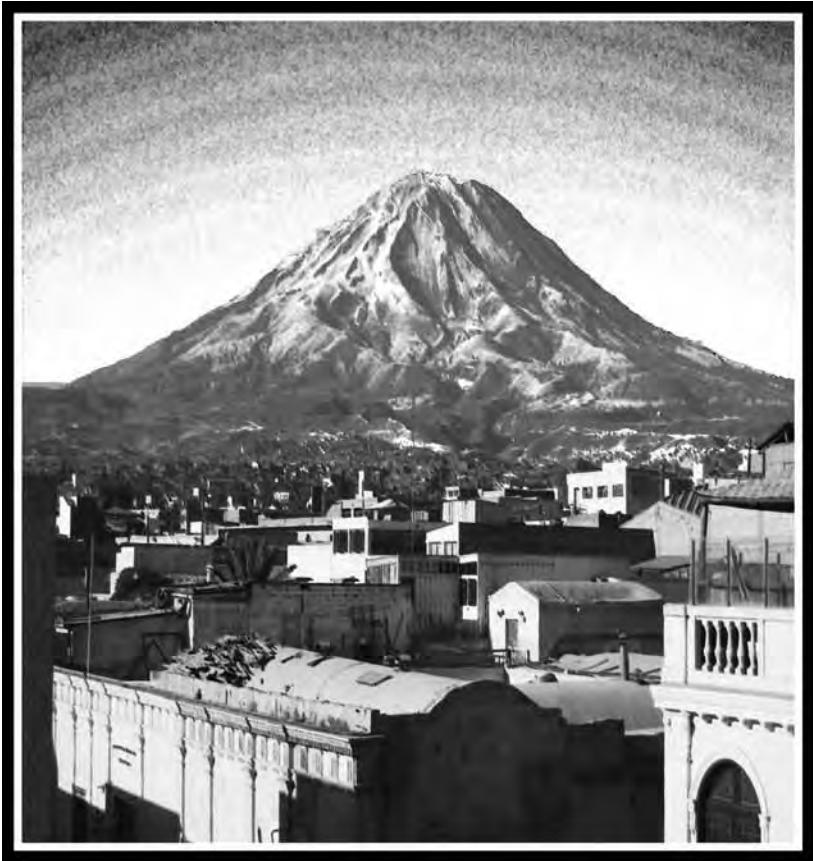


# World's Window



Ruminations Psychedelic & Otherwise,  
Being A Journal of My Travels in Peru

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by Christopher Patrick Gose

**World's Window:  
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Being a Journal of My Travels in Peru**

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. . . to my mother

*She began to cry when you said goodbye  
and sank into your dreams.*  
—Willie Nelson

## Prelude

*We are stardust  
Billion year old carbon  
We are golden  
Caught in the devil's bargain  
And we've got to get ourselves back to the garden.*  
—Joni Mitchell

My journey into the center of the visionary potential of the human nervous system, out of the mundane world of the war-bloated American consciousness, began with the world of plant medicine, and many a drug tale along the way.

My mother, an oil heiress, was emotionally unstable in the borderline sense. Her presence, sporadic among my childhood memories, formed the basis of a particular set of imprints that have been a focus of my young adult life. In spite of her instability, she was a remarkable woman in her own way. Her second husband expressed it most aptly in snidely commenting at her funeral, “she was *everyone’s* friend, wasn’t she?” (an off-color reference to affairs she certainly had during their marriage). She was quick to laugh, ready to love, infinitely generous—and forgave transgressions without a second thought. In my own life, I have emulated the example of her heart while transmuting the *prima materia* of her failings.

My father—God bless him—remains a man wholly devoted to the straight and narrow mythology of Reagan America, or what that patron saint of misinformation Rush Limbaugh refers to as “principled conservatism.” Like any well-meaning son, I made what effort I could to stomach the meal that had been laid on my table; I even joined the army to appease his blood lust and expectations for my life. Eventually, I opted for more nourishing fare.

I was in high school when I first ate the sacred mushroom. I had developed a particular interest in the inspired musings of Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and the nineteenth-century French hashish eaters. I mulled over Baudelaire’s *Flowers of Evil*, and fancied myself precocious, except for the fact that I wasn’t a particularly popular young man. In the *Flowers of Evil*, I intuited the first and faint stirrings of an authentic *complexio oppisitorum*, ripe with mystery and the irrational vicissitudes of the heart. As an Irish-American, I lusted after things strange: the

stranger the better. In Baudelaire's vision of the "artificial paradise," my youthful fancy found wings and took flight. I would sit beneath the trees and imagine I was the sole denizen of a moon-bound garden rife with Baudelaire's flowers of evil. The centerpiece of this perfumed flower garden overflowed, as if some sort of alien and opulent fountain, spilling out into four causeways from the crux point. Unbeknownst to me at the time, the word for psychedelic sacrament in the Nahuatl language of the ancient Aztecs translates to mean "flower."

The mushroom became the centerpiece of my imaginal Eden in the years that followed. One day while perusing books in the library, I came across the image of an Indian woman holding mushrooms out over smoke in her outstretched hands, eyes half-closed in prayerful reflection. The image took on a life of its own in my imagination, and that life was larger than my own. Since that time, I have identified the image as one taken from Gordon Wasson's *The Wondrous Mushroom*, but to this day the image in my mind's eye remains much larger than the one from Allan Richardson's photograph. For not only does everything appear expanded, but there is a light escaping off the top and convex lenticular surface of the *saprophytic basidiocarp* like stardust off a fish's back. Several years later, the very same *Lumen Naturae* shown clearly through the illustrations and photography that accompany the Oss/Oeric *Psilocybin: Magic Mushroom Grower's Guide*. The image captured my attention in one resolute gesture of mystery that has guided my soul ever since.

In a cosmic adumbration of what psychedelic and literary pioneer Aldous Huxley termed "gratuitous grace," later that very same day I happened to be walking into the boys' locker room when a friend of mine ran into me and, reaching into his overcoat pocket, handed me a bag full of the very same genus of mushroom I had earlier seen as an image in the student library: *Psilocybe*. Over the years, the manifestation of the mushroom in my life as a guiding *Imagos* of the sacred has been uniformly accompanied by what analytic psychologist Carl Jung termed *synchronicity*. Synchronicity, an acausal principle of connection between disparate spatial and temporal events, finds its most apt mythological expression in the Greek figure Eros: winged god of Ecstasy and the spontaneous product of the fusion of Chaos and Gaia. Like the "flowers of evil" image which equates the delicate beauty of a flower with diabolical *daemonia*, two forces in seeming and impossible opposition to one another are brought into a state of inexorable fusion,

what alchemists refer as the *Coniunctionis*. From this fusion erupts an irrational and transcendent Other which brings the entire system into a supraconscious state. Synchronicity is the temporal sensing of this supraconscious Other, and has been observed to be prescient of the revelation of Spirit in its incarnation as supraconscious Other: oneness with God, atonement of father and son.

\* \* \* \* \*

Over the years, I've often heard many variations of the "direction" question as it was being asked of experts/authorities in the field of psychedelic studies: "if I'm interested in psychedelics, what do I study?" or "how do I integrate psychedelic insight into my daily life?" or "what does the psychedelic experience imply in terms of this or that life experience?"

I think the psychedelic experience can inculcate a sort of shamanic worldview in some individuals—a worldview very much at odds with the status quo of the cultural climate in which most of us exist in the twenty-first century. In truth, I don't think this worldview is as unusual or exotic as it tends to be viewed; I believe that aspects of the shamanic worldview are quite pragmatic, a function of brain chemistry, and likely the result of certain types of evolutionary pressures that were placed on our ancestors. University of Arizona anthropologist Dr. Michael Winkelman expresses it quite simply in stating that shamanism and its various technologies and accoutrements allow larger numbers of people to come together and stably interact at the group level. I believe shamanism has also served the function of providing some flexibility in terms of the nascent family imprints we develop during the infant stage of our life; this flexibility—which is also grounded in the brain's own neoteny—has allowed the human species to occupy an incredibly broad array of ecological niches on this planet. Nevertheless, certain aspects of the shamanic worldview can be difficult to accept, such as the Navajo assertion that the four mountains of their native homeland are "sacred," "alive," and constitute a sort of space-time mandala and maternal matrix. So here we're getting closer to the whole issue of "direction," "gaining one's bearings," and all of those kinds of questions asked above. The shamanic worldview is full of such self-orienting motifs as "sacred mountains," "world trees," and "sacred calendars." I see these motifs as being grounded in a holistic, insightful

mode of consciousness that weaves seemingly disparate elements into a cohesive fabric. Functionally, this mode of consciousness seems to bring people together towards some common purpose, a behavior that has obvious implications in terms of our fitness as a species. I don't know if there's necessarily any "truth" to these things, but I feel like I need a sense of wholeness in my life.

