (and the following) the revelations during my ongoing process of individuation as I moved towards connecting with my spiritual nature. In this chapter, I will be sharing two of the three ceremonies I experienced with Ayahuasca, which led to a personal transformation that was therapeutic and healing. My journal entries take place either prior, during and post ceremonies, and will often represent how I was able to self-reflect and analyze how I am accessing my spiritual nature and authentic *Self* by undertaking a facilitated process individuation.

### ***My first Ayahuasca ceremony: a process of individuation***

*6pm July 10, 2013 – As Ronald prepares me for my first Ayahuasca session, which is about to begin in the next few minutes (as the sun starts settling while we sit in his ceremonial hut), he mentions to me that the length of therapy will be determined by La Planta Maestra. She (Ayahuasca) knows how many sessions I will need. Each session will give me pieces of information, and at the end – when it is my time – it will all come together.*

As an Ayahuasca Shaman, Ronald is a transpersonal therapist since he focuses not only on transpersonal issues but also in working with *La Planta Maestra* to “facilitate the development of a stable, cohesive ego, and the exploration of the existential self” (Strohl, 1998, p.400). This the purpose of transpersonal therapy – a therapy that is based on the belief that the mind, body and spirit “function as a harmonious unit” (Strohl, 1998, p. 401). Similarly to many Indigenous cultures and spiritual perspectives, plants not only have water and active principles but also a spirit, energy and soul. Ayahuasca, for example, is a plant that embodies a spirit, which can help raise awareness on many different levels (Ronald, 2013; Wilcox, 2003). Wilcox (2013) has attempted to explain this concept by quoting Richard Noll's in *Shamans Through Time*:

Spirits are an incontestable part of human kind's “experienced reality” and, regardless of what their “ultimate reality” is, cross-culturally they seem to represent the forces of transformation that can either enhance growth or inflict dis-ease or even death. Therefore, they are by their very nature both good and evil, both guides and receptors, both healers and destroyers, the creators of life and the servants of death. To seek out these transformative powers willingly, as the shaman does, brings one into intimate contact with the secrets of existence. To open oneself to these double-edge forces is thereby to transform oneself. (p.120)

And so, at this point I am about to undergo my first Ayahuasca ceremony that will allow me to explore the world of spirits and connect with my spiritual nature – in hopes that it can support my healing process.

*6pm July 10, 2013 con't – ...Ronald now blesses the botanical mixture and sets out the intention so that La Planta Maestra can guide me and be of good benefit to me. He passes the glass over and asks me to proceed by first, thanking Ayahuasca for what she is about to teach me; then ask her a question or set out an intention (so I chose the theme I have been discovering during these past fews days: to help me overcome fears that may create emotional blockages and thus possibly contribute to the physical manifestation of my MS); and finally to ask a spirit to keep me company during the ceremonial trance (and so I ask the spirit of my father to be with me). I raise the glass, then drink the 50ml sacred botanical mixture, and begin to wait.*

*AM July 11, 2013 – I've been woken up by a far away sound of a TV or a radio that has been bugging me since 4am and it is almost 8. My hearing this morning is extremely acute, as acute as it was last night after drinking Ayahuasca. As I reflect on my experience last night, every sound as distant and slight as it was, I could hear it. I must still be experiencing Ayahuasca in a more subtle way. I guess Ronald did mention that it could stay in me for days, weeks and even years. Reflecting on last night, I remember how it all began shifting when at one point I noticed the acuteness of the sound of a dirt motorcycle driving from a distance, a sound that seemed to be going back and forth.*

*When I first drank the mixture, I could not feel anything. Ronald asked me several times if I felt any bodily sensations or was having any particular thoughts. I felt nothing at first; however, Ronald did mention that it could take from 5 minutes to 2 hours in order to take effect. So he lit some tobacco for me to smoke, which was intended to help enhance the process. After a while of not feeling much aside from the acuteness of my hearing, I decided to lay down on my mat.*

*Shortly after, I started to feel at peace – even though at times I felt fear. Interestingly, I had asked Ayahuasca to help me overcome my fears at the onset of the ceremony prior to drinking. For a while, I stared at the moon, which had a slight crescent as we approach the full moon. I heard a voice in my head telling me that this is what I needed, to take the time I never allow myself to take so that I can meditate and be still, and that my connection with the moon was a great way to do so. I also heard that I already have all the tools that I need at my disposal in order to heal myself and that I do not necessarily need Ayahuasca. I must just keep working with the moon – especially during full and new moons – as a means of enhancing, accessing and trusting my intuition, by paying attention to what comes to mind, how I feel, and my dreams (vs. letting fear or the chatter of the ego mind take over). I also heard that I should continue focusing on my yoga practice and the philosophical texts that support the mind, body and spirit.*

*As it becomes clear to me that this is what I need to do, I felt ease. At one point I began to feel physical discomfort with Ayahuasca in my stomach, and so became aware that – based on Ronald's teachings – she was now working at the physical level in clearing energetic blockages. During this period, Ronald played his ceremonial music with his*

*drum to ease the pain while I stayed laying down, staring at the moon and noticing how lovely the sky was filled with bright and shinning stars. I had ever seen so many bright stars in the sky. It was beautiful. I would also get a glimpse of fire flies<sup>22</sup> flying in the sky, mixing into the canvas of shining stars. As I stared at the moon I could also see the brightest star below it, and to the right, venus – the planet of love and beauty.*

*At some moments, I would get distracted at the sounds coming from outside the screened hut, which would then produce feelings of fear. I would then become aware of Ronald's presence as he continued to play his icaros and so I knew that everything was fine. The presence of his mother who would fall in and out of sleep, was also comforting. When I retuned to look at the moon again, she had disappeared behind the trees. I began to see psychedelic-like objects and vibrant colours; geometric patterns that were rotating clockwise and counterclockwise, moving in perfect unison, in harmony. I had no concept of time. When I would close my eyes, the visions would remain intact.*

Visions can be seen as multidimensional spheres rotating and spiralling with different colours – like molecules, atoms, and DNA – as though “partly responsible for life, for all that is alive on earth” (Wilcox, 2003, p.21). Shannon (2002b) explains these visions to be:

without semantic content, primitive figurative elements, images-scenes-visions of light, bursts-puffs-splashes, repetitive non-figurative elements, patterned geometric designs, rapid figural transformations, designs with figures, kaleidoscopic images, presentation of single objects, serial images, snapshots, glimpses, full-fledged scenes, grand scenes, virtual reality, geometric compositions, coloured visual space, darkness, the spider web, and supreme light. (p.24)

*AM July 11, 2013 con't – I then began to feel discomfort and wanted it to stop (this morning Ronald mentioned that this could be Ayahuasca giving me playful and meaningless visions as a process of getting me into the work that has to be done. Almost like creating a therapeutic relationship with me before we went into deeper work. Fascinating!) The visions eventually disappeared and so I rested for a while until I felt an urge to go to bed. Five hours had gone by and so Ronald and his mother accompanied me to my room and left a bowl of papaya fruit in order to help ground me with the sugar and water of this delicious fruit. I am amazed at how this journey is taking place from the new moon (July 8th) to the full moon (July 22). Perfect time to connect with her energies as I explore the transformative mysteries of Ayahuasca.*

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<sup>22</sup> It is interesting to note that my grandmother used to call me “Luciernaga” (fire fly in spanish) and on my last ceremony, I felt her presence in Ronald's mother who was present in all ceremonies. I realized then that my grandma had been with me the whole time.

Since transpersonal modalities accept that there are alternative paradigms of healing dis-eases other than conventional western thought, the use of Ayahuasca can provide several healing benefits in a contemporary therapeutic context (Rivera, 2013a; Rivera, 2013b; Beyer, 2012; Fotiou, 2012; ICEERS, 2012; Schmid et al, 2010; Shannon, 2002a). Ayahuasca led me into an extraordinary state of consciousness by opening the valve of the unconscious, allowing me to slowly move toward being reborn in all aspects; creating a fountain of revelation, initiation and an awakening of my consciousness – a spiritual initiation, evolution and personal development (cited from a discussion with Ronald). At the end of this ceremony, I knew that more work had yet to be done since I had a taste of this evolution and personal development. I had experienced some form of revelation from my unconscious psyche that supported the awakening of my consciousness. Was this a facilitated process of individuation?

The process of individuation is an important Jungian theory to discuss in order to better understand the relevance of transpersonal therapy on my transformational process towards connecting with authentic *Self* as a means of healing. Carl Jung used the term individuation to denote “the process by which a person becomes a psychological *individual* – that is, a separate, indivisible unity or *whole*” through a process of “meaningful dialogue between the conscious psyche and the archetypal world,” which he believed was essential to individual growth and creativity (Stine, 1992, p. 169). Therefore, in working with a transpersonal model towards spiritual growth, Ayahuasca was able to facilitate my undergoing a process of individuation. Upon reflecting on this ceremony, I begin to see

how my consciousness and unconscious were having a meaningful dialogue – slowly connecting me with my spiritual nature.

Jacobi (1934) describes two kinds of individuation process where both forms have the “same powers [at] work, striving for maturation and self-realization from the seed of the fruit, to the invisible goal of immanent within them” (p.15). The first one occurs autonomously and as an unconscious as it is left to the natural process, while the other is assisted, intensified and consciously realized by the application of a specific technique” as it occurs through an aided process such as “by analysis, developed by definite methods, and consciously experienced” (p.15). The true goal of individuation process is to achieve the “most complete and comprehensive development of the personality... inner peace, and therewith the highest form of happiness” (p.17) – where one moves “from an “ego-centered” attitude to an “ego-transcending” one, in which the guiding principles of life are directed to something objective, and this can be anything from one’s children, one’s house, one’s work to the state, humanity, God” (Jacobi, 1934, p.24). In order to achieve this process, which Jung described as attaining psychic wholeness, the conscious ego and the unconscious realms of the psyche must be in unity (Jacobi, 1934). I began to feel a sense of peace; however, I was also feeling fear at times. Perhaps I was experiencing what Jung referred to as the *shadow*?