\* \* \* \* \*

Sometimes I feel that I have lost my own way, perhaps that I am part of a particular time and culture that is very much lost—and I suspect that I am not alone in feeling this way. So this journey is something of an effort to gain my bearings—give some direction to myself, my family, my friends. Tomorrow I'm heading to the forest, and I plan on getting lost; I plan on getting very high and taking it all to heart. Obviously, I need to find a solution to this dilemma that is inclusive of my own personality and its dynamics while being practical and down to earth.



World-Window

## Part I: Chewing Coca

02/07/2009 Cusco, Peru

*Reality is not stranger than you suppose,  
it is stranger than you **can** suppose.*

—Terence McKenna,

“I Understand Philip K. Dick,” 1991.

The incessant hum and noise of Lima, a swarmy maelstrom of sprawl and velocity; our one night in the city was restless. As we landed in the earlier part of the evening, I found myself feeling a bit more relaxed and emotionally open. On the heels of my dream (of Gratefulbear's mother blessing our journey) the night prior to leaving Albuquerque, something emerged in the undulate rhythm of place and people, like a slow and flowing ocean current; the sensual gait of the Peruvian stewardesses, the oscillating current of the language. As I sat looking up into the open skylight of our hotel in Lima, listening to the pulse of the city—and in spite of being desperately tired—, I felt alive and on the cusp of wonder. For all the ugliness of Lima, flying into Cusco over the Andes was truly breathtaking. Stark mountainsides, lush and green ascending snow-capped peaks.

Our arrival into Cusco was marked by extreme exhaustion, and a vastly overpriced taxi-ride from the airport. We quickly proceeded to the San Blas district of the city on the far northern end of the Cuzco valley, which is more of a cradle of mountains than a valley. Cusco itself is quite charming, with narrow alleyways paved with cobblestone, an open drainage system, and small cultivated gardens tucked into each and every corner. Arriving quite early, and our room not yet prepared, we waited some time in the living area adjacent to the patio-courtyard at our hostel. Our host quickly offered coca tea, our first exposure to the plant that was much of my motivation in visiting this region of Peru. The tea induced a mild and expansive elevation of mood that sent us out into the city in spite of the exhaustion of three days of travel with little sleep.

Cusco is gorgeous and powerful in its own right, nestled into the hills of the high Andes. Everything is built with economy and on top of everything else, with the effect of receding terraces of terra cotta

roofing. As you ascend any of the given hills of Cusco, the view across the valley is most extraordinary. Framed on either side by tightly knit brickwork in the Incan style, the valley stretches out below in a dark orange terra-cotta ocean of syncretic Incan-colonial architecture and style.

From San Blas, narrow streets descend steeply into the central municipal valley. At the center, the Plaza de Armas consists of a large church on the northern side of the square with the stone plaza situated around a central park. Further south and to the west, the bustling San Pedro market was a real education in Peruvian culture, with *Erythroxylum coca*, *Trichocereus pachanoi*, and *Banisteriopsis caapi* being openly sold together with the vegetables and the fruits. I bought coca together with a hard ball of llipta-lime and we quickly returned to our room, which was ready for us by this time. Much of the first day I chewed coca and, after several hours of chewing, quickly fell into that lucid, wafting dream state with which I am so familiar. I felt myself gently drifting down the valley on a sort of tumbling cloud of light, soaring above a receding crevasse that was like a flowing cradle. The horizon recedes and I peer deep into this infinite and spacious chasm, and there's an unfathomable sense that this journey into the heart of the New World is blessed, and I am somehow seeing through my mother's eyes. Who knows how long it lasted, but there was something profoundly reassuring about it, soothing to the soul.

## 02/08/2009 Cusco, Peru

*Let the world change you, and you can change the world.*  
—Che Guevara

Our first night was quite restless, and Gratefulbear showed mild signs of altitude sickness, but nothing a few cups of coca tea didn't take care of. I dreamt of my brother, and the regret of losing a close friend. In the dream, he was packing all of his things and leaving. I opened his closet and found my bookshelf in it, noticing three specific books: *Unspoken Sermons*, and *Thomas Wingfold, Curate* (both by George MacDonald) and a third book that was so worn in its binding as to be unrecognizable. I was somehow compelled to open the book and sign it as a farewell gesture to my brother.

We visited Qorikancha today, a real window into the world

of the Inca. Translated to mean "Court of Gold," Qorikancha was the very axis of the city of Cusco, itself considered the "navel of the world." At Qorikancha, more than four thousand priests are said to have lived. Its centerpiece was said to have been an immense golden disk positioned in such a way that the morning light reflected off its surface into the main temple. While Qorikancha is today a sort of amalgam of archaeological curiosity and Catholic presence, the court remains a startling example of Incan stonework. Stonework that, when originally encountered by the Spanish, was proclaimed to be the "product of demons," an assertion hardly less fantastic than some of the speculation today (extraterrestrials, plants capable of dissolving rock).

The actual explanation for the elegance of Incan stonework may be far simpler. To quarry the stone, the masons sought natural weaknesses in the rock, small fissures that could be widened by planting a wooden wedge and soaking it in water. Once a block of stone broke free, it could be worked with harder rocks by a series of abrasive blows that in time would transform its surface. Experiments have shown that, even without iron tools, a shapeless lump of andesite can be turned into a smooth cube in just two hours. Perhaps even more miraculous than an extraterrestrial or magical explanation, the actual explanation for Incan stone working betrays an attitude towards stone that is almost impossible to comprehend. The Inca seem to have viewed matter as living, dynamic, and even divine; the transformation of matter thus seems to have been viewed as a service to the gods. Naturally, time has no meaning for a task in service of the divine, and such an attitude harnessed by a system of imperial governance explains in part how the Inca were so prolific. This basic attitude seems common to many indigenous groups and is more generically expressed in the notion of the sanctity of land. At Qorikancha, forty-one imaginary spokes are said to have radiated outwards and beyond the horizon as determined by the stars, the sun, and the moon, connecting various communities in space within the cosmological framework of the land of the Incan Empire. To this day, and in spite of the Conquest, one religious icon of the Inca remains: the earth itself.





Mama Coca

02/09/2009 Cusco, Peru

*I've walked these streets  
in a carnival  
of sights to see.*

—Natalie Merchant

Last night I chewed coca all night long. Looking out westward over Cusco, just before the rising of the sun, the following vision unfolded over the terra-cotta roofing of the city.

Outside the window, there was the face of a masticating jaguar, chewing and chewing with a vicious look upon its face. As it chewed, I became very unsettled staring at it but could not turn away. As I fixated on the face of the jaguar, my field of vision kind of rolled over in a gyrating fashion to the left, and to the left of the jaguar I saw the face of a very old tree, brow ruffled and eyes closed in sleep.

I became highly unsettled as this unfolded, dripping with sweat and heart pounding, my mind echoing, “must raise the dead, must raise the dead.” The bleary-eyed tree began to awaken. Rolling over again to the left, I saw a bird like a toucan, but with more of a

downward hook to its bill, downward slit of its eye. Rolling over again, there was a face like a man, a conquistador, and his face was merging right to left with a face like an Andean native with a stern brow. Their faces became one like an owl, then feline, and there was a shaft of light rising from its feral brow, and a crescent over the top shot through by the light, and it became some sort of ascending thunderbird. Then rolling over to the left, there was a circle of women robed in white, faces veiled, witnessing something in their midst that was hidden from my view. To the farthest left of the sequence, there was an angel, wings spread outwards and behind, hands outstretched as if receiving whatever was being witnessed in the circle. Then my eyes toggled all the way to the right, and the jaguar was chewing, chewing; vicious face. Then right to left, right to left: it looked like a tube or a horn of some sort. Then left to right and the central piece of the tube with the robed women, tree/conquistadore/Indian/owl/thunderbird became smooth and faceless, and there was only the winged angel on the left and the masticating jaguar on the right. Left, then all the way right, and the jaguar turned and looked me straight in the eyes with a vicious smile, then a look of recognition and friendship, and then it dissolved into formless light. Then right to left, and the angel had transformed into a blue bird with an immense and rainbow tail, turned around and flew away just as the sun peaked over the mountains. I have no interpretation for this most peculiar of messages from the coca ally.

Coca is certainly one of the more fascinating plants of South America. A spectrum of domesticated plant varieties almost probably from a common Bolivian ancestor, *Erythroxylum's coca* and *novogranatense* were considered one of the three sacred plants of the Inca—as well as yage and manioc—sent by Wirakocha at the dawn of creation. Ubiquitously known as “mama coca” throughout the Andes, the status of coca amongst the peoples of Peru is aptly expressed in t-shirts and signs all throughout the sacred valley, “*las hojas de la coca no es una droga, es cultura*” (the leaves of coca are not a drug, they are culture). As a barometer of Incan influence, the presence of coca forms a sort of cultural dyad of the continuity and extent of the Incan empire; where the Inca were, you today find both coca and corn. Though much of the existent patterns of coca use are hybrid forms of the ancient patterns, there are certain groups that seem to maintain their relationship with coca in an ostensibly pure form.

In the Kogi mythology, the comos is conceived auto-



egocratically by the Great Mother, who anoints one of her pubic hairs with menstrual blood and then impregnates herself with a phallic lime-stick. Descendants of the ancient Tairona civilization, for the Kogi the chewing of coca is the purest activity of their lives, as well as the most profound expression of their culture. At the age of 18, and in preparation for marriage, the Kogi initiate is gifted the ritual implements for the chewing of coca—their yoburu (gourd) and lime-stick—by the mamas/shamans. An initiate is also gifted a mochila/coca bag by his wife-to-be, woven from thread gifted by the mamas. For the Kogi men, the first bittersweet taste of *hayo* (coca) brings them into manhood. At the marriage ceremony, the mama perforates the yoburu and impregnates the bulbous base of the gourd with lime.

The mamas/shamans of the culture are divined at birth by the throwing of coca leaves, which are then read. If selected, the neophyte is taken deep into the mountain caves and raised the first eighteen years of her life without any exposure to sunlight. At the age of 18, and on a particularly clear day, the mama is brought out into the sunlight and tastes *hayo* for the first time. Wrapped up in symbols of re-birth and the maternal matrix, the chewing of coca is—for the Kogi—the recreation and genesis of the cosmos as they know it.

### 02/10/2009 Písaq, Peru

*Though the path before me  
stretches clearly;  
and long the winding road  
that leads me;  
each step I make  
hence follows surely:*

*CruX Mea Stella*

*The Crossroads are my Star.*

—Ol' poem of mine, dictated by  
my Uncle Buster from beyond the grave.

We bussed earlier today from Cusco eastwards to the small Andean village at Písaq. The bus ascended perhaps 1000 feet from Cusco (at 10,000 feet), and then descended 3000 feet more to the Urubamba River Valley. On the bus ride, I was quickly engaged in broken Spanish conversation by an elderly artisan from the Peruvian

city of Huancayo.

He pointed out the various animals, introduced me to his wife, and agreed that I should follow him into the Písaq market to view his artwork. Little did I know that I would then be obligated to make a purchase. It was beautiful nonetheless: a carved gourd with images of the sacred valley engraved upon it. Images of the Inca and valley gracing the surface: sun and moon; serpent, puma, and condor (trinity of sacred totemic Andean animals); Machu Picchu and scenes of traditional agricultural practices of the valley. As we descended into the Urubamba Valley, we saw for the first time the terraces/tarrazas of the Inca.

The coca in Písaq seems better than Cusco—larger, unbroken leaves—and the cholco/corn is a meal unto itself, far superior to the corn in the United States.

### 02/11/2009 Ollantaytambo, Peru

*Imagine . . .*

—John Lennon

A soft wind blows warmly up the crevasse perpendicular to the sacred valley where Ollantaytambo is situated. I think we will spend several days here; I'm quite moved by the people and the pace of life. An even gentler wind blows through my soul this evening as we watch the sun set over this splendor of a valley. After our arrival by colectivo from Písaq via Urubamba, we made our way through labyrinthine chasms of stone and soil, skipping over drainage rivulets from off the mountain stream of the Montana de Santa Marta.

Gazing eastwards up the valley of the Santa Marta, an immense calm suffuses my body and oft-weary heart. There is a sense of sacred space here, perhaps in the heart of the people of this valley. I feel myself being drawn up the valley, drifting in a world of folk reveries and smiling faces, dark skinned and hiking up the valley with ease . . . to be here is to feel human again.

## 02/12/2009 Ollantaytambo, Peru

*The connection to the Friend  
is secret and very fragile.*

*The image of that friendship  
is in how you love, the grace*

*and delicacy, the subtle talking  
together, in full prostration,*

*outside of time. When you're  
there, remember the fierce*

*courtesy of the one with you.*  
—J'alalludin Rumi

Our second day in Ollantaytambo, and we moved to the Quilla lodge. The man who runs the lodge—same age as myself—invited us up the adjacent valley from yesterday's reveries, and into the mountains for a fiesta of sorts. The event was described to us as a "reunion" of the folk peoples of the upper mountain area with the peoples of the lower valley. There was dancing, music, maize beer, and also—amidst



Fiesta de la Montana

the festivities—the occasional firing of a large canon that reverberated with an immense boom down the valley. In the first dance, the dancers were dressed in something like ornate green pajamas, faces masked, and were brandishing whips, which they would snap around the feet of the dancers in front of them—this went on in a circle to the delight of everyone watching. In the second dance, men brandishing bright orange frocks in the traditional Andean style waved a white sash back and forth at one another, a dance imitating some manner of Andean swan, perhaps the mythological swan that escorted the Sun and Moon children sent from Lake Titicaca to populate the earth at the bequest of the Incan creator deity Wiracocha.

We walked up the hills to one of the many small agricultural settlements along the mountainside, our guide pointing out the various cultivated plants: varieties of potatoes with flowers of several colors, peas, and some varieties of plants unfamiliar to me. Our guide's spurious grip on English was only matched by my similar grip of Spanish. Somehow we managed to communicate and I learned a couple of new words in Spanish (*llave*=key; *campana*=church bell; *abbas*=peas; *caminata*=trek). We ate amidst the festivities, and then walked the long road back to Ollantaytambo, perhaps four miles. More than I have walked in some time.

## 02/14/2009 Ollantaytambo, Peru

*Your pain is the breaking of the shell  
that encloses your understanding.*

—Kahlil Gibran

Two nights back I again chewed coca all night, a substantial quantity. The coca in Ollantaytambo is large-leafed and seems less potent than that in Pisco. Towards the morning, I had something of a psychological-emotional breakthrough.

I'm truly impressed with this plant—it is as powerful a plant as I have ever experienced. In the early hours, I began walking through emotional states that have been particularly difficult for me in the last several years. These states were like layers around a core psychological-emotional challenge. First I was going through anxiety, a mental state that I have a tendency to quickly identify with. I often seem to need something to worry about. With the coca, I was able to take a step

back and recognize a certain set of behaviors as being rooted in this anxiety, and simply experience the anxiety as such. Then I saw that the anxiety was one layer of a deeper state of suffering, and the anxiety itself opened up. It became clear to me that my seeming need for anxiety, and something to worry about, was part of a mechanism protecting me from being overwhelmed by despair. This despair and sadness appeared to be largely rooted in childhood imprints, and was wrapped into a gestalt of emotions that I believe are at the core of why it is that I have had so much trouble honing in on a career. In essence, I experience a sense of sadness and intense frustration in not being able to “earn” my mother’s love.

For children, maternal love is the ultimate currency and value, and I suspect the basis for most human values. Freud and Jung were perhaps not amiss in referring to the mother-child relationship as the basis for what they termed “object libido,” or the central axis about which pleasure-seeking behavior—as an effort-reward mechanism—revolves. We cry for our mothers, and this behavior is reinforced by the pleasure of being fed. As we grow older, this basic reward system becomes much of how our work ethic evolves: we work for our mother’s love because our mother’s love is our own biological survival. This love then becomes the object of the libido by which we come to enjoy work as something pleasure-bestowing and of intrinsic value. Reflecting on my upbringing, I saw that I worked very hard—according to my nature—to be an object of my parents’ love, and specifically my mother’s. It simply never happened, so I have associated work and goal-motivated effort (the object libido) with a sense of frustration that believes—at an unconscious level—that my best effort simply doesn’t matter.

So I put in my best effort with the unconscious assumption that it is ultimately valueless, with the inevitable consequence that I never really see anything all the way through. In fact, if I were to see something all the way through, it would be all the more disappointing once again to realize and recognize that unlovable and frustrated child within me. As a result, over the years I’ve tended to view practical work with some amount of disdain. These insights seemed very “matter of fact” at the time, and were not the product of any real “thinking through” of what I was feeling. They seemed to proceed naturally from the simple act of feeling these very difficult emotional states in their wholeness. The focus on effort-reward is quite interesting, as I’ve been told that cocaine works within the “pleasure-reward” systems



**Cactus in Bloom**

of the brain (perhaps I'm wrong). It's further interesting that coca is typically anthropomorphized as feminine, "mama" coca. In a sense, this particular plant seems to be acting as a sort of surrogate mother in an unforgiving landscape.