*Ipm July 11, 2013 – Lunch was a silent time for me. I felt sad. I am still feeling sad. So sad that I cant stop having tears in my eyes. Maybe I miss home? But what is home to me? Perhaps I feel lonely? Being alone is something that I am not used to since I always distract myself with work, school, projects or the presence of others. Should I be learning how to overcome loneliness and become comfortable in being alone? Is that why I am feeling the way I am? What I do know is that I feel that this is a process that I must go through. To feel ok with myself alone and not distract myself from my inner self. I feel that*

*this is an enormous element for both my healing and growth. I must also stop doubting the experience Ronald will be giving me. I must trust that it is genuine and that it will be of service to my overall wellbeing, and that this is not just a money making intention. Now off to rest and maybe do some yoga and do a little reading. Another big night ahead of me. But first, I think I need to cry some more and maybe reflect on why...*

*3pm July 11, 2013 – I just finished my yoga practice. During my practice I felt better; however, towards the end I started to cry again. During my meditation I saw a heart beaming and when I started to cry it broke in half. My heart feels broken because it is lonely. My intention during my practice was to embrace the moment, and so I am doing so by acknowledging my feelings and paying attention to where they are coming from. I will give Ayahuasca another try as I still have fears but they seem to be slowly disappearing. I don't feel like reading much today; however, I find myself drawn to the Yoga Sutras. Actually, I am reading more deeply into the sutra on suffering:*

*2.1 Accepting pain as help for purification. Study of spiritual books and surrender to the Supreme Being constitute yoga in practice...We will actually be happy to receive pain if we keep in mind its purifying effects...Self-discipline is an aid to spiritual progress, where self-torture is an obstacle. (p.75-6)*

*Is what I am currently doing to myself self-discipline or self-torture? Currently it feels like self-torture; however, I did commit myself to this. Therefore, I must self-discipline myself to endure stillness and practice yoga to help me accept this pain and continue to study spiritual books and surrender to the universe as a means of overcoming this pain.*

One of the most important areas of transpersonal therapy is in working towards transforming an individual's *shadow* and appear "in the form of blunders, asocial behaviour, egoisms, rudeness, etc." (Jacobi, 1934, p.39) – and it is through the conscious realization of the shadow, its qualities, and its contents that will bring a therapeutic effect "because this is a step on the way towards man's wholeness" (Jacobi, 1934, p.40). Jacobi (1934) refers to the *shadow* as:

the sum of all qualities conforming to our sex that were neglected or rejected while the ego was being built up. The growth of the shadow, like that of the persona, keeps par with that of the ego; it is, as it were, the ego's mirror-image, and is compounded partly or repressed, partly of unloved psychic features which, for moral, social, educational, or other reasons, were from the outset excluded from consciousness and from active participation in life and were therefore repressed or spit off. (p.38)

While Jacobi (1934) speaks of the *personal shadow*, Jung speaks of the *collective shadow* “in which the general evil is contained [and] gives expression not to the contents belonging to the personal life-history of the individual but to everything negative, everything that opposes the spirit of the time” (p.38). Jacobi (1967) further explains that the shadow along with the ego form consciousness, and:

[it is through] the confrontation with the shadow and its integration must always be achieved first in the individuation process in order to strengthen the ego for further laps in the journey and for the crucial encounter with the Self. That is why the shadow qualities must first be made conscious, even at the risk of neglecting other aspects and other figures presented by the psychic material. (p.47)

Since transpersonal psychology believes that “evil can always be transformed, and never needs to be destroyed or banished” (Rowan, 2002, p.109), transpersonal therapists will often work with the spiritual nature of the individual through the use of tools and techniques that can help them access the inner wisdom necessary to transform this *shadow* (Guest, 1989). For me, this was a crucial element of my MS healing journey; transforming my fears (through a process of individuation) that were being manifested through my *shadow*. And so, journalling became an essential element to my individuation process.

*PM July 11, 2013 – Maybe since it was not so intense for me during the first five hours of last night’s ceremony (due to my blockages), today I am crying a lot. Perhaps this is because Ayahuasca is continuing to work on me. This is why Ronald believes that we should take a few days break before my next ceremony, and see how I feel tomorrow. He says that the Ayahuasca is working through my tears as it could be shedding fears.*

After my journalling earlier in the day, my sadness prevented me from resting and so I went out to speak with Ronald and his mother. Was I trying to run away from my need to work through these emotions? Even though the Ayahuasca ceremony itself often

elicits “spontaneous, intense, and meaningful imagery narratives related to psychological and physical healing, problem solving, knowledge acquisition, community cohesion, creativity, and spiritual development” (Echenhofer, 2012, p.60), these effects continued brewing within me in a more subtle and less intense manner.

*10am July 12, 2013 – I just returned from the washroom and I have my period! Now I am unable to undergo an Ayahuasca ceremony since it could interrupt my the natural process of my cycle. Ayahuasca will continue to work and Ronald says that it will probably be discharging some things through my period. Ayahuasca is so complex. I must admit that yesterday was a very difficult day for me. Plus last night I had a nightmare, which has only happened once to me. The last one I recall having, was back in February on the night Herbert (the other Shaman that was recommended to me when I began to search for a reliable connection) contacted me. He responded to my inquiry a week later, just as I awoke from this nightmare in the middle of the night! This was something I found very strange, especially when Ronald also messaged me in the morning after I had falling back to sleep after receiving Herbert’s message. So I am finding it very strange right now that I had my second nightmare last night while I am here with Ronald.*

It is said that our *shadow* qualities may appear personified in dreams (Jacobi, 1934), and that it is possible to discover the nature of the *shadow* being embodied through an inadequate persona (Hall, 1983). This is interesting seeing that in my first nightmare I experienced something that reminded me of my rape and my sense of powerlessness. I wonder if there is a relation between the dream, connecting with Ronald on that day after I had gone back to sleep and having had a good rest – was this the spirit of Ayahuasca connecting with me so that I would in the end work with Ronald to overcome these fears that create energetic blockages and so supporting the manifestation of my MS? However, I am glad that I decided to analyze my dreams during this time of reflection (as an element of my research and self-awareness process) as I was not able to undertake another ceremony due to my period. This following quote is particularly

interesting to me since it supports my need to examine my personal dreams as a means of connecting with my inner wisdom, psychic unconscious and the mysticism within the transpersonal world:

Jung's idea is that in dreaming we are in touch with a spirit beyond empirical science, something that transcends our personal selves. Our dreams give profound advice; we should "listen" to our dreams as to oracles, because wisdom is contained there. This is a "deeper" wisdom than we ordinarily know, and so we may profitably meditate upon on dreams. (Globus, 1987, p.140)

*10am July 12, 2013 con't – ...Last night I had a wide array of dreams. As I interpret what I wrote earlier upon waking up, I see there is an indirect mention of letting go and cleansing toxins and what no longer serves me and a direct mention of needing to do what I need to do to overcome the impacts of feeling abandonment. As well as trust my intuitive judgment to find the process. The first nightmare I had in February was of myself being in lingerie skiing down a hill but tied by the neck with a rope. I was slanted backwards as I was skiing downward. There was a blaze that was coming in between my legs. I stopped (or the end of the rope stopped me) – my vagina being millimetres away from the blade. This is when I woke up to the Facebook message of Herbert, which appeared on my phone as I decided to check the time this occurred at. I am amazed at the outcomes of analyzing dreams and how it can provide subconscious answers to conscious questions. I think I will continue to do so throughout my journey here.*

*Perhaps this first nightmare is associated to the rape I experienced as I lost my virginity? To the lack of trust that I have in men due to this incident and the fact that my 'first love' cheated on me with sex workers, and the propaganda found in the media subliminally promoting/accepting men to be unfaithful? Again, a theme of abandonment and fear. This reality continues with my interactions with other men as I often feel uncomfortable when I am around unknown men, and even more so when I sense their attraction towards me – especially when I am alone with them. Abandonment I also fear when I am with a man; that he will cheat on me and/or abandon me. This has happened with my past relationships after the rape and my first love up until my current relationship. My lack of trust in men perhaps interferes with my relationships with them. I can't keep having this continue since this ego chatter in the mind creates emotional knots, which may have the ability to impact my MS! I must stop this fear. Luckily, Ronald says that Ayahuasca can help overcome fears and transform them into positive energies. Perhaps I should give Ayahuasca another chance; however, I fear taking Ayahuasca again. Especially, to possibly have to experience that sense of fear and somewhat turmoil... but I should... I will.*

### ***Self-reflecting on fear...***

*8am July 11, 2013 – WHAT AM I FEARFUL OF? I need to stop fearing and being able to trust. Perhaps that was my main teaching during my first session: to face my fears and transform them by focusing on what my true nature is. This is perhaps why I was hearing that I should focus on developing my skills of listening to my intuition as well as concentrate on and deepen my yoga practice. I'm now remembering how there was a point in time after last night's ceremony when I began to see the psychedelic images again while I was in bed, moving in circles in different directions with bright colours and to the sound of the jungles insects, which were singing, talking and crying quite loudly. Despite not seeing where the sounds were coming from exactly, I felt safe in my mosquito net. It almost felt like an energetic shield. After sharing my reflections with Ronald, he mentioned that Ayahuasca could be supporting me as I start to overcome mental fears and energetic blockages prior to being able to open myself. La Planta Maestra could be subtly curing/unblocking me so that I could go through processes of fears first, which he says is normal. He says that Ayahuasca generally makes us face those internal fears that block us prior to experiencing harmony and balance. The standard experience is to go through a cleanse first prior to experiencing vitality, harmony and joy (the process, can however, be reversed). He continued on to say that fears do not necessarily need to be represented by the exact situation that occurred in the past given that Ayahuasca works with the unconscious, the soul and the spiritual world – and aspect that is foreign to the rational and conscious ego mind.*

Fear can be a roadblock to self-expression and self-knowledge (Wilcox, 2003)

and part of the mastery of Ayahuasca is learning how to control fear (Shannon, 2002a). I feel that this process of individuation accompanied by additional tools such as my yoga practice and the analysis of my dreams, are allowing me to become aware of these fears that are blocking my unconscious psyche to connect with my conscious ego in order to fully transform (i.e. individuate). So it is by transcending my ego and *shadow*, that I was able to tap into my inner wisdom, allowing me to move closer towards becoming my authentic *Self* (Cowley, 1996). This enlarged sense of identity through the transcendent experience of Ayahuasca created “an enhanced feeling of personal freedom, fuller range

and depth of emotions, heightened sense of serenity, and increased access to intuitive resources” (Strohl, 1998, p.401).

*8am July 13, 2013 – Based on Ronald’s teachings, if Ayahuasca helps you face fears and discover blockages (e.g. hurts) that are blocking vitality to ones health, then it seems to me that I am in the process of discovering these blockages! He says that Ayahuasca does not transform it for you; it gives you the information that you need and you must do with it what you need to do. So based on my thoughts yesterday and all of my self-reflections, I may already know all that I need to know? I now need to do something about it, and that came down oh so very clear to me during this first Ayahuasca ceremony! I must keep working with my dreams during the moon cycles, and delve deeper into my yoga practice.*

Ayahuasca has an effect of inducing a “heightened sense of intuition and enhanced psychological sensitivity” (Shannon, 2002a, p.258) as well as “enhance clarity, recognition, and sensibility” (Schmid, 2010, p.198). I have now had a glimpse of the powers of *La Planta Maestra* and her ability to bring about intuition and clarity.

*8am July 13, 2013 con’t – I now feel that my fears are related to abandonment and broken trust. Abandonment from father and mother, and broken trust from men. So I must now keep working on myself through yoga, my dreams and my work as a therapist. Ayahuasca is wonderful; however, it is too harsh on the body and quick changing states of consciousness (vs. stages of consciousness as found in yoga) is a difficult thing to embrace and surrender to. It can’t be expected that everyone can be able to do so (or even want to!) I think the element of being disconnected in solitude through isolation, and spending the time self-reflecting by analyzing dreams, reading spiritual books and practicing yoga as a means of turning inward, is a much better process for me. I think that Ayahuasca; however, would be good for people living with addictions as a quick drain-o effect to the soul! Now I can understand why it is used with this demographic. Similarly to a psychedelic and mind altering drug, it makes you experience a trance, only that this ‘drug’ brings you clarity, which seems to be a reoccurring theme in the literature on Ayahuasca, what Ronald mentioned as an Ayahuasca Shaman, and my own lived experience with it.*

I am now realizing the importance of transcending the mind and how transpersonal therapy can facilitate this process and of overcoming the *shadow*, whether it be through Ayahuasca, dreams and/or yoga! Self-transcendence has the ability to heal,

which is a process that can be undertaken through the support of transpersonal therapy (F. Vaugh in Almendro, 1994, p.54). After this initial experience (two more ceremonies to come), I realize that this process of individuation facilitated by *La Planta Maestra* towards embracing my authentic *Self* has a powerful transcendental healing ability.