Beyond this basic system of imprints, I came in touch with an overwhelmingly intense sense of existential insecurity that seemed to have a cosmic dimension to it; it felt as though an immense and vibrating current was surging from my solar plexus into my heart area. This current was marked, physical, and quite strong. I felt like it might shake me to pieces; it became quite clear at this point that attachment to the physical and emotional forms was going to create a lot of suffering. So I just let go, my fontanelles seemed to flare out and through the heart center coursed massive amounts of biographical suffering, years of anxiety, despair, and frustration spilling through my heart in a compressed and ultra-intense gush. This must have lasted 20 or 30 minutes, and was quite unsettling; it was like all of my pain took on an objectified form and just poured out of my body. My mind swimming, I kept breathing my way through it, trying to relax and continuously remind myself that this was part of the healing effect of the coca medicine. Eventually it passed and I was left with a sense of solidity and clarity in my heart. Since this opening, I have felt considerably more capable of dealing with uncertainty and stress; there have been several situations that previously would have caused me considerable anxiety, and they have been much easier to deal with. The plant seems quite therapeutic, though it almost feels like electro-shock therapy at the higher doses (this is definitely a stimulant). Certainly one of the more powerful psychological-emotional openings I have ever had. The llipta-lime in the markets here in Ollantaytambo is incredibly caustic, a small piece will burn the heck out of one's mouth. The best llipta I've had was a sweet anise paste in Písaq, quite pleasant. The llipta here is a bit much.

Today we crossed the Urubamba River and hiked up to a relatively pristine set of Inca terraces. With the entire canyon to ourselves, the terraces were small and apparently used to grow medical and aromatic plants for the temple. Past the terraces was a temple nested within a cave complex, with two main iconic artifices. One, a doorway carved into the stone was described as a "doorway into another dimension"; the other, a stone altar with a set of Incan crosses upon it used for prayer and reflection. We were told "*es un sitio sagrado*," that

this was a "sacred place" used to reflect on and pray to "Pachamama."

There is a very tall grouping of San Pedro cactus (*Trichocereus pachanoi*) in flower on the western side of the central plaza, perhaps the tallest San Pedro I have ever seen. Cultivated specimens are quite common up the valley, including Cusco. Typically, in the higher elevations, these specimens seem to have been grown from thick cuttings that are clearly sourced from some other locale; while the root cuttings are often quite thick, the pups tend to grow quite thin, indicating a lack of sufficiently intense sunlight. I suspect these cultivated San Pedros in Cusco are brought inside during the wintertime, so they don't receive much sunlight. However, at the lower elevation here in Ollantaytambo, the cultivated specimens look quite healthy and are planted directly into the ground. There is a *trichocereus* or *cereus* cactus species endemic to this area that I've been told is not psychoactive; a shame, as it's *everywhere*.

#### 02/16/2009 Aguas Caliente, Peru

*The soul is here  
for its own joy.*  
—J'alalludin Rumi

We arrived by train from Ollantaytambo at the station at Aguas Caliente, the pueblo below Machu Picchu. Both Gratefulbear and I have been dealing with some stomach upset—it was bound to happen—and today we are mostly resting. Gratefulbear has slept most of the day. The train ride itself—though exorbitantly priced by my now-lowered standards—was quite extraordinary. Leaving just before dawn, we descended from the arid climate of the valley south of Ollantaytambo into what is essentially a cloud forest. Continuing further up the Sacred Valley, plant species began proliferating exponentially: large swaying trees hosting epiphytes tucked into niches, creeping vines, a thick mat of floor covering. Intermittently, the train would pass through fields of the most peculiar varieties of flowers, an infinite gradient of shadings from purple to blue to red to pink. The jungle is near, perhaps a day away. *Brugmansia arborea* seems prevalent in both the arid southern part of the Sacred Valley and here in the cloud forest. In the arid upper valley I only saw orange and white flowers; here in the cloud forest, there is a peachish-pink variety of *Brugmansia* in flower.



Machu Picchu pueblo itself is abloated with tourism, overpriced, with the layout of the city—though small—contributing to a sense of crowdedness. Everything is built upwards on a small embankment of the Urubamba River; the locals seem to have crammed as much marketable economy as is possible into this small space. While the one redemption of this little pueblo is the audible sound of the river from every point within it, it often appears as if the entire little town might just fall into the water and be carried downstream into the jungle.

Widespread fascination with Machu Picchu is interesting in itself. The town here below the ruin is an enigma. On the one hand, the locals clearly rely on tourism. On the other, I have found that the residents seem to find tourists rather annoying. Somehow I don't blame them. It's one of the defining drives of long-term travel, that we're somehow looking for something that connects us to a place. But this place is a drive-by, and I think a lot of us here are in the driver's seat.

The emphasis on Machu Picchu—as a tourist destination—is unusual in the sense that, while explorer Hiram Bingham's original theory posited that Machu Picchu was the “hidden kingdom of the Inca”—their last stronghold during the time of the Conquest—, recent evidence has pointed to the overgrown jungle site at Espiritu Pampa as the probable stronghold of the fabled city of Vilcabamba. So what is it about Machu Picchu that so fascinates people? At the ruins there are no choking creepers or tangles of trees—just rawly exposed clarity. I think there's an ineffable beauty to discovering something completely revealed in its original untouched state. Chalk it up to “magical thinking,” but sometimes you get the sense that the world has been waiting for you to see it.

Also, I think that Bingham's story of the search for that which was hidden appeals to the romantic in many of us. So I figure I'll keep this in mind as I become part of the drove of tourism passing through this region. Perhaps I'm only here to see something naked and beautiful; something that was hidden that is now revealed.

The coca here is the most unique of any I have yet tested; it is substantially more potent, with smaller and more delicate leaves. It has a very pleasant and sweet caramel aroma to it, which gives it a rich taste. The llipta-lima is quite mild in terms of causticity. Perhaps owing to the lack of roads between here and Ollantaytambo to the south, the source of this coca seems to likely be regions on the borders of the jungle to the north. I suspect the coca in the markets to the south of

Ollantaytambo is coming from fields that are at a lower elevation to the south of Cusco towards Arequipa; the leaves are much larger and have a smell somewhere between hay and green tea.

We have decided to continue north out of the valley—instead of heading back to Cusco—and make our way to the jungle, with the hopes of finding a plane to Pucallpa or perhaps just a river boat. Tomorrow, we will visit Machu Picchu; both Gratefulbear and myself are glad this particular leg of our trip—which was sort of obligatory—will soon be over. After the hike up to Machu Picchu, we will be heading to Quillabamba where we plan on acquiring supplies for the forest.

This afternoon, Gratefulbear and I became feverish with whatever stomach bug we've picked up. Coupled with the fatigue, I figured it was time to give ourselves the C-bomb: 500mg Ciprofloxacin, a staple of the traveling medical kit. Within a half hour, we were worlds better. In retrospect, I suspect some of my anxiety in the early part of the week had something to do with this stomach bug. I think I tend to be particularly tuned in to my gut; I just had a “gut feeling,” as my father used to say. But we feel much better now, hopefully well enough to find the ruins tomorrow after a strong dose of yogurt. I *really* need a book to read.

### **02/17/2009 Aguas Caliente, Peru**

*Remember when you were young,  
you shone like the sun.  
Shine on you crazy diamond.  
—Pink Floyd*

Today it rained all day, starting early in the morning. We decided not to visit the ruins as a result. Instead, we made our way up to the hot springs for which this town had taken its original name. The main street leads up through town and above to an estuary of the Urubamba River. Crossing a bridge, we ascended to the bathhouse, which was composed of a bar overlooking a set of terraced bathing pools of various temperatures.

We spent most of today relaxing in the hot springs as the clouds drizzled over the semi-tropical environment of the cloud forest. Tomorrow, we'll find the ruins.

## 02/18/2009 Machu Picchu, Peru

*In a world full of people, only some want to fly,  
isn't that crazy?*

—Seal

I must say that, while I had some reservations about all the tourism and hype surrounding the ruins at Machu Picchu, it really is “all that,” an unbelievable place. We awoke at 5 am, and were ready for the bus at 5:30, having been told you cannot miss the sunrise. I awoke with some residual stomach illness and, after several days of poor sleep and illness, my mood was fairly depressed. Crossing the river and winding our way up to the ruins we entered the park shortly before sunrise to a spectacular and clear view from the guard house above the central ruin. As the sun rose, an immense cloud of fog lifted from the lush and wet valley below, shrouding the entire ruin in a veil of mist. We walked along a trail leading up and away from the central



**Machu Picchu Morning**

ruin, photographing both specimens of Angel Trumpet (*Brugmansia candida*), and a most unique wild orchid (the first wild orchid I have ever seen).

As the mist baked off and the view cleared once again, we made our way to the central ruin. Still a bit depressed and more than a little turned off by all the tourists, we climbed down to a more inaccessible section of the ruin. Descending steep stairways and climbing across rocks, we found a bluff overlooking the valley in front of a sort of cave and sat for several hours well out of the sight of any tourists. I began to pray for guidance, for happiness and healing for friends and family, and asked for some sign: a symbol of orientation.

Suddenly, in a hurricane of feathers from the empty space of the valley, swoops in a quite large bird—perhaps two feet tall—and no more than six feet away from where we're sitting. We sit motionless, a bit shocked; I take a close look at this bird. Black with a white breast, orange billed with a downward hook-shape to it. Suddenly, I recognize this bird as the one that was described earlier as “toucan-like” in my coca vision in Cusco. He hops even closer, and we simply stare at one another for perhaps 20 minutes; he seemed very interested in us and was perhaps only hungry, but it was a striking experience having never personally been so close to such a large bird. As we sat there looking into one another's eyes, I felt a wind of energy rising from my heart: an ineffable sense of connectedness and meaning. Life, naked and beautiful—that very life which endures beyond our little lives, the great life which we are part of. I grab my camera to take a picture, press the shutter button, and the camera dies right then and there!

The sense of living within sacred space is quite pronounced at Machu Picchu, the lateral view dominated by that space which is hemmed in by the surrounding mountains. Wet and lush, the sound of rushing water down below. At the center sits a stone described as the “sun teather,” ostensibly used to orient the peoples of Machu Picchu in their relationship with the sun. The carved stone marks the course of the sun along the horizon from summer to winter solstice; an angled cut at the base of precisely 13 degrees, which just so happens to be the declination of Macchu Pichu in degrees south of the equator (speculative, magical, schizotypal thinking, anyone?).

Needless to say, my malaise has lifted; something seems to be drawing us onwards. The “sun teather” metaphor strikes me as a most beautiful one, in the mystical sense of a natural symbol. For people



who have been traditionally migratory, the activity of thread making and weaving seems to take on an almost religious significance. Aside from the material necessities of migratory cultures—which tend to practice animal husbandry and herding—the activity of travel and migration seems to weave a common thread across the planet, tethers one to the great and abiding icon of humankind—the earth, the “great mountain.”

We’re heading back to Cusco tomorrow as a landslide has taken out the route between Aguas Caliente and Quillabamba. We’ll have to find some other route to the jungle, preferably a flight.

## 02/20/2009 Cusco, Peru

*In the body of the world, they say, there is a soul  
and you are that.*

*But we have ways within each other  
that will never be said by anyone.*  
—J’alaludin Rumi

Yesterday we taxi’d from Ollantaytambo all the way back to Cusco. An hour and a half in total, our route veered south at Urubamba, circumventing Písaq, and taking us up to the high grass planes of Chinchero. Peruvian peasants in traditional Andean wear herding flocks of sheep and llama, occasioned honks—a roadside greeting—from our driver. It was nice to indulge the extra soles for a taxi ride; I think it’s important every so often to opt for comfort during periods of extended travel.

Though described in ethnobotanical literature as a place of particular interest, Chinchero struck my untrained eye as rather drab—a formless chaos of whitewashed dwelling cubes around a thin stretch of highway. There is a large, rectangular grass field in the center of the town, with children playing soccer and couples kissing on benches. While Peruvians seem for the most part quite conservative in terms of public displays of affection, the parks and plazas seemed to be a safe haven for couples in tight embrace, tongues locked in wet and probing discoveries of one another. We passed through Chinchero quickly, like a summer’s breeze.

We spent most of our afternoon in Cusco resting at the hostel—

our room quite small and simple excepting the luxury of two—yes, two—windows. Later we walked down to the Plaza de Armas, quite lively and somehow alight in the dim and starless evening.

One of the most endearing aspects of traveling in less industrialized countries is the sense of simple things. Last night, I went out and bought four white candles. Gratefulbear and I sat silently in the candle-lit darkness, burning the fragrant wood of the Palo Santo tree to brighten our olfactory pallet. Throughout this trip, we’ve both found great comfort in familiar memories, each an hallucination: the smell of our favorite breakfast cereal, a rhythm wafting through the air, a turn of English phrasing.

I seem to have lost my iPod, which had become something of a crutch anyways, as well as a book I finished in the earlier part of our trip. I guess it was their time—they may have been stolen, or possibly I misplaced them. We’ll never know. Both are bound to happen.

I have been giving considerable thought to the whole notion of biological imprinting as the basis of the archetypes. This last summer, during a period of accelerated personal change, I seemed to devote particular attention to the *anima mundi* (“world soul”) iteration set of the maternal imprint, perhaps as a result of my initial reading of Jung’s *Mysterium Coniunctionis* (not the last). I think some of the seeds of the concepts developed in *Mysterium* are foreshadowed in *Alchemical Studies*, where Jung lectures brilliantly on the dual motherhood that was implicit in the philosophy of Paracelsus (often considered the father of Occidental medicine). Paracelsus seems to have shared with me the confabulation of a distant personal mother. As a result, in his philosophy, you see particular emphasis on the *Alma mater*—patron mother—, a compensatory mechanism that loosens the grip of the consuming mother as a nascent imprint. Paracelsus found personal peace in what George Macdonald terms the “symbols of nature,” expressed in Paracelsian philosophy as the *Lumen Naturae*: the light of nature. Several of the principles of homeopathic medicine can be traced back to the Paracelsian sensibility.

In our Western culture, the idea of a living and breathing Spirit in Nature has a sort of passing and “new age” appeal—but to seriously consider what the Spirit in Nature implies, in terms of our place in things, stretches reason to the maximum. Most people seem to resist this notion at an unconscious level, with much gnashing of teeth, because to accept it is to die to ourselves. We’re simply not that

important in the grand scheme. But in Bodhgaya I touched a tree, and that tree quite literally spoke to my heart, in a language that only my heart was capable of understanding. This tree was alive and aware. What evidence do I have to offer except what is my most deep and abiding value?

I am like a great and solid rock island in the middle of a coursing river; I only know the river that flows around me. But my ultimate destiny is down river beyond anything I've ever known, and that unknown is a fine and ungraspable light, like a gaseous mist rising in the morning—entirely self-illuminated and utterly unknown.

So perhaps it is fitting that the Inca worshipped the Sun, the source of the light which has been—across the ages—the central “natural symbol” and metaphor of the mystic’s heart. In my own life, the *Lumen Naturae* has comforted a heart alienated by a distant mother and a world alienated from itself; a man has to stand for and within something. Rain is falling outside, and the Christ statue above on the hill where the Sacsayhuamán ruins are situated is alight, a white and gleaming beacon with arms outstretched above the valley. It’s quite a pleasant statue, less austere and encumbered by theism than many images of Christ—more natural like a bird in flight. It was here in the mornings that the priests of the Inca would raise their arms, palms stretched upwards, to receive the rays of the sun. Enough for today—tomorrow is a mystery with arms outstretched to receive it.

## 02/21/2009 Cusco, Peru

*The lover is just as bad;  
He falls into a hole  
But down that hole he finds something shining,  
worth more than any amount of money or power.*  
—J'allaludin Rumi

This morning I took off my shirt to discover that—somewhere amidst the fatigue, diarrhea, altitude sickness, and nausea—I seem to have developed pectoral muscles and a six-pack. Last night we finally realized that we were suffering from more moderate symptoms of altitude sickness. Flying into Cusco earlier this month, I had taken the necessary precautions to avoid serious symptoms: rest and hydration. However, it kind of slipped my mind that, between Machu Picchu and

Cusco, we would be ascending almost 4000 feet. So I wasn't paying attention to hydration or rest.

In the evening I sat down with my new book, John Hemming's *The Conquest of the Inca*, and, after a couple of minutes of reading, noticed I was mentally fatigued, to the point of actually being lightheaded. It definitely seems to get worse in the evening. My palms were a bit clammy, and my lips were quite parched. A little light bulb went off in my head: “huh, I have been having some weird sort of rolling nausea and headache waves today.” Furthermore, both Gratefulbear and I were getting these most disheartening waves of oscillating loneliness and depression; Gratefulbear described it as “you have loneliness on one shoulder, and depression on the other.” A most unpleasant effect. So I dropped a couple of liters in one of the hydro-paks and started hydrating. I gradually started feeling better. Having taken a bit of time away from the coca, I pulled some out and began chewing. I must say, hydration + coca is something of a miracle when it comes to altitude sickness; there seems to be a synergistic effect.