*8am July 13, 2013 con't – Ayahuasca as a transpersonal modality allowed me to realize, thus far, that I should continue working with yoga and dreams as a means of building intuition and self-reflection to support my MS healing journey. I'm also realizing that I think I would rather work slowly through stages of consciousness that can be facilitated through yoga rather than quick shifts of states of consciousness as experienced with the intake of Ayahuasca. Both provide the benefits of clarity of mind and heightened intuition; however, unlike yoga, Ayahuasca hurts my stomach and makes me vomit. This feels a little abrasive on my body while Yoga, makes me feel blissful and strong after a practice. So even though Ayahuasca provides me with quick clarity, I must still do the work anyhow. So why not do the work slowly knowing/trusting that the clarity will come to me through yoga? Though, I must say that I am very thankful to Ayahuasca for confirming the emotional and energetic blockages that reside within me, and now the work begins!*

The beauty of transpersonal therapy is that it acknowledges that not all therapies fit with everyone and is also dependent on the person's current situational context and consciousness. Therefore, Ayahuasca may not be for everyone and was not for me when I was first introduced to it in 2009; however, during this point in time it felt right. I realize that it is a good tool if one feels called to it. *La Planta Maestra* can still be of benefit even though she is only experienced once. Or maybe she is for everyone; however, she has a different timing and length process for everyone. It may also be the omen in one's life (e.g. at one point it may not have worked or been felt but in the future it can). Transpersonal therapy allows individuals seeking a sense of meaning to the "spiritual void within a troubled society" (Cowley, 1996, p. 668), the opportunity to work within the whole-istic spiritual (or religious) realm. As a whole-istic approach that "assesses the

developmental level of the various dimensions of being... [it] is used to describe levels of consciousness that allow access to the intuitive self, or Real Self, and are *higher* on the ladder of being than the personal or *self-actualized* levels" (Cowley, 1993, p.527). In working towards transcending the ego and its companion the *shadow*, I was able to awaken my intuitive unconscious psyche; not only increasing access to inner wisdom and self-awareness, but also support my will and freedom to transform so that I can heal.

*11am July 11, 2013 – As I reflect on my experience last night and my conversation with Ronald this morning, I am beginning to think that by being in the jungle, I can (and forces me to) cleanse, be still, reflect and focus on my yoga practice – and in connecting with the moon's energies and pay attention to my dreams I am able to increase my ability to self-reflect and connect with my inner wisdom. I know that I still have quite some time ahead of me and perhaps things will change; however, right now it feels as though this is what I need to be doing. Perhaps by being placed in a space where I have nothing else to do but to mediate, think and reflect, that this well needed habit will become a part of who I am. In addition, I am also cleansing my body from toxic foods and substances. Whether Ayahuasca is for me or not, and whether I go through moments of doubt regarding my process here, I need to be here and for the time duration that I allocated myself. Habits and thoughts do not necessarily change over night! I must say though that I feel blessed to have this opportunity to heal and self-reflect. A major theme I am noticing is to move from fears to trust, from doubt and analysis paralysis to intuition – and so how do I overcome this?*

A transpersonal approach to therapy facilitates the process of individual transformation through the use of transcending experiences and various techniques and transpersonal tools such as meditation, contemplation, intuition, yoga, biofeedback, breath training, inward focusing, visualization, dreamwork, and guided imagery (Ajaya, 1997; Boss, 1980; Hutton, 1994), which can facilitate access to "realms beyond the personal and facilitate healing of unresolved personal issues," helping clients access their spiritual nature that can provide them with "motivating energy toward meeting the potential for self-development and self-transformation" (Carroll, 2010, p.11) as well as

support them towards “connecting with all which exists - with self, others, and God or the transcendent” (Carroll, 2010, p.9). Ayahuasca provided me with a transcending experience, as a process of moving towards connecting with my authentic *Self*, which can only be done by transcending the ego. She facilitated the healing of unresolved personal issues related to my fears and allowed me to discover the healing benefits of my yoga practice, and of analyzing my dreams. Thus, Ayahuasca facilitated my motivation and awareness of the tools I have at my disposal that can support me in moving towards my authentic *Self*.

### ***Individuation through dreams***

*AM July 13, 2013 – Last, night I had another detailed dream. After analyzing it, the main element that stuck with me was the spa’s logo I saw. I remember thinking how amazed I was at the logo. It was a letter M, which then looked like it was part of a tree with roots. Part of their objective was to get to the roots of the problems so that the Self (physical, spiritual and mental) could bloom like a tree (and in the roots of the logo were written the problems). Now that I write the interpretation of my dream, I feel that this could be the logo for my transformational healing institute/centre! Maybe the yoga tree pose?*

Dreams have the ability to bring into reality “the whole human being – that is individuation” (Jung, 1933, p.26). I find it fascinating how we spend almost half of our lives sleeping, in a more or less unconscious state – a state where we dream, which “is specifically the utterance of the unconscious” (Jung, 1933, p.11) – yet we don’t acknowledge the information that comes from the unconscious psyche. Since our unconscious psyche can speak to us through our dreams, dreams have the ability to “give information about the secrets of the inner life and reveal to the dreamer hidden factors of his personality” (Jung, 1933, p.16). Jung (1933) believed that:

It is certain that consciousness consists not only of wishes and fears, but of vastly more than these, and it is highly probable that the unconscious psyche contains a wealth of contents and living forms equal to or even greater than does consciousness, which is characterized by concentration, limitation and exclusion. (p.10)

Therefore, as I analyzed a series of dreams and identified important contents and basic themes, I was able to “consult the unconscious without external help” (Jung, 1933, p.13) and discover information that was pertinent to my pursuit of having my own business. I was never able to pinpoint exactly what it would be in the health and wellness field; however, given that the content of dreams “should be treated as a contributory factor in framing our conscious outlook” (Jung, 1933, p.18), I was able to analyze – in-depth – the meaning behind them. And so, it was in writing my dreams and their context, that I was able to work on my own interpretations; allowing me to learn “how to consult the unconscious without the doctor’s help” (Jung, 1933, p.14). A tool I began to learn throughout my journey to be very valuable for my healing journey, and for working towards connecting with the essence of my being.

*AM July 14, 2013 – As Ronald mentioned yesterday, all shamans began by being sick and by curing themselves before they went on to dedicate their lives curing others. I feel as though this is my true nature, my authentic Self – to facilitate a healing process with others. To heal how? I am unsure yet; however, perhaps this will come to me as I continue this personal healing journey. I do know that this is what my MS diagnosis provided me with; the opportunity to search ways to heal myself so that I could be of service to others seeking to heal...*

*...Counselling and yoga are two ways of working with others towards healing. I always knew that what I wanted to do was to work with people in finding happiness. When I was a teenager and in my early adulthood, I would respond to what I wanted to do by saying that I wanted to make people happy, and that seeing people happy made me happy. I now strongly believe that by facilitating the process for others to find happiness, that I too can heal. I also find that being in a healing environment is healing in itself. The positive energy vibrations of happiness must have an impact not only on my mind (and thus heal the mind-body connection of dis-ease), but also on a cellular level – regenerating cells as Ronald was talking about during our seminar.*

*Perhaps the spa's logo image of a tree's roots under the letter M that I saw in my dream on the night of the 12th, and then later as a tree with roots in my yoga practice (as I did the tree pose), could be not only my business logo but also bringing about to my consciousness an awareness that yoga is an element of my spiritual nature? Or perhaps that my transformational healing institute/centre would look like a spa that would include different transpersonal modalities? I'm so excited of this new awareness about my path! I must remind myself, through self-discipline, to focus on cleansing the mind and body, connecting with my spiritual nature through yoga and school/training (trying to have a main focus on transpersonal therapy as much as possible) so that I can have a good foundation in order to start my business.*

It was by analyzing a series of my dreams, in addition to my Ayahuasca ceremonial experiences along with the post-reflections, that led me through a process of individuation, supported by the mind-calming effects of my yoga practice. This process supported me towards connecting with my authentic *Self* – to connect with my spiritual nature and intuition through yoga so that I can in the process heal myself before facilitating healing for others. And since transpersonal therapy is not about owning “a toolchest of techniques” rather it is about a therapist who “can go into a place of not-knowing, and wait for inspiration” (Rowan, 2002, p.105), it is essential that as a therapist I do my own inner work with my consciousness and intuitive abilities prior to working with a client in a transpersonal context. While intuition for a client can provide them with critical guidance for their process of moving forward in a positive direction (Birnbaum and Birnbaum, 2006), for a therapist it is that which will “provide the psychic support for working transpersonally” (Cortright, 1997, p.57). Hence my need to continue pursuing my personal healing journey in order to increase my own intuitive abilities, develop my consciousness and heal the *shadow* in order to become a whole and complete person.

*7:30am July 18, 2013 – I'm starting to wonder whether dreams become conscious only when there is a message for our conscious minds. Last weeks dreams were incredibly useful to me, especially around my yoga practice and my transformational healing institute/centre. Was the reflection on the two specific images in my dream, which triggered my intuition as the voice of my unconscious psyche?*

While my dreams were the “utterance of [my] unconscious” speaking to me in images (Jung, 1933, p.11), it is through the analysis of my dreams as I connected the unconscious psyche to my conscious ego that lead me closer towards the “rediscovery of the law of [my] own being” (Jung, 1933, p.26). Jung (1933) believed that dreams give us information about the secrets of the inner life and can reveal hidden factors our personality to us since dreams are a source of information and “our most effective aids in the task of building up the personality” – and this information “is to be taken in all seriousness as something that has actually happened to us; it should be treated as a contributory factor in framing our conscious outlook” (p.18).

*PM July 14, 2013 – As mentioned by Ronald, the amount of the Ayahuasca I took could continue to work at more subtle levels post ceremony (even after the state of trance) for up to a week. He also mentioned that paying attention to my dreams is especially important, which I have been doing. Especially since Ayahuasca still works but at a more subtle intensity and can affect our dreams in a therapeutic manner as it makes the connections clearer for us. Makes sense to me, given what I have been experiencing with my dreams since I first took Ayahuasca!*

*1pm July 16, 2013 – During lunch Ronald and I continued to talk about dreams and Ayahuasca. I mentioned how I was reading a book written by Carl Jung about dreams and so I asked him if he analyzed his own. He said that he did; however, not specifically in relation to linking consciousness and unconsciousness. He does look to see if he gets any messages (or clarity) through them. We then spoke about the differences between Jung and Freud. How Freud saw the unconscious as a dark space and dreams as wishful thoughts (Globus, 1934), while Jung saw the unconscious and our dreams as the source of wisdom that resides in our inner world that complements and balances our conscious world, and so helping us individuate (Jung, 1933).*

*I started to realize that my journey here with Ayahuasca has been a process of individuation in itself since I've had an opportunity to become aware of my fears and the*

*shadow aspects of my ego that interfered with my ability to connect with my unconscious and intuitive psyche, which I am learning to bridge by analyzing my dreams as a process of bringing about that harmonious unit. Ayahuasca has brought me clarity (re: already having all the tools I need to heal the shadow that may have an impact on the mind-body connection of my MS, and thus preventing me to become my authentic Self). I feel clearer than ever on how to walk my path that lays ahead of me without having past fears block me. Perhaps the energetic vibrations coming from Ayahuasca within me has also helped me enormously – but that we will never be able to causally prove... What really matters in the end is that I feel clear of my role within this oneness of our universe, earth and collective unconscious – and finding my spiritual nature.*

### **Theme Two Conclusion**

*11am July 13, 2013 – My goodness, after a yoga session I feel amazing, much stronger and vital. As I continue to reflect post my first Ayahuasca session, I am realizing more and more that Ayahuasca is not for me; however, that one session was great to make me realize that I already have all the tools that I need!*

*AM July 14, 2013 – Ronald said that what I drank on Wednesday was sufficient enough to stay and work in my body for a week. Even though some people participate in daily ceremonies, I feel good just the way things are going. I can definitely understand and grasp the clarity of Ayahuasca based on how I have been experiencing it thus far. Things seem to be so clear to me these days, especially with the path I am to choose to help me connect with my spiritual nature and to no longer fear what does not serve me well. On a side note, I think that I am currently feeling La Planta Maestra a little throughout my body or a slight feeling of a current running through my body. I'm not sure that I'm liking this foreign substance in my body. I much prefer the natural state of transformation through the ecstatic stages that yoga gives me. Anyhow, let's explore while we are here.*

In transpersonal therapy, the goals for the process of spiritual growth are aimed at achieving “fulfillment of one’s potential which is also called *individuation*, self-actualization, and self-realization,” which promote “*qualitative changes* in one’s view of the world which leads to greater connectedness with self, others, and all existence” (Carroll, 2010, p.6-7). In this chapter, I took you along my transpersonal journey in transcending my ego and in connecting with my inner wisdom that resides within my unconscious psyche. This ongoing process of individuation – which is a

natural process in itself and can also be facilitated (Jacobi, 1934) – allowed me to move towards my authentic *Self*, and away from fears so that I can continue supporting my healing process. In the following chapter, healing through my increased connectedness to others and all that exists will be explored. This first experience with Ayahuasca as a transpersonal tool, allowed me to not only enhance my intuitive insight, ability to self-reflect, increase self awareness and personal transformation as integral elements to my MS healing journey, but also to connect with my spiritual nature so that I can move towards individuating into my authentic *Self*. Together, Ronald and *La Planta Maestra* were my transpersonal therapeutic co-facilitators during my process of discovering the benefits of my daily yoga practice accompanied by self-study in calming the chatter in my mind, and how analyzing my dreams as a means of connecting with my inner wisdom could provide me with answers and themes that can help me through the individuation process as well.

During this first session, I began by exploring the dark and unknown parts of my being (i.e. shadow) as I experienced increased awareness, I experienced a crisis of the limited understanding of the self and my thoughts. Interestingly, personal crisis is one of the most important elements that address the three dimensions of dis-ease, and often occurs “before a successful healing [including physical, psychological, and spiritual healing] and negative experiences become a catalyst for healing and positive transformation” (Fotiou, 2012, p.35). And so, in speaking with Ronald about this session, he mentioned that in moments of crisis, one is given an opportunity to re-evaluate and reformulate our perspectives. Therefore, my first ceremony was the beginning of

contemplation for the next two weeks to come. The main epiphany for me during this first ceremony was that I already have all the tools that I need in order to heal (i.e. yoga and dream analysis), and that I can enhance (and trust) my intuition that comes out of me when I implement these tools. This enhanced intuition also told me to continue connecting with the moon as a complementary and energetic means of concentrating and turning inwards as I continue to embrace the eight limbs of yoga as a form of self-study. The latter is especially important given that by incorporating a yoga practice into my routine, I can be supported in returning to my peaceful state, which is “the natural condition of the mind” (Satchidananda, 2012, p.4). Through this first experience with Ayahuasca, I became aware that I would be able to heal as I transformed my fears into trust, and that in order to do so, I have to turn my senses inwards and listen to my inner wisdom, continue to contemplate under the moon, and deepen my yoga practice.

*7am July 17 – Today I must rest and fast after lunch since it will be my second Ayahuasca ceremony beginning at 6pm, at sunset... Today I do not fear it. I look forward to the experience since it may even be my last and I would like to have an ecstatic and liberating experience during the trance this time (vs. only afterwards). Mind you, this is what happened with last week's session; however, it was more subtle and that feeling of self-awareness, awakening and liberation occurred throughout several days. It's almost like what I was to experience in five hours occurred through the span of five days in an intensity that was more subtle and manageable for me, given my fears of the unknown and altered states of mind. I do feel that I achieved in these past days what one can achieve in a five hour session. I feel very good about myself and feel as though Ayahuasca has supported the mind-body connection of my MS healing process as I begin to overcome my fears, which are creating emotional blockages within me.*

In order to access my authentic *Self*, I need to transcend my mind (Satchidananda, 2012). Even though I feel that I am almost there, I will never be there. I can; however, keep moving towards this authentic *Self* as a process of healing. Why not? What do I have

to lose? In the end, it is all beneficial for me... but what about the world around me? I don't feel as though my true nature is to be an anthropocentric, ethnocentric and individualistic being! So how does all this benefit not only my healing journey but all that exists? How does this relate to my choice to be a therapist in the field of structural social work? Can my healing also support the healing of others and *La Pachamama*?

## **Oneness: personal transformation as an essential element of social change**

### ***Introduction to Theme Three: re-spiriting humanity for social justice?***

*5pm July 15, 2013 – We are so fortunate in many ways in Canada yet we seem to suffer high levels of depression and other individualist syndromes. In what we call “the first world/the developed world,” material wealth is arguably experienced by most (in comparison to ‘third world’ countries), yet souls are commonly in a state of un-ease and disconnected to the collective unconscious that connects us all to one another, to Pachamama (since there is a tendency to believe that we own Mother Earth versus being a part of her), and to the universe as a whole (i.e. the cosmos). Watching “D’Autres Mondes” [Other Worlds], a french documentary by Jean Kounen (2004) and his experience with Ayahuasca shamans and the plant in the peruvian Amazon, was a fascinating experience since it demonstrated how the “developed” world can learn from “primitive” cultures, and that the “developed” world should be called the primitive ones seeing that its world is so disconnected from its unconscious realm, nature and that of the spiritual world. Living in our rational and objective minds may have brought us material wealth; however, it has impoverished our souls. An element so essential for living life in harmony within ourselves and with all that exists (i.e. life forms that are interdependent to one another). We should also value the intuitive and spiritual nature of the unconscious psyche just as highly as the rational conscious ego as I can attest upon reflecting on my first Ayahuasca ceremony.*

*Kounen (2004) discussed how in some cultures, the use of psychocatalytic botanical brewed mixtures by Shamans have been used for centuries as a means of connecting with the spiritual and physical world; allowing to discover purpose and in turn a sense of vitality. It seems to me that transpersonal therapeutic modalities such as Ayahuasca are able to offer this ‘awakening’ to our so called “developed” world and its “first world” problems. Perhaps, these tools will not directly solve the systemic causes of poverty (for instance); however, finding a sense of purpose and meaning to our existence and developing a sense of empathy towards all that exists and oneness could provide healing to societies, which have lost their soul – a reality that the naked eye can quickly see is affecting our global community with its increased levels of mental health dis-eases. Perhaps it will take a long time before Ayahuasca can become legal; however, working with other transpersonal elements/methods (e.g. yoga and dream analysis) to achieve that sense of oneness without the use of state altering substances can be used to create that sense of empathy and unity with all that exists?*

Jung (1933) identified the modern spiritual problem as individuals having:

lost all the metaphysical certainties of [their] medieval brother, and set up in their place the ideals of material security, general welfare and humaneness...[where] science has destroyed even the refuge of the inner life... what was once a sheltering haven has become a place of terror. (p. 204-5)

However, Jung (1933) does note that “while man, hesitant and questioning, contemplates a world that is distracted with treaties of peace and pacts of friendship, democracy and dictatorship, capitalism and Bolshevism, his spirit yearns for an answer that will allay the turmoil of doubt and uncertainty” (Jung, 1933, p.211). This is why (during this time) there had been a rapid growth in interest in psychology around the world, which Jung (1933) believed showed that:

modern man has to some extent turned his attention from material things to his own subjective processes... This “psychological” interest of the present time shows that man expects something from psychic life which he has not received from the outer world: something which our religions, doubtless, ought to contain, but no longer do contain – at least for the modern man... And so given that various forms of religion no longer appear to the modern man to come from within to be expressions of his own psychic life; for him they are to be classed with the things of the outer world... The modern man abhors dogmatic postulates taken on faith and the religions based upon them. He holds them valid only in so far as their knowledge-content seems to accord with his experience of the deeps of psychic life. He wants to know - to experience for himself... Our age wishes to have actual experience for itself, and not to make assumptions based on the experiences of other ages. (p.205-8)

Therefore, Jung (1933) saw a return in interest of the unconscious mind during his decade through the “widespread interest in all sorts of psychic phenomena as manifested in the growth of spiritualism, astrology, theosophy, and so forth,” which he argued that the world had not experienced this since the end of the seventeenth century (Jung, 1933, p. 206). While I was reading *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* by Carl Jung (1933) as a self-study book for my Ayahuasca journey, I felt that his observations are very applicable in our current times. Especially, given that it relates to the spiritual malaise that transpersonal theorists speak of, that is experienced in our current day society.

*11am July 17, 2013 – After reading Jung’s (1933) chapter entitled “The Modern Spiritual Problem,” I find it interesting how in his time Eastern contemplative thought was seen as lesser than Western science and technology while now Eastern contemplative and spiritual practices are creeping back into our lives, just as he had predicted. For instance, Jung (1933) mentioned how S.H. Schmitz traced “the parallels between*

*psychoanalysis and yoga” (p.216), and continued on to say how “psychoanalysis itself and the lives of thought to which it gives rise – surely a distinctive Western development – are only a beginner’s attempt to what is an immemorial art in the East” (p.216). Perhaps my increased awareness about the benefits of my yoga practice is related to my authentic Self? Maybe this is my contribution to healing and social justice... to facilitate compassion, peace and joy?*

Jung’s (1933) perspective is similar to that of current transpersonal theorists whose theories “evolved out of a cultural context exacerbated by not only an existential vacuum, but a spiritual one as well” (Cowley and Derezotes, 2011, p.552). For instance, Cowley and Derezotes (2011) note that transpersonal theory “arose to serve the dispirited man or woman in an age characterized by spiritual poverty and a lack of traditional knowledge” and that experience this pain as “a hole in the soul,” which they believe is characterized by economic insecurity, addiction, violence, and religious extremism (p.552). As a result, Cowley and Derezotes (2011) argue that the most prominent presenting symptom of the day is a sense of demoralization or dis-spirituation, which is often oversimplified as clinical depression. This makes me wonder whether the increased levels of depression experienced/documenting leads to lower levels of civic participation and thus increased levels of apathy? If so – and given that a core element of transpersonal psychology that is consistent with spiritual healing traditions is that “the directed inner activities of a person may affect others” (Sollod, 2005, p.277) – do we need to increase access to spiritual health care as a means of ‘re-spiriting’ our souls in order for the spiritual healing needed to occur so that our global society as a whole can find meaning, purpose and connection – a sense of oneness (e.g. collective consciousness)?

## ***Second Ayahuasca Ceremony: My Spiritual Awakening and the Epiphany of Oneness***

There are too many persons to whom Freudian psychology is dearer than the Gospels, and to whom the Russian Terror means more than civic virtue. And yet all these people are our brothers, and in each of us there is at least one voice which seconds them - for in the end there is a psychic life which embraces us all [i.e. the collective unconscious].

– (Jung, 1933, p.212)

*5:30pm July 17, 2013 – As the sun is starting to set during these Amazonian winter months, the juggle is singing a soothing melody. The view and sounds are relaxing to my soul that feels very happy and blessed with who I am, what I have, and life in general. I look forward to the teachings that will be brought to my awareness during (and post) this second Ayahuasca ceremony.*

I now realize how the time spent reflecting in isolation after the personal crisis during my first ceremony, led me to re-evaluate and re-formulate my personal path, which was of great benefit to me. During this time, Ayahuasca continued to play a subtle role in my individuation process. Now that I am about to embark on my second ceremony, I am beginning to move closer to that natural state of peace.