Within 20 minutes of beginning to chew coca again, a sensation like achey pressure-release developed in my chest. Imagine being tense and sore after a workout and then soaking in a nice hot tub, and all of your muscles just relax—that kind of achey-tension release but in the respiratory system. With each pressure release, I would need to urinate. It was a remarkable effect and the symptoms of the altitude sickness quickly subsided. I chewed periodically through the evening—chewing and then hydrating. After a certain amount of time passed between chews, I would feel the return of symptoms that progressively decreased in intensity with each chew. It was quite a lesson to connect with coca as a medicine for specific physical distress; I seem to have connected with coca in a more balanced and respectful way as a result. I wonder what is happening at the molecular level in this case.

Perhaps some of my mad ramblings and delirious visions have been the result of improper hydration, though not to suggest they are any less meaningful. William Blake wrote that humanity's core delusion was a belief in a body separate from soul. I think what we often call “soul” is perhaps, in fact, an as-yet-hidden aspect and understanding of the material universe. It has always seemed to me that the often irrational and confounding vicissitudes of the heart, soul, and psyche have a truth and reality as compelling as anything we currently understand of the material universe. Gnosis/knowledge, then, truly

becomes a function of revealing that which is hidden and unknown, a sort of light in infinite regress, with each revelation containing within it the seed of some future enlightenment—albeit in a veiled and phosphorescent form—, and each successive seed then dissolving the fruition of the previous seeding and awakening.

I looked into plane tickets to Iquitos, which connect through Lima; more expensive than I was hoping. In fact, the flight to Iquitos will end up costing as much as our flight to Lima from the United States. So it seems we will bus to Arequipa-Puno, visit the Colca Canyon (and hopefully see a condor), Lake Titicaca, and perhaps hit up Bolivia before heading back to Lima and catching a flight from there to Iquitos. From Iquitos, my work with ayahuasca begins.

For all the myriad of psychedelics and psychoactives I have sampled from A to Z to 2-C-Special G, I have never once imbibed the vine of the soul, nor any of the traditional DMT-enriched plant admixtures of the ayahuasca complex. My fascination with ayahuasca began at the age of 14. Having been introduced to the world of dimethyltyptamine through the rabbinical ramblings of the inimitable Terence McKenna, my initial exposure to the visionary vistas of ayahuasca came through the inspired visual poetry of Pablo Amaringo. At the age of 14, I promised myself that I would wait until I was in the Amazon jungle itself before taking ayahuasca. Now, sixteen years later, here I am, within striking distance of the jungle and that very vine which connects our world with the Other.

What Jung termed the “duality of the archetype of the mother” is expressed in the shamanic-mystical worldview as the two worlds. This world, which we perceive through the doorway of the senses, is bound by the same laws which govern the structure and function of the sense organs through which this world is perceived. William Blake termed humanity’s obsessive and myopic fixation on this domain of perception as the world seen through “narrow chinks of the cavern.” The essential initiatory crisis of the neophyte seeking induction into the expanded domain of the Other World involves what William Blake termed the “infernal method,” a stripping away of life, death, and the world as he knows it. Mircea Eliade describes a similar process as the “skeletonization” of the shaman.

Over the years, I have discovered that while many people have a sort of fascination with psychedelics and the human relationship with drugs, both plant-based and synthetic, very few people seem to

connect with the psychedelic teachers at the visionary level. It’s just too much. More often than not, people seem to toy around a bit with the psychedelics—just enough to have fun but not so much as to challenge their essential worldview. Generally then, the psychedelics are integrated into the ego-cocoon and become part of the reflexive unconsciousness of the self-focused state. My observation has been that—at this point—psychedelic experience is passed up for less consciousness-expanding fare such as alcohol. In fact, I have known entire subcultures within the psychedelic scene that devolve to this point and then become collectively locked into the participation mystique of the group consciousness, in a way that I can only describe as cultish. The collective force of this strictured and limited state of consciousness then takes on a life of its own, maintaining its homeostasis at all costs. Discussions become limited to only those topics—and modes of expression—which reinforce and maintain the cocoon of the devolved state of consciousness. Jung aptly described this state as “collectively unconscious.”

Over the years, I have listened as various “seekers” parrot an argument that Thomas Mann made in response to Aldous Huxley’s *The Doors of Perception*. Mann argued that the spiritual journey is like a mountain that we climb, and psychedelics are like taking the tramway to the top—they’re a shortcut. When I think about this particular experience, and just how challenging the psychedelic path has been for me . . . “shortcut, my ass” I conclude. Embedded within Mann’s metaphor and argument are several misconceptions, not the least of which is the myth of enlightenment as an attainment. But Mann also turns a blind eye to the original purpose and function of psychedelics in their native setting—psychedelics heal. As such, psychedelics can become an authentic path in their own right, as part of the aspiration to relieve suffering or what the Mahayanists call *bodhicitta*. While I cannot ascribe to a metaphysical philosophy of absolute moral relativism, many of the moral arguments against the use of psychedelics don’t seem to take into account the very necessity that informs their use. The Mazatec of Mexico use the mushroom because they can’t afford expensive pharmaceuticals. The Native American Church uses peyote as a way of enduring their often marginalized place in American society. Much of my travel and effort has been about contacting psychedelics within the matrix of this necessity: to heal.

The peyote shaman Don Jose Matsuwa received his shamanic

vocation after losing his arm in a farming accident. He lived to be 110 years old. In his latter life, he observed: “The shaman’s path is unending. I am an old, old man and still a baby, standing before the mystery of the world, filled with awe.”

## 02/22/2009 Cusco, Peru

*But my dreams  
They aren't as empty  
As my conscience seems to be*  
—The Who

I slept almost 13 hours last night. I guess I needed it. My dreams were rapid and mundane, a clear case of REM-rebound. I seem to be dreaming a great deal about my brother, for whatever reason. We have been resting, though the both of us are ready for another journey into the unknown. We have considered working with a local San Pedro cactus shaman, but I don't feel particularly called to San Pedro here in Cusco. Perhaps in its native region—in and around Trujillo in the northern part of the country—, I will feel more of a pull.

Trujillo itself interests me greatly, as the source of the famed “Trujillo coca.” The *novogranatense* species of the *Erythroxylum* genus, Trujillo coca is said to contain quantities of methyl salicylate, which imparts to the coca a sort of minty flavor. *Novogranatense* is unique in the sense that while *E. coca* is capable of self-germination, *novogranatense* lacks the proper morphological structures for self-germination. I find this interesting bit of botanical data especially intriguing in light of the Kogi mythologem which describes the cosmic genesis as an act of self-germination. In fact, the Kogi actively cultivate only the *novogranatense* form of coca, its *E. coca* relative occurring predominately farther to the south with a morphology that suggests a natural and uncultivated source. Perhaps, then, their mythologem tells something of the story of how coca came into human cultivation.

Apparently the majority of Trujillo coca is exported to the United States, stripped of its cocaine—which is then marketed for medical use—and used to flavor Coca-Cola (the sole licensed American importer is Mallinckrodt of St. Louis, Missouri). Of further interest, the area around Trujillo seems to be the headwaters of *Huachuma/T. Pachanoi* shamanism, certainly one of the most ancient of the New



Gratefulbear

World shamanic forms. Cactus is especially good for facilitating human bonding and clearing the heart.

## 02/23/2009 Cusco, Peru

*What does it mean when a bird talks? What does it mean when you are still enough to hear the bird talking? . . . And what is the language of birds—not the language of English or Spanish, or even the language of humans, but the language of the birds?*

—Dr. Peter Kingsley

I slept another twelve hours last night, and would have slept more except for a knock on our door early this morning. Our fourth night here—we haven't paid yet and they were just checking to make sure we hadn't skipped town. We finally sent out the package we've been holding onto; postal service is quite straight forward in Peru. Still, they took my passport number, a copy of my passport, as well as a



finger print! It was like being inducted into the army; I was waiting for the blood draw.

### 03/02/2009 Puno, Peru

*Enlightenment is like the moon reflected on the water. The moon does not get wet, nor is the water broken. Although its light is wide and great, the moon is reflected even in a puddle an inch wide. The whole moon and the entire sky are reflected in dewdrops on the grass, or even in one drop of water.*

—Eihei Dogen

It has been several days since I have made a real entry, having been hit by some sort of malaise. It may be emotional acclimation to the culture shock. As wonderful as travel can be, there is a profound loneliness to it as well. Nothing is familiar, from the subtleties of body language to the quality of the air. We often reach out for company in what is familiar to us.

Our bus from Cusco was perhaps the most comfortable bus I have ever ridden in—plush seats that reclined with leg support extended out fully. One could easily sleep in these seats—we chose to pay the extra five soles for the luxury seats.