*11pm July 17, 2013 (post ceremony) – I am now back in my room, tired, but I want to briefly jot down what felt like an internal dialogue between my unconscious psyche, conscious ego and Ayahuasca. I think what I heard at most during this dialogue was that I have it all already (similarly to my first ceremony). At that moment everything (especially my mind and body) felt heavenly. I felt pure love and oneness with everything around me and with the sounds. My body felt as though it was being wrapped and then hugged by Ayahuasca. Later in the ceremony, Ronald and I had a wonderful conversation about Ayahuasca and God, and how the concept of God is love. I keep thinking that whatever we spiritually seek for, that getting in touch with our spiritual nature requires love for all that exists, La Pachamama and the universe. This is my concept of spirituality at least. Especially given that it complements the goals of social justice so nicely. Or better said, facilitates the goals of social justice! Anyhow, later in the evening when I thought it was all done, I had visions of many images and symbols. I saw the same bright shinning star from my last ceremony. Now I saw it twice, at the beginning and towards the end. The star was shinning so brightly white while my eyes were shut and I was listening to more icaros being played by Ronald. Amongst many images and symbols, I remember the shinning star the most since it was the most vivid symbol of them all. I also, remember seeing a cross; however, it faded and was replaced with the bright shining star as though to tell me that even though Catholicism has been a part of my upbringing, it was good that I questioned since my curiosity led me to the world of universal energy.*

*This shining star reminded me of the star of Venus (the shiniest star in the sky) and was shining in front of my 3rd eye chakra (the seed of our intuition). Basically reminding me to trust my intuition – something that dreams and yoga foster and heighten. La Planta Maestra has treated me like a (heavy-duty) therapist and a messenger-facilitator between my conscious ego and unconscious psyche (inner self). Like Jung (1933) once said, we spend half of our lives sleeping yet we don't pay attention to that voice, which contains so much information! I feel happy that during the first ceremony, La Planta Maestra made me feel and experience fear and now she is making me feel pure love... bliss... oneness... Wow.*

As a social worker in the pursuit of social justice, this spiritual awakening of mine is making me think whether healing work is the specific path for me – especially after experiencing this feeling of pure love, bliss and oneness. Humanity seems to be carrying with it “tenable pain, loneliness and deep longing to be free,” Brennan<sup>23</sup> (1988), argues that the work of a healer is a work of love since:

the healer reaches into the painful areas of the soul and gently reawakens hope. S/he gently reawakens the ancient memory of who the soul is. S/he touches the spark of God in each cell of the body and gently reminds it that it is already God, and already being God, it inexorably flows with the Universal Will towards health and wholeness. (p.131-2)

My goodness! All these synchronicities in my life since I last experienced Ayahuasca. A woman I encountered while I was travelling in the USA, four months after my Ayahuasca journey, commented on my energy field. She had no idea what I was writing my thesis about; however, I felt her energy too and so we began to talk about the metaphysical world of energy. She recommended a book from a program she took in the 90s. Upon writing the title *Hands of Light: A Guide to Healing Through the Human Energy Field* – where Brennan (1988) brings forth, the first in-depth study of the human energy field for people who seek happiness, health and their full potential – it dawned upon me that this

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<sup>23</sup> An American author, physicist, spiritual healer, businesswoman and teacher working in the field of energy healing who brings a new paradigm for the human being in health, relationship and dis-ease.

book fully resonates with me. Especially since it discusses energy blocks leading to physical dis-eases, the causes of dis-ease from an energy paradigm, the process of healing, amongst other very interesting subjects that I am actually exploring through this thesis! After my master's I must look into how the human energy field looks, functions, is disturbed, is healed and interacts with others! Now back to oneness, or better said, continuing onto oneness...

*7:30am July 18, 2013 – Ronald says that the concept of God is the spirit that Ayahuasca allows you to connect with. During last night's ceremony, I felt it as being one with everything – like the concept of oneness that is common in yogic philosophy. However, I feel it as not only a connection to it all but as love. I feel that the current mainstream understandings of love are somewhat narrow; perhaps even too rational. I feel as though love is greater than the love for oneself and another being such as a partner, parent, child, pet or friend. In more depth, it is a feeling of joyfulness, warmth and empathy towards everything that we are connected to, interconnected with, and a part of. For some reason, I feel as though this feeling of oneness as love, as God, can be achieved through the eight limbs of yoga that Patanjali describes as (1) Yama, which consists of non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, continence and non-greed; (2) Niyama, which consists of purity, contentment, accepting but not causing pain, studying spiritual books and worshiping God [to self or surrender to the universe]; (3) Asanas, which consist of the posture practice in yoga; (4) Pranayama, which consists of the controlling of breath; (5) Pratyahara, which consists of the sense of withdrawal; (6) Dharana, which consists of concentration; (7) Dhyana, which consists of meditation, and (8) Samadhi, which consists of contemplation, absorption and achieving a superconscious state.*

Satchidananda (2012) describes how the first five limbs of Raja yoga have benefits, obstacles, accomplishment, and ways to overcome the obstacles – they are the practice stages of yoga. The three final limbs are known as the “inner steps of Raja yoga” (p.xi) and comes to the faithful practitioner, which is the portion on accomplishments; the last being Samadhi (contemplation, enlightenment,etc.) Therefore, there is plenty of work for me to do and so perhaps before I embark on another journey of learning a new transpersonal modality, I should remind myself of the importance of being in the

moment, of living the present with presence, and what *La Planta Maestra* has been telling me – that I already have all the tools that I need to heal. Perhaps once I feel healed that I can move into the field of human energy, or maybe I should just let it come to me when the time is right, just like Ayahuasca did at its perfect time.

*7:30am July 18, 2013 con't – ...I also realize that it is important to reflect and become aware of the five afflictions, which Patanjali talks about in sutras 2.1 to 2.12: (2) ignorance of our true self; (2) ego (e.g. somehow we need to compete because we are different); (3) attachment to pleasure; (4) aversion to pain; and (5) attachment to life (fear of death).*

Patanjali identifies five life obstacles in *sutras 2.3*, which are ignorance, egoism, attachment, hatred and clinging to bodily life. Satchidananda (2012) discusses the order of importance as being significant since:

because of ignorance of the Self, egoism comes. Because of egoism, there is attachment to rings for the ego's selfish pleasure. Because sometimes the things we are attached to do not come or are taken away, hatred for those who get in our way comes in. And, finally, because we are attached to things and afraid of death, there is clinging to life in the body. (p.80)

As my journey continued in the jungle, and the more I was studying about the *Self*, I began to realize how not only do I connect with the practice of yoga, but also with the yogic philosophy through the *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* as a means of connecting with my spiritual nature. This process led me to a greater awareness of the benefits of implementing yoga into my practice as a therapist who believes in the beneficial role that spirituality plays in social justice – especially as a means of connecting to everything that exists and having a sense of compassion towards humanity, *La Pachamama* and the cosmos.

Realistically, I think that I can only work *towards* the 8th limb (being that of self-actualization) through the first seven, in addition to being aware of the afflictions and obstacles that “can be destroyed by resolving them back into their primal cause [the ego],” which “in the active state, they can be destroyed by meditation” (Sutra 2.10-2.11 in Satchidananda, 2012, p. 88). In addition, I should also keep in mind the *sutra* that I keep being drawn to, which I mentioned in my journal entry: “accepting pain as help for purification, study of spiritual books and surrender to the Supreme Being constitute yoga in practice” (sutra 2.1 in Satchidananda, 2012, p.75), can allow me to move *towards* connecting with my authentic *Self*. Also, Satchidananda (2012) further expands on this *sutra*, which I should also keep in mind as I embrace this spirituality.

Satchidananda (2012) commented on the first element of *sutra 2.1* by discussion how it is by burning verbal, physical and mental impurities through self-discipline (an aid to spiritual progress whereas self-torture is an obstacle), can we experience its purifying effects. As we control the senses and organs [through self-discipline], which “often seems to bring pain in the beginning, it eventually ends in happiness...” (p.75). The second element of this *sutra* is to study that, which concerns the true *Self* and not merely analyze the emotions and mind “as the psychologists and psychiatrists do,” but to study “anything that elevates our minds and reminds us of our true Self should be studied... trying to understand every word – studying with heart” (p.77). Furthermore, Satchidananda (2012) believes that “we can hear things, study, form our own opinions, use our imagination, but nothing can equal experience...the Self cannot be known by theory alone... [rather] it is only when you “quote” from your own experience that your words have weight” (p.77-8).

It is very important to experience what we learn since theory and practice go hand in hand, and inform one another. By only focusing on theory, we will not be able to understand the experience that enhances the theory. Lastly, Satchidananda (2012) elaborates the third point in *sutra 2.1* as dedicating “the fruits of our actions to God or to humanity, which is God in manifestation...Let us all dedicate our lives for the sake of the entire humanity” (p.78-9). And so, as I work towards becoming aware of the five afflictions and by practicing the eight limbs of yoga, I can hopefully minimize the five obstacles and move *towards* achieving self-realization (Satchidananda, 2012). Thus, I shall keep practicing yoga as a means of attaining my authentic *Self* and continue to dedicate my life and my actions for the sake of the entire humanity. Thus, the *Yoga Sutras* seem to be a complementary philosophy and ethics to my work in becoming a transpersonal therapist with a structural lens to my work.

*6:30am July 19, 2013 – I can see myself awakening to the importance of self-discipline, which I am learning through my yoga practice. The self-awareness that I have been experiencing in the jungle these past few weeks has made me realize that I need to incorporate self-discipline for my spiritual growth as a tool/process of fully transforming to my authentic self (or true Self as the sutras would day) versus self-torturing myself through unhealthy habits and which is an obstacle.*

*I find that my study of and with La Planta Maestra has provided me with this first step; a jump start or push towards incorporating self-discipline and study that concerns my true Self. It has also allowed me to become aware of how essential yoga – as a psychology of the mind – is supporting not only my MS healing journey but also my spiritual journey of individuation/transforming towards the essence of who I am in which the mind will decrease its interference with the messages being provided by my intuition, my inner voice. It has also made me realize that dream analysis and yoga will be essential elements in my practice as a therapist working with individuals seeking to heal, and that Ayahuasca perhaps would be best left for those who have heavy blockages (e.g. addictions, chronic depression) and may need a quick awakening and/or moment of self-awareness. Sadly, Ayahuasca is not legal in Canada; however, perhaps in the future if*

*advocates such as Gabor Maté (2004) continue to challenge conventional biomedical models to treating dis-eases.*

*11:11am July 20, 2013 – I had a nice yoga practice this morning. I feel amazing and inspired to read some more sutras as a means to self study through spiritual books. I'm discovering how I enjoy combining a practice followed by yoga sutras. It is inspiring. It inspires me and makes me feel in unity with all that exists and connected to my spiritual nature; often (if not always) allowing me to feel and think in the vibration of authentic Self and my unity with all that exists through the feeling of unconditional love.*

Yoga differs from most other psychological approaches, which predate the fourth force of transpersonal psychology since “they usually believe you have to understand everything with the mind and that beyond it you cannot understand anything” (Satchidananda, 2012, p.78). Yoga goes beyond and claims that there is knowledge possible without the mind since all that we know through the mind is limited and conditioned, which is why experience is seen as valuable, and this includes transpersonal experiences given that yoga itself is a transpersonal modality with an integral. Why? Because:

it does not simply advocate meditation but takes into consideration the entire life of a person. Its philosophy is scientific. It welcomes and, in fact, demands experimental verification by the student. Its ultimate aim is to bring about a thorough metamorphosis of the individual who practices it sincerely. Its goal is nothing less than the total transformation of a seemingly limited physical, mental and emotional persona into a fully illuminated, thoroughly harmonized and perfected being – from an individual with likes and dislikes, pains and pleasures, successes and failures, to a sage of permanent peace, joy and selfless dedication to the entire creation. (Satchidananda, 2012, p.xiii)

Ayahuasca on the other hand does not feel like an integral approach since it does not always provide benefits to the physical dimension of the individual. Or perhaps it is that after drinking Ayahuasca the physical healing *may* come? And this is a *maybe* since not everyone experiences *La Planta Maestra* the same way. However, if Ayahuasca has the ability to provide positive changes related to disease where a change of self-concept or

conducts is an outcome (Schmid et al., 2010), then perhaps it can have an impact on the physical if the mind-body connection of illness hypothesis continues to grow? Even though everyone also experiences yoga differently, the goals are the same, and the path is straight forward. I guess the goals of Ayahuasca are the same as well; however, yet much more complex and diverse. However, Fotiou (2012) does mention how “what makes ayahuasca such an encompassing healing tool is the holistic approach of ayahuasca shamanism, its attempt to treat the whole person,” since it “it works on three levels: the physical, the psychological, and the spiritual. Using this model, shamans can claim that they can heal anything, from cancer to a fragmented soul” (p.8). Based on this model, the physical, psychological and spiritual are intertwined and not separate from one another. Therefore, perhaps Ayahuasca is an integral approach to healing, and may even be able to help the healing procuress through a total transformation with a quick death of the ego that creates all the obstacles, and that interfere with the path to oneness and self-realization, similarly to which the *Yoga Sutras* talk about? Ayahuasca has been referred as “the best psychologist in the world” given its effectiveness, which is why many Westerners seek (and have benefitted from) ayahuasca today for psychological healing (Fotiou, 2012, p.8).

During this process of connecting with all that exists through the feeling of unconditional love was an interesting experience given that I have recently been learning about how to love is to let go of fear. Another synchronicity? Perhaps. Since January 2013, I have been working with several individuals in a therapeutic environment that

experience fear. One day (months prior to my Ayahuasca journey), a client brought in a book that was recommended to him by an anxiety group facilitator called *Love is Letting Go of Fear*. Its basic premise is that love is “the total absence of fear” and that “with love as our only reality, health and wholeness can be viewed as inner peace, and healing can be seen as letting go of fear... Love then is letting go of fear” (Jampolsky and Prather, 2004, p. 17-8). This brings me back to my first Ayahuasca ceremony in which I experienced fear and where I discussed in great length – in my first findings chapter – how I realize that I must let go of fears and experience the moment, to live with presence. I not only discovered how yoga can help me with these tools, but also how dreams can help me better understand my inner wisdom that can support me to trust my intuition. Perhaps Ronald was right in that synchronicities start occurring more and more after experiencing Ayahuasca as a means of bringing you closer to your truth and essence. I hope my personal journey is making sense to you since it is enlightening and inspiring as I keep writing.

So, now that I read that we begin to experience a personal transformation “as we help ourselves and each other let go of fear” (Jampolsky and Prather, 2004, p.17), these experiences with *La Planta Maestra* are coming together for me. Especially after reflecting on this particular Ayahuasca ceremony. I can now see the link of letting go of my fears so that I can transform, but also that in helping others let go of fear can we all transform. The question that still seems to remain for me is: how exactly will this be manifested for me? I am now aware that yoga and dreams are two key pieces to my process of letting go of fears and for self-transformation; however, what is my role when

being of service to others? How can I incorporate my passion for healing in my path as a therapist? Also, how does this spiritual philosophy complement (or does it?) structural social work?

***Theme three conclusion: The link between transpersonal theory, spirituality, structural social work and social change***

For once a man has reached a certain state of maturity through the individuation process it becomes possible for him to see his apparently insurmountable personal problems in the light of objective problems common to all humanity.

– (Jacobi, 1967, p.46)

*9am July 20, 2013 – Overall (so far) Ayahuasca has confirmed to me that I'm walking my path as I need to be and that I have the tools and resources already at my disposal to heal myself. Even though my visions were not as intense as others may experience it, I always saw the energetic grid; the multidimensional geometric grid that is commonly seen within an Ayahuasca ceremony. The first session was more based on overcoming fears by being reminded that I have all that I need to heal, while the second was experiencing unconditional love, being connected with all through love – feeling oneness. Ayahuasca thus far has given me a different perspective of my spiritual path. I'm not sure I will work with her again since I feel as though I have received from her what she had to offer, teach and awaken me. But for now I feel complete. I will give it a last moment tomorrow though, prior to my departure from the jungle on Tuesday.*

It is said that there is a “positive relationship between spirituality and social justice advocacy” (Prior and Quinn, 2012, p.186). In addition, Lee & Barrett (2007) found that “a commitment to justice can be strengthened by personal faith and professional experiences” (p.17). They argued that “further knowledge of the connections between spirituality and social justice could ideally enhance the integrity of development in the social work profession as a whole” (p.17). As per my experience with my Ayahuasca ceremonies thus far, it seems to me that transpersonal theory and therapy have the ability to support the social justices goals of structural social work since it not only brings about personal transformation through a spiritual awakening but also a sense of

connectedness for humanity as a whole, including *La Pachamama*. Transpersonal therapy has the ability to bring about an awareness of our collective unconsciousness and the interconnectedness of everything that exists. Similarly to transpersonal theory and its modalities, structural social work views both the macro (structural) and the micro (intra-psychic) transformation going hand in hand (Mullaly, 2007). Structural social work “is not anti-psychological, it is ‘anti-mainstream psychological’ and ‘pro-liberation psychology’” (Mullaly, 2007, p.291). This is in essence what transpersonal therapy is about given that “the transpersonal movement in social work and related disciplines is built on a central notion of the unity of the individual and that which is around them, including the rest of humanity” (Leight, 2001; Strohl, 1998 in Prior and Quinn, 2012, p. 176). While structural social work practice has a guiding principle that focuses on oppression and empowering individuals to take collective action – guided by the belief that “everything we do in some way contributes to the goal of social transformation” (Mullaly, 2007, p.288) – transpersonal theory also focuses on empowering individuals by the awakening of consciousness at multiple levels given that the journey towards personal growth has two goals.

The first and more immediate goal of transpersonal theory is that of *self-actualization*, which is “the ability to run one’s own life, to be truly oneself, and to be in control of one’s own destiny as far as is practicable while at the same time respecting the rights and needs of others” (Guest, 1989, p.64). The second goal being more spiritual in nature and is that of *self-realization*, which focuses on “knowing one’s spiritual nature” (p.64). The first primarily focuses on empowering an individual through

increased awareness while the latter focuses on an increased realization (i.e. ‘awakening’ of consciousness) of one’s connectedness to humanity, nature and the universe as a whole. Thus, even though structural social work emphasizes social transformation, it does not neglect personal issues and individual difficulties since these are understood as related (Hick & Murray, 2013). The goals of structural social work is to alleviate “the negative effects of an exploitative and alienating social order on individuals, while simultaneously aiming to transform society (Hick & Murray, 2013, p.110), and the role of the structural social worker “in empowerment-based social work is one of facilitator and support” (Mullaly, 2007, p.302). Therefore, transpersonal therapy can thus complement structural social work as it can help “integrate diverse spiritual approaches to expand the scope of social work “beyond egocentrism, ethnocentrism, humancentrism, and nationalism in order to encompass all beings in a cosmocentric view”” (Canda, 2006, p. 207 in Birnbaum and Birnbaum, 2008, p.100). Since the transpersonal approach has a whole-istic view of the individual in its environment, it should therefore be viewed as complementary to the structural approach given that it values not only the importance of working with both the individual as a unit and the multiple systemic layers, but also in working towards connecting humanity with each other, nature, and the cosmos.

While spirituality is “one’s basic nature and the process of finding meaning and purpose” (Carroll, 2010, p.2) and is a subjective experience of “how we relate to ourselves, to each other, to the earth, and to the cosmos” (Vaughan, 1996, p.51), it can “most simply understood as a person’s desire for an expression of loving connection with everything” (Dezerotes, 2006, p.3). Connectedness is a central theme in spirituality (Prior

and Quinn, 2012). Therefore, incorporating the benefits of awakening one's spiritual nature though transpersonal social work can be of benefit to the structural social work philosophy. In doing so, social workers can support the movement towards transpersonal existence, which "is seen as invoking the loosening or breaking down of those personal boundaries that separate the individual from those around them resulting in the individual becoming more lovingly aware of our interconnectedness with, and our interdependence on, the whole of creation including humanity" (Prior and Quinn, 2012, p.176). Therefore, as spirituality is increasingly becoming a central focus in social work practice, research, and education (Canda, 2005; Canda and Furman, 2010; Cowley, 1996; Derezotes, 2006; Hodge & Bushfield, 2006) – and seeing that spirituality is transpersonal in nature (Prior and Quinn, 2012) – the therapeutic benefits of transpersonal therapy should be further examined.

Transpersonal social work can be a useful approach to: (1) understanding all dimensions of an individual's functioning; (2) supporting the development of inspiration, creativity, intuition, and values, and (3) working towards re-connecting humanity with each other, nature and the cosmos. Not only can transpersonal social work empower an individual at the intra-psychic level, it can also lead to societal transformation by increasing self-awareness of one's connectivity with humanity as a whole, nature and the universe. For example, the results of a study investigating the relationship between spirituality, connectedness with humanity, and the propensity to participate in social justice advocacy suggests a positive relationship between spirituality, connectedness with humanity and social justice advocacy (Prior and Quinn, 2012). Therefore, in order to

create societal change, it is essential that transpersonal therapists work with individuals in finding life purpose, meaning and/or direction in a neoliberal capitalist paradigm – a paradigm that is based on a religion that promotes privatization, individualism, free markets, competition, and material success and progress, which is further alienating and isolating ourselves from one another, nature and the universe as a whole. Transpersonal social work has the ability to support the development of a larger sense of interconnectedness.

Perhaps, the ‘spiritual malaise’ of our contemporary society, which is fuelling a sense of apathy and disconnectedness, can be healed through the mainstreaming of transpersonal social work. An approach that allows humanity to tap into the inner wisdom necessary for both the societal- and self-transformation needed to awaken a sense of connectedness to humanity, nature and the cosmos can be highly beneficial to the unidimensional field of structural social work. Therefore, working with clients from a whole-istic perspective that includes the spiritual nature of self can prove to be promising for the field of social work as we seek to work with others in improving the lives of individuals and humanity's capacity and tendency to participate in social justice advocacy.