For all the charm of Cusco, I'm glad to be moving on. It reminds me of Santa Fe in a way—there's beauty and a sort of gravity and draw that can become inescapable. The stalls, markets, and goods, with everyone trying to sell this or that. At in least some of the parks throughout Cusco moments of solitude and belonging open up.

Today our bus followed the auburn waters of the Rio Vacanota south of Cusco. Barren land, strewn with the withered stalks of grasses well past their bloom. Tomorrow we hope to be well and rested enough to explore the city of Puno and see Lake Titicaca itself. Until then, rest and music.

### 03/04/2009 Puno, Peru

*Imagine the time the particle you are returns where it came from*

*The family darling comes home.*

*Wine without being contained in cups is handed around.*

*A red glint appears in a granite outcrop and suddenly the whole cliff turns to ruby.*

—J'allaludin Rumi

Awoke this morning after a restless night of unsettling dreams, many with a sexual charge. In one dream, I'm copulating with a black woman who—at orgasm—disintegrates into a skeleton. I seem to be dealing with more gastro-intestinal discomfort. I went a bit overboard with “comfort foods” last night. I decided to just sap it with some Ciprofloxacin, and it seems to be working quite well. My flurry of creative energy and effort from the other night has me once again feeling these similar emotional patterns: is this effort worth anything? does anyone value this work? I don't check my email, because there's always running that risk of bearing your soul and having it trampled on.

### 03/06/2009 Puno, Peru

An interesting development regarding the coca. Up until two nights ago, I was chewing daily with no discernable problem. Then I started chewing and seemed to suffer an allergic response. Starting as an itch in the scalp, I then developed a hive-like rash on my neck and forearms, and my eyelids became slightly swollen. I took a couple days off, bought some loratadine, and tried coca again today. After twenty minutes of chewing, the rash developed again. I took the loratadine, which allayed the symptoms within an hour or so.

This could be something specific to the coca in this particular area, or it could be an authentic sensitivity to coca itself. It may be that my physical body is shifting into a mode whereby it is preparing for the ayahuasca. Though I've never taken ayahuasca, I have experienced unusual phenomena surrounding the ayahuasca-complex; phenomena that appear—in some way—to be atemporal and connected to some

future encounter with the plant.

Several weeks before we made the decision to travel, I dreamt that the ayahuasca spirit came to me as a soft and golden light. “It’s time to walk this medicine path,” it said. It was peculiar and subtle, but the message was very clear. Today, after experimenting again with the coca, it seems I’ve quite clearly shifted to the ayahuasca, and my sense of it is far more veiled. I have no idea what will happen, but have a sense it will be amongst that rare class of experiences described as “peak.”

### 03/08/2009 Puno, Peru

We just returned from two days and one night on Lake Titicaca. A threshold has been passed in this journey: physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Our boat, a shallow skiff with outboard motor, chugged along slowly; within an hour, we stepped off at one of the several floating islands at Uros. The tradition of floating communities began during Inca times, when pre-Incan groups along the lake at Titicaca took to the waters as shelter against the dominant and invading Inca. Initially living only in boats, the inhabitants of the floating islands shifted to floating islands made of reed and large chunks of floating peat moss, all roped together. We sat, sang, purchased some crafts, and moved on to the island at Amantani.

Described as a living relic of Incan culture, the community at Amantani is cradled by two peaks, each boasting temples devoted, respectively, to the masculine and feminine principles. Terraced with modern agricultural stonework, the land is divided up into family parcels. The families—women dressed in traditional clothing—met us at the dock, accompanying us to our respective homes for the night. In the afternoon we ascended to our highest elevation so far this trip: 13,800 feet at the Pachamama temple.

At night, we danced with our families and the community. For the first time, I felt that perhaps tourism wasn’t such a bad thing, but could be a medium of education and cross-cultural understanding. I slept lightly, and we woke early; apparently Gratefulbear’s clock was an hour fast. I dreamt that I was Che Guevara, training in an underground complex; it was painful.

The boat ride between Amantani and Taquille was rough, the waters tossing the boat around for the entire hour and a half.



**Uros Floating Islands**

Gratefulbear suffered from a bit of sea-sickness, while our Japanese traveling companion experienced full-on puking. At Taquille we walked an hour up to the main community, admiring what surely were the finest textiles we have witnessed in Peru. I purchased a vest. We ate lunch on the far side of the island and made our way back to Puno in the afternoon. A wonderful experience. Tomorrow we’re heading back to Cusco, and then catching a flight to Iquitos.

### 03/11/2009 Iquitos, Peru

The vibration of the jungle has long captured my spiritual imagination—what Henry Corbin calls the *Mundus Imaginalis* or imaginal world—in a way that has quelled all doubts in my mind as to the compelling reality of the process that was initiated in me almost ten years ago now. By comparison, American culture—with its compulsive fixation on disparate bits of externally verified datum—is for me knotwork, a cacophony of doubting and critical voices, like twisted bits of string, each bit so enamored of its own peculiar twistedness as to refuse to recognize the very fabric of which each and



all are interminably bound.

In the Siona mythologem, the verb *suná* is used to describe the actions of ayahuasca upon the human mind and sensorium. Translated roughly as “shine,” suna denotes the second in the bi-phasic action of the “vine of the dead.” The first phase—designated by the verb *dwege*—is to be drunk, dizzy. Suna is the revelation of all of the realms of the universe within the fulcrum of constant transformation, rhythm, meaning, and design. Here in the jungle, I feel myself shining; often, there is a sense of electrostatic swell within my heart, stretching out beyond the physical plane like an immense vibronic and luminescent green blanket. A veritable forest of visions humming with the dense and rich music of souls taken to flight, or ashine on the branches of the one great tree that is itself all direction and life—wings outstretched and then gone from the branches.

This last month of challenge and travel has fortified my constitution and, while everything feels foreign and strange, there is a sense of personal renewal, as if my own world has been created anew. Our travel yesterday included the long ride from our hotel in Puno to the airport at Juliaca, and then flights to Lima connecting on to Iquitos. Landing in Iquitos, itself a bead along the vast and meandering serpent that is the Rio Amazonas, our plane settled amidst a pillow of cloud and wind. The rain is a constant companion of the diversity in which the rainforest itself is embedded. We emerged from the cool comfort of the plane into a humidity both hot and hectic.

We quickly proceeded to the Belen market described as “filthy but real” by the owner of the Yellow Rose of Texas, where we seem to take most of our meals. Last night I dreamt of the ayahuasca spirit, and the message was simple: *allow it to open, allow the experience to come to you.*

03/13/2009 Iquitos, Peru

The clouds cleared today, leaving us quite exposed along the banks of the Rio Amazonas. I have begun acclimating to the infamous *mapacho* tobacco, the *Nicotiana rustica* of the jungle. Thick and of an altogether different class of psychoactivity than its commercial cousin *N. tabacum*, it has been a challenge to get used to the thick, dark, potent smoke. A universal companion of ayahuasca, the tobacco is used for cleansing and in ritual. However, I didn't want to just dive



Quistakocha Zoo Bench

into two wholly novel psychoactives at one time, so we bought a little and have been sampling it.

Yesterday we journeyed a couple hours down the Rio Amazonas to the Rio Nanaya, a tributary that winds its way along the southern bank of Iquitos. Having not planned to be out, we forgot our sunscreen, long sleeves, and hat—so both Gratefulbear and I ended up with sunburns.

### 03/15/2009 Iquitos, Peru

Today we attended a *futbol* game at the main stadium in Iquitos, a fairly civilized affair except for the difficulties in obtaining water. Our companion from London—Nick—is quite a find in terms of familiarity with Iquitos and his willingness to help us in exploring the local scenery. As adventurous as Nick is, you'd figure he would be a bit more jaded, but he is always up for something new. The heat was nearly unbearable, beating down on us just past halftime and leaving us soaked in sweat. But we have figured out how to deal with the sun, by

wearing long sleeves and using strong sun block. Though expected to win, the home team was a disappointment. We ate tasty Ceviche and spent the afternoon staying out of the sun.

Yesterday we visited the Quistococha Zoo, an up close and personal look at the jungle fauna. The jaguar especially struck me, powerful and muscular as it paced in a circle about the cage. The pumas masticating in ecstatic feline joy, immersed in bloody, raw carnivorous splendors. Both Gratefulbear and I stroked the belly of a Waidurin, a pink Amazonian river dolphin. Afterwards, we fished for our lunch up the road, all under the lead of our local guide, Roy. His English is good enough to teach me a fair amount of Spanish.