*3pm July 19, 2013 – Earlier in our seminar we stopped to take in the view and the breeze of the rainstorm. We even saw a rainbow! It was nice since there was a fire happening close by (the 4th in 2 days!) In this area, people burn their fields for planting/harvesting. However, we talked about how irresponsible that is since it puts neighbouring properties at risk, and nature! If only they drank Ayahuasca to increase their sense of interconnectedness with humanity!*

## **Overall Conclusion: my final ceremony – self-realization and closing the cycle**

*12am July 22, 2013 (post 3rd and final Ayahuasca ceremony) – For this next entry, I will write as many details as possible in order to full grasp my last ceremony – the most intensely experienced throughout this journey... I feel the need to share all that is (and was) going through my mind. It feels so powerfully intense! At the beginning of the trance I was hearing within myself and to the sounds of Ronald's drum, that the essence of my being is to heal with joy and through joy. That this is my true nature, my authentic Self. Healing through joy since the power and energetic vibrations of joy heal both inwards and outwards. I also remember being inspired towards the beginning and the end of the ceremony, to play and sing an icaro melody of my own about the full moon and her healing energies, which was shinning above me. I felt absolute, limitless and infinite joy at the beginning (and in the end, but not in between...)*

*At the beginning I felt pure joy, and I was fully embracing the moment and what IS. No body and no mind, but pure spirit (?) We are all one at some fundamental level, which can be represented by the concept of oneness. At the end of the ceremony I had a feeling of immense joy through the healing powers of laughter (more on this further down as I will soon be writing down the notes that I actively wrote during the ceremony).*

*During the middle part of the ceremony, I experienced a psychedelic-like intensity and I had to lie down, but even laying down was uncomfortable. I could not keep myself sitting up, let alone sitting straight (Ronald mentioned that by sitting up straight, it would help calm down the intensity of the trance since laying down can intensify it). There was not one position that felt comfortable. Ronald told me to relax and try to receive what La Planta Maestra was brewing within me, and to let it happen (just be?!) and to not struggle against it. As I laid down, my eyes were shut most of the time (at odd times I would open them; however, they would just shut themselves). Ronald came twice to my 'rescue' and blew smoke on the palm of my hands and the crown of my head, to alleviate the trance. This section of the trance felt intense (and like an eternity!) It felt as though parts of me that I'd move would float into an out of body experience – like mist drifting away. Then Ronald began to sing his icaros (right at the perfect moment it seemed) as it brought comfort and would at times ground me. At one point he sang the love and God song about my lover and I, which he had sung during the second ceremony. It brought me a sense of joy as I continued to visualize outer space like images that were colourfully floating/flowing in my field of vision. At other times the icaros would make me fly out in space (I could almost say that this was literal since that's how outside of my body I felt). Towards the end of this wave, I begged for water when I was finally able to get myself up (luckily water lowers the intensity). Since we were slowly approaching the end of the ceremony, he agreed to give me some water after having had me just "entregarme a la Madre Ayahuasca," meaning to hand myself over to Mother Ayahuasca. I'm glad I finally did 'hand myself over'; however, this was the part of the trance that I would not want to necessarily experience again since it was nauseating. Ronald mentioned that I was*

*feeling this way since Ayahuasca was working out some knots/blockages, which interestingly I had visualized at the beginning of the intense wave during the trance (he told me this without me even telling him what I had visualized!)*

*Now here are some of the notes I took towards the end of the ceremony last night to complement this journal entry: after the intense wave, Ronald and I conversed a little as his mother would at times snore during a session and he would ask me at times if it bothered me. It didn't. I would say that it sounded like it was part of the symphony of the jungle. We laughed/giggled every time I'd say that, but at this moment his mother had awakened and said that it was not true that she snores (in a jokingly and slightly embarrassed manner). We all started to laugh. It then came to me that the spirit of my grandmother (Mom's mother) was with me all along and embodied through La Señora (that is how I would call Ronald's mother). So my intention to La Madre Ayahuasca at the beginning of the ceremony manifested itself: Ayahuasca closed the circle/cycle of this experience and journey for me. I now realize that the spirit of my grandmother was present during my whole journey in the jungle through La Señora's presence! Interestingly enough, I associate the healing power of joy with my grandmother – and healing through joy was one of my main epiphanies during this ceremony – as the essence of my true nature... Wow!*

*Maybe that's why I got along with La Señora so well; the same way I got along with my grandmother when I was a child, for her joy just like my grandmother's! Interestingly, La Señora was with me for all three ceremonies. I could have had my ceremonies when Ronald's wife was around; however, they always occurred when La Señora was here. The days I felt ready to drink the botanical mixture, she was the one who was around. Even yesterday when it could have been Ronald's wife (and was originally going to be); however, La Señora made her way back from the city. She even jokingly said, upon her arrival today, that I was starting to miss her. This was in part true even though I had just seen her on friday. There must have been a reason why I always drank on the days she would be around. Perhaps, unconsciously I waited for her to be present? For my grandmother's spirit to be present through her? We then listened to some of the healing music I have and enjoy listening to. We listened to a song called "Heart Sutra" and then "Limitless Love," and it was at that moment it came to me that love is limitless... love is joy! Joy heals and thus so does love! We then listened to the "Compassion" song from the "Compassion" CD that synchronistically appeared into my life a couple of years ago. During that moment it came to me that compassion is the answer to the world's spiritual malaise that is fuelling the individualistic disconnect from our inherent connectedness through our collective unconscious. While listening to this song, it felt as though Pachamama was singing. Music is so powerful, therapeutic, healing, inspiring, awakening.*

*I then went outside to moon bathe under the full moon, soaking her energies and feeling inspired at how her vibrations are also healing. The moon's vibrations heal. Nature is healing for the soul. Those of us whom are stuck in the go-go-go of city/'modern'/*

*industrial (or whatever it is) life seem to have a tendency to forget about the most beneficial (and free!) healing tool that is at our disposal whenever we want it – yet we get so caught up in the go-go-go of everyday life that we forget to embrace and soak the healing vibrations of nature. The moon is one we can easily access within a city. By simply connecting with the moon through her cycle can ground and heal us and thus allow us the space to look inward and to connect with our inner and true Self... and thus connect with our intuition (our inner wisdom). But this may sound foolish to one who is so immersed in the go-go-go of rationally objective city/‘modern’/industrial (or whatever it is) go-go-go left brain thinking life. We need to balance and bring ourselves back to a harmonious and peaceful state, which is our true nature and where both right and left brain, conscious mind and unconscious psyche are listened to. This is what Ayahuasca could bring to this go-go-go world... a quick awakening, or better said, a reminder of our anthropocentric views of life. But seeing that Ayahuasca is not accessible in Canada, Yoga can also facilitate this process; however, in a more disciplined and slower pace – it can foster compassion, joy, connectedness with all that exists, and remind us of our true nature.*

*The ceremony ended with laughter... so much laughter to the point where my stomach was hurting and I was crying (of joy). This moment was experienced with La Señora who was also laughing hysterically. The laughter was so contagious. This laughter began when her voice of reason interfered with Ronald’s blowing of the horn to end the ceremony. With a smile, she said “You are going to wake up the neighbours!” This immediately broke the serious silence and got me laughing, then she started as well and we continued to laugh together for a while. Ronald at times would join us with a more softer and serious laugh. I felt that he has some emotional knots himself that he is working on... how can one not freely laugh? It is medicine to the soul! Therefore, knots/blockages are all that I could think of as an interference to laughter. Isn’t laughter part of our essence? We then took photos under the full moon and feasted. I had a big bowl of papaya with half an orange while Ronald ate soup and corn bits (the Peruvian corn snack). We laughed some more – mainly La Señora and I – but Ronald would sneak in some jokes from time to time. It was a joyous end to a lovely last Ayahuasca ceremony.*

*Now off to bed to the ongoing and what seems to me like the white noise of the Amazonian jungle’s never ending symphony (I’ve gotten used to it by now). Perhaps my dreams will be touched, enlightened and thought provoked by La Planta Maestra again tonight. Wait a minute... Oh my! Now I get why Marlene (my psychic/transpersonal counsellor) pulled the Power of Joy angel card in my November reading. Joy is my gift/contribution/role in this world, and I can definitely see it being manifested in all areas of my life (i.e. work, school placement/now volunteer job, partner, family, friends, strangers, etc.), and it does heal at some vibrational level, I know it does! I can see it especially when I am working as a therapist – the joy becomes contagious on clients. Thank you Marlene for being such a great therapist to me! I know you can hear me telepathically. As final thought, I must say that this experience has been very healing and transformative. I*

*feel like a stronger and new person filled with joy and even more passion to live life to its fullest and as my authentic Self based on my true essence. My direction in life seems so clear to me, clearer than ever – and the tools that I need I am now fully aware of and that are currently at my disposal. I do not need to keep searching for additional modalities to heal... I shall deepen my awareness and utility of these tools (i.e. dreams, moon and yoga). I shall remind myself to live life joyfully, with love, without fear and in the moment, truthfully... thus healing my MS through a spiritual path facilitated by transpersonal therapeutic modalities!*

Exploring an ancient Amazonian shamanic wisdom, tradition and ritual, as a transpersonal therapeutic modality, supported my MS healing through a process of self-transformation by facilitating a spiritual awakening. This process facilitated an increased personal, transpersonal and social awareness through self-reflection and enhanced insight and intuitive abilities, which also allowed me to access the wisdom that resides within the unconscious realm of my authentic *Self*. This experience and self-realization provided me with the strength and hope necessary to heal, as well as allowed me to realize the importance of accessing my spiritual nature as a means of healing my MS, which can be facilitated through transpersonal therapeutic modalities. The modality that facilitated this process was Ayahuasca; however, I realized that both yoga and the analysis of my dreams have the ability to continue supporting my ongoing healing process, especially since it provides me with the hope necessary to overcome the mental and emotional distresses often experienced when living with MS (Eeltink and Duffy, 2004).

By accessing my spiritual nature, I was able to experience a feeling of hope that I could support the mental and emotional distresses experienced when living with MS by no longer embodying what Frank (1995) calls the *modern experience of illness*, which focuses on curing. I was able to move into what he calls the *postmodern experience of*

*illness* where I can begin healing by re-claiming my voice so that I can pursue the journey that my inner voice is asking me to follow instead of waiting hopelessly for a cure to be found within the biomedical paradigm. The voice I reclaimed includes both my conscious ego and unconscious psyche. I began to listen to the information being sent by my unconscious psyche (i.e. intuition) to my conscious ego about my path to healing as I continue to move towards self-realization (i.e. authentic *Self*). As a process of individuation, I was able to move away from the ego's tendency to habitualize negative thinking (i.e. the *shadow*) that could compromise the immune response of the body and therefore possibly contributing to the advancement of my MS. Having had the opportunity to support my healing through a facilitated process of individuation that involved transcending my personal ego and its companion the *shadow* through self-reflection, I was able to develop an awareness on how my spiritual void could have been linked to my experienced psychological and emotional stresses, and that this void supported the stressors impacting the mind-body connection of my illness.

During the tobacco cleansing, two of the three Ayahuasca ceremonies (the first and last), and the time spent reflecting, allowed my fears to resurface to consciousness as I underwent a process of awakening and developing my consciousness that began with a point of crises/awakening as I explored the dark and unknown parts of my being (i.e. the *shadow*). I felt, and was told by Ronald that *La Planta Maestra* was facilitating the outward purging process of these emotional knots residing in the *shadow* and impacting the ego, and onto its manifestation at the physical level of my being. Both types of ceremonies facilitated the healing process of my mind, body and soul though an energetic

cleanse and a process of spiritual awakening as I began to be clear of the important role: my dreams have in connecting me with my inner wisdom (as the voice of my authentic *Self*), my yoga practice plays in my healing journey as a means of supporting the ongoing individuation journey towards self-realization of my essence and thus heal, and how my connection with the energies of the moon support my need to calm the mind, live the present with presence and to connect with my unconscious psyche.

The third Ayahuasca ceremony closed the circle of this journey as everything I had experienced in the jungle began to connect for me. It allowed me to realize that I can heal myself and others by embracing my spiritual nature as an element of my authentic *Self*, which is led by my joyfulness and the integration of yoga into both my personal journey and practice as a therapist. I also realized how important the role of my dreams and the moon could support me in connecting with my inner wisdom.

The three Ayahuasca ceremonies and post-ceremonial reflections and journaling were part of a transpersonal therapeutic process that supported the individuation of my being. Through this journey, I connected with my yoga practice and its philosophy as an integral element of my true nature that would help me heal the mind-body connection of my MS. *La Planta Maestra* facilitated my awareness that joy is love, love is letting go of fears, and through my joyful essence, I can let go of fears – and that by deepening my yoga practice I can support this process of living without fear and to love all that exists with compassion. She also facilitated my increased clarity of the importance of deepening my yoga practice as a tool to help the mind-body connection of my MS as I self-discipline myself to live with presence (vs. living in the present), to live with purpose (vs.

look for purpose). I am now committed to an ongoing study of the Self through the Raja yoga philosophy, so that I am able to build the compassion that can support my healing and my ability to be of better service to humanity and La Pachamama. My awareness that both yoga and compassion can heal and that the seed of compassion is the same between us all, I realize that an integral element of my essence is to share my practice with joy and compassion, as a transpersonal modality.

Ayahuasca, dreams and yoga are all ways of transcending the conscious ego mind (e.g. Ayahuasca ceremonies, analysis of dreams, yoga practice and self study). They also complemented each other and supported my ongoing process of individuation as my self-awareness of my true essence increased. Overall, my journey with *La Planta Maestra* has been a liberating process in which I experienced (1) her physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health benefits; (2) several epiphanies about my personal healing process and that of humanity as a whole, along with Mother Earth and the universe; (3) the benefits of connecting with my spiritual nature through the eightfold path of classical yoga for both my healing and in order to be an effective structural social worker and transpersonal therapist, as I discovered the essence of my true nature to heal myself and others with/through joy, laughter, compassion, and yoga; (4) the benefits of accessing intuitive insight, self-reflection and increased awareness as integral elements to my MS healing process – especially the realization of my spiritual connectedness with the moon and how it allows me to concentrate and listen to my inner voice when analyzing my dreams as a tool to bridge the conscious and unconscious; (5) an awareness of how transpersonal wisdoms have several healing benefits in contemporary social work therapy in

understanding wider cultural, political, and social meanings, and in understanding the root causes and curative beliefs of this debilitating dis-ease, and that there may be a mind-body link in the manifestation of my illness; (6) an awareness of how transpersonal wisdoms can be integrated into a contemporary social work therapeutic context in relation to personal and social transformation; (7) and insight into how spirituality and social change can be linked by incorporating transpersonal theory and modalities into the structural social work paradigm as a means of facilitating an increased awareness that a sense of oneness can be facilitated so that individuals and systems are more likely to feel connected and have a sense of empathy with/towards humanity and mother earth.

It is important for social workers, if we are to fulfill our commitment to social justice, that we find ways of incorporating transpersonal theory and its modalities into mainstream social work so that people may have the space and ability to re-connect with their true nature and also with all that exists. For instance, this can be done by supporting the process of self-realization and facilitating epiphanies of our interconnectedness, a sense of empathy can be created. As a social worker in a globalized and interconnected world, this journey has brought me clarity of my personal role in our global community, which is to facilitate happiness through joy and compassion as a social worker and therapist. By embracing my essence, I can support the transpersonal movement since this journey reassured me that transpersonal theory has an integral role to play in structural social work. In order to achieve social justice there must be social transformation, which includes both the individual and the social systems levels of change. My role in this process is to continue cultivating compassion through my spiritual nature so that I can not

only heal my MS but also contribute to the healing of our world (e.g. bringing about awareness of how spirituality can support social justice) as I work in service to others, healing through the power of joy.

Structural social work can be strengthened (or better said, adapted to our current multi cultural society – culture beyond just race and ethnicity) through the adaptation of an integral lens, which a transpersonal approach to social work can offer. For instance, a social work specific transpersonal approach (e.g. Cowley and Derezotes (2011) *transpersonal social work* model) could perhaps help social workers understand all the different dimensions of individual functioning. In doing so, we could support the development of inspiration, creativity, intuition, individuation, and values while also working towards re-connecting humanity with each other, nature and the cosmos through spirituality. This approach could perhaps also support individuals, such as myself, in search of healing from an ‘incurable’ dis-ease through a process that allows us to move towards self-realization as we become empowered in finding a sense of meaning, life purpose, and hope within the current biomedical cultural hegemony; a paradigm that is based on a religion that promotes individualism, competition, and happiness based on material progress and success – further disconnecting ourselves from our authentic *Self* and surroundings. Therefore, the use of transpersonal therapy in social work can allow for the awakening and validation of one’s intuition; find a sense of hope; heal; and connect individuals in a whole-istic manner to their surroundings (fellow humans, earth, cosmos, etc.). Thus, allowing to overcome ‘spiritual malaise’ and provide the necessary empathy needed to increase individual willingness to participate in social justice advocacy.

This autoethnography of my personal multiple sclerosis healing journey by exploring Ayahuasca as a transpersonal therapeutic modality, has allowed me not only to heal by discovering the essence of my true nature and the process to get there, but also the link between spirituality, structural social work and social change, and how transpersonal theory can bridge them together.

*July 22, 2013 4pm (Last day of seminar with Ronald) con't – I asked Ronald "how does Ayahuasca heal you?" He responded the following: "Lucille, Ayahuasca breaks the ego, its paradigm. It makes you confront your fears... its undoes the energetic and emotional knots, which can also be done in a gentle manner. It is liberating and revitalizing that can also be mystical. It regenerates the human body, strengthens the development of personality and awakens or matures human consciousness. It is also a good way to cure addictions and taxonomies because it generates a deep cleansing of the body and restores an individuals sense of the existence. Ayahuasca is a mystical experience of a symbolic death, which allows a person to be reborn, discarding anything negative to start a new life. The meaning of this rebirth experience through a symbolic death, is a personality development and the consolidation of a new awareness/consciousness. Hallucination is typical of a pathological state. The hallucination is a hoax, it's an illusion, it is a perception without an object, it is to see something that does not exist. This is contrary to what is experienced with Ayahuasca since it is a de-hallucinogen because it allows us to perceive reality as it is, and to see outside of the hallucination or alienation; it awakens and presents to the world and life as they are. The best way to put your feet on the ground is by drinking Ayahuasca and awakening from all our socio-cultural hallucinations. During the Ayahuasca trance we perceive things that exist in other dimensions, or in other realities; because there is no single reality, but several realities. The experience of drinking Ayahuasca is a confrontation against the deepest fears, worries and anxieties. The trance is a confrontation with our own psychological demons and ghosts [i.e. facing our shadow?]; it is a step within our inner hell to then – once liberated and the catharsis fulfilled – ascend to heaven, which is equilibrium/balance, health and harmony [i.e. the individuation process?] Ronald concluded by saying that "post an Ayahuasca medicinal journey, the effect continues and it is during this time that things start emerging, you dream. These are the outcomes of the vibrations and so you attract other people and things. Ayahuasca develops a magic and creates synchronicities that enrich your opportunities. Ayahuasca opens the unconscious valve. After an Ayahuasca journey, you are reborn in all aspects..."*

*I really feel that Ayahuasca allowed to shake my ego and awaken/connect the inner being, the realm of my unconscious psyche, to discover (or re-connect with after becoming aware and facing my shadow that blocked me) my authentic self, which is not*

*necessarily opposite to who I've been but the aspect of my being that is my soul... my nature... my true essence of who I am/ This increased awareness facilitated the process of transformation (i.e. individuation) and becoming aware of the shadow that energetically blocked my from being my authentic self. To transform these shadow into positive energy so that I can shine. I feel that these blocks for me were not only the ingrained element of fears and fears of abandonment within me but also a lack of spiritual nature-discipline. Thus not living the moment... not allowing myself to just be by trusting and having faith... and being stuck in the ego mind, living with inner and outer imbalances and a disconnect between my conscious ego and unconscious psyche...*

### ***Implications for social work, health care and my professional practice***

As an individual interested in the overall well-being and harmonious interconnectedness of all that exists, this research has enhanced my ability to implement both a structural and transpersonal lens to my work as a social worker. Transpersonal theory and its therapeutic modalities will continue to support my work as a structural social worker living in a continuously globalizing world since it acknowledges the multidimensional reality of human beings, and all forms of wisdom and psychologies. Thus, expanding my toolbox, lens and openness to the complexity of health, illness and social work. Even though transpersonal theory may be perceived by some to be in the margins of mainstream social work, it is an integral approach that is slowly being mainstreamed through mindfulness work (as an element of the transpersonal) and now being incorporated into contemporary healing practices with elements of traditional yoga (as a transpersonal tool). Therefore, integrating spirituality – through transpersonal theory – into the structural social work paradigm could lead to a more comprehensive and integral approach in working towards personal and social transformation. In addition, normalizing the importance of the healing journey of the illness itself could fill an important gap exiting in the normative biomedical model of working with MS.

Since Ayahuasca is illegal in Canada, I continue to personally explore, and offer the opportunity with individuals I work with, the opportunity to integrate transpersonal therapy as a modality. For example, in supporting individuals to explore, identify themes and analyze their dreams, I facilitate a process for them to connect with their deep personal inner wisdom as their unconscious psyche and conscious ego begin to merge. I also integrate a universal, interfaith and all-encompassing yoga philosophy/practice (as a science of the mind) into contemporary social work healing contexts and as a means of connecting with the essence of who we are through individual counselling and workshops. Specifically, I embrace Hatha Yoga (the physical/forceful yoga, which cleanses/purifies the body to facilitate the process of understanding and mastering the mind – supporting the goal of self-realization) and Raja Yoga (the mental science aimed at expanding consciousness through meditation, philosophy and practice – supporting the goal of total transformation).

Recognizing yoga, dream analysis and other transpersonal therapeutic modalities and tools for supporting healing journeys, is an ethical responsibility I feel that I have as a compassionate structural social worker. Thus, having both a transpersonal and structural lens allows me to have a multidimensional toolbox, which allows individuals and groups a space in which they can move towards transcending – embracing and transforming – their *shadows*. This supports them through an individuation process moving them closer towards their authentic *Self* – facilitating a space in which individuals can empower themselves through the awakening of consciousness at multiple levels. By normalizing yoga as a transpersonal therapeutic modality, can a process be facilitated – regardless of

cultural identity – that allows us to connect with our inner wisdom, the essence of who we are, and to experience and realize the unity of everything – allowing us to heal, achieve our full potential, empower us in a compassionate manner, and be engaged in issues of concerns to our global community.

By helping us heal as individuals, by gathering together the carried aspects of the self, Ayahuasca shows us how one person's healing contributes to the healing of us all, how our self is really part of the larger self...Ayahuasca showed me that we are all one and the same, yet glorious in our individuality.

– (Wilcox, 2003, p.223).

### ***Sometime in the future upon reconnecting with Luis...***

*Lucille's whole-istic mind: "Luis, remember when I had lost my vision in my left eye, and that the neuro-ophtalmologist had told me that I most probably had MS and that I should see a neurologist upon my return to Canada to confirm the MRI results? Remember how scared I was? Remember how you asked me what it is that I did not want to see? Well I was diagnosed and upon visiting Ronal seven years later; Ayahuasca helped me see... in full clarity!"*

*Luis's whole-istic mind: "What is it that you saw?"*

*Lucille's whole-istic mind: "I saw the knots during my last Ayahuasca journey that may have contributed to my MS... and throughout the journey as a whole, I discovered that I had all the tools at my disposal to heal! I also realized the power of healing through joy, and that of spirituality as a means for social transformation!"*

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