### 03/18/2009 Iquitos, Peru

*Tomorrow has gone  
where do the voices come from?*  
—Porcupine Tree

Yesterday we traveled by taxi up the lone road and across the Rio Nanay to the jungle town at Nauta, catching a grass-roofed river taxi down the Rio Ucuyali to the headwaters of the Rio Amazonas. From the watchtower, the muddy waters of the Rio Marañon merged in one fluid continuity with the dark waters of the Rio Ucuyali to form the one great river Amazon, teeming with water and life all the way through Brazil to the Atlantic. From the watchtower, my mind slowed and rested in memories of moments long ago; the great and blue image of Planet Earth that graced the side of my mother-in-law's deathbed; the one great Light that is Spirit; a quiet nap in the evening. "Such moments remain with us always," I thought to myself.

The bright and smiling faces of river children, splashing in the languid waters along the shore, echoed as if in a dream and, sweeping across the flat plane of the jungle, came a great and showering blanket of rain, a welcome respite from the radiant heat of the equatorial sun. For lunch we ate fish, which is nearly impossible to avoid in the jungle, and fried plantain like sweet potatoes. "Time has no meaning out here, except for the two times: sun up and sun down," the proprietor at the local gringo hangout reminded us today.

From the watchtower, we continued up the far shores of the Rio Marañon to a point just beyond the headwaters, where the flow



Nauta Watchtower

temporarily slows before merging into whirling and unruly currents. Jumping into the cold water, we found the pink river dolphins gathered around us, emerging momentarily to exhale in spurts of foaming mist. A day well spent, except perhaps for the taxi ride home, like a flying metal death-trap on wheels. Today we relaxed and tomorrow we will go see the butterfly farm.

### 03/19/2009 Iquitos, Peru

*Where is my spirit?  
I'm nowhere near it.*  
—Stevie Wonder

Last night I dreamt again of the ayahuasca spirit. A group had gathered in an open-air space beneath a wooden cottage propped up on stilts, with one side opened out onto a sort of lagoon or lake. We partook of the brew and sat in anticipation of the oncoming surge. I felt myself being pulled up on a sort of tether, floating up and above the cottage, and being almost sucked into the vast and empty sky. Then a complete shift in consciousness, and I suddenly found myself completely removed from the domain of the physical and sensory. Everything was dark, but my consciousness was illumined within the darkness without any sense of physical body—all senses in complete suspension. The darkness was like a large and warm velvet blanket, welcoming and spacious, and became the object of a light that was beyond light. At some point I returned to the physical form and found that Gratefulbear was having some sort of difficulty. “Where did you go?” she asked, but I had no answer to her question. “Nowhere really, but while my body was here I was elsewhere,” is all I could think to say.

The sense of illuminated darkness was striking and somehow absolute, touching something ineffable and removed from the narrow chinks of the sensory and bodily. Not void, nor nihilistic in any sense, but empty of any discernable singularity or substance. Not even truly “dark,” but light of an altogether different variety. Many of my recent dreams have dealt in the ayahuasca theme, though I have not recorded the majority of them. This one was quite striking. I have no interpretation.

### 03/20/2009 Iquitos, Peru

The young man who has been occasionally acting as our guide accompanied us to the Mariposaria—butterfly sanctuary—up the Rio Nanay. Looked over by a well-informed and passionate Austrian woman, we were walked through the various stages of the life-process of the different butterflies, from egg to pupa to caterpillar to winged butterfly. Stepping off our boat, we were immediately mobbed by capuchin monkeys, and warned to protect our belongings from them. They have a reputation for pick-pocketing.

Such a strange way to live, tending butterflies for the simple sake of doing so—for butterflies have no real economic value so far as the butterfly sanctuary goes. I find the devotion to beauty for its own sake most appealing, though she offers a sort of service like a zoo. The sheer impracticality impresses me.

Afterwards we boated across the Nanay to the serpent farm on the other side, a somewhat drab place where they clearly don't take optimal care of the animals. Honestly, I felt bad being there as we learned they are not properly licensed—but the Amazon does not tend to be a place of licensing and protocol.

Draping an anaconda around my neck—to my own surprise—the snake handler passed me the head while yelling in Spanish. Shocked and afraid that if I didn't take the head they would just simply drop it, I grabbed the neck just behind the head. A mass of tightening musculature, the snake reared its head and opening its mouth hissed at me. Quite a snake, about 13 feet long and with a reek like death. I was glad to get it off me.

### 03/22/2009 Iquitos, Peru

We have waited now several weeks in Iquitos to work with the ayahuasca medicine. Though occasionally impatient to get things moving, I know things are unfolding as they should—the synchronicity and magic which has brought us to this point is assurance enough that we are in good hands.

This morning we struggled through an ass-buster of a bike ride through the jungle; now I know why they call it *mountain* biking, not jungle biking. Between large sections of mud and sand, the terrain varied far more than one would imagine in this jungle basin. The heat

beating down in waves with the passing of the torrential and incessant multitudes of hovering clouds; the sun peeking through, hell's very own beacon in this devil's paradise. We begrudgingly biked to another watchtower, cursing the entire way. Gratefulbear fell off her bicycle just short of the watchtower, tumbling straight into some monstrosity of a plant with evolved and plentiful splinters like a fine dust burrowing into her skin. She was not pleased.

But I can't complain really. The jungle is just such an incredible unfolding of novelty. The passing of each and every second reveals a wild flux of alien and vegetable geometries, fresh and alive. We were supposed to meet our English companion Nick for swimming this afternoon, but none of us could pull ourselves out of bed. We were so exhausted by the morning's bike ride. We should sleep well tonight.

### 03/23/2009 Iquitos, Peru

*We have no idea what we are.*  
—J'allaludin Rumi

I awoke this morning with some attenuated reservations about spending two months in the jungle; more reflections than reservations really. Yesterday I struggled with homesickness, though I wouldn't call it "sickness" per se—more like home-discomfort, like I had eaten too much green chili. Yesterday I spent time chatting with a good friend who has been in communication with Ram Dass over recent months. Ram Dass made an interesting comparison between the ayahuasca seekers of today and the "starry-eyed" LSD-enthusiasts of the 1960s. An interesting comparison in the sense that the third eye is often referred to as the "star of the east," a five-pointed star wreathed in blue light—the original "starry eye." Nonetheless, I can't disagree with the suggestion that ayahuasca seekers today share a certain excessive enthusiasm and naïvete with those seekers inspired by the first big wave of psychedelia in the '60s. The issue of MDMA came up, with both of us agreeing that somewhere between the euphoric push of MDMA in the early '80s, and the research chemical fad of the late '90s, something had been lost. Last year I re-evaluated the role of MDMA in my life, and came to the resolute conclusion that it had not been a particularly beneficial influence. Over the years, I have settled on psychotropic plants because it has consistently been my experience that there really

is something magical about the plants.

I think perhaps the real power of MDMA and the phenethylamine class of research chemicals is in research and therapy. I often seem to play devil's advocate in regards to science and therapy as areas of human inquiry, though I'm not particularly antagonistic to either science or therapy. The dichotomy between what I have described in this journal as the "shamanic" worldview, and the worldview born from scientific understanding, is perhaps overstated. In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche criticized the Christian worldview of his age as being "impervious to philology," and I believe similar criticisms can be made when it comes to that worldview born from the "age of reason."

Derived from the Greek terms φίλος (*philos*), meaning "loved, beloved, dear, friend," and λόγος (*logos*), meaning "word, articulation, reason," philology often pertains to the historical development of language; Nietzsche also pointed out a tendency towards ossification in thinking itself (an idea that arguably foreshadows the notion of "cognitive philology"). More generally, Nietzsche points towards a tendency to cogitate impervious to the metaphysical assumptions at the root of one's thought process.

In truth, it is neither science nor reason that I object to—it is those forms of ossified thinking that refuse even the possibility of non-ordinary sources of gnosis and understanding. Experience has compelled me toward the necessity of remaining open to sources of information not always consistent with reason in its current and conventional conception. Parmenides of Elea, who lived around 475 B.C., wrote of:

*The one [path] on which mortals, knowing nothing, wander, two-headed, for helplessness in their breasts guides their wandering minds and they are carried, deaf and blind alike, dazed, uncritical tribes, for whom being and not-being are thought the same and yet not the same, and the path of all runs in opposite directions. For never shall this be proved: that things that are not are. But do restrain your thought from this path of inquiry, and do not let habit, born from much experience, compel you along this path, to guide your sightless eye and ringing ear and tongue. But judge by reason the highly contentious disproof that I have spoken.*

Reason is quite a transparent, mutable, and mercurial concept that



suggests a mysterious and unknowable richness. It is not reason that I object to, but those manners of thinking which deny the possibility of what is truly mysterious.

### 03/28/2009 Iquitos, Peru

We've spent a substantial amount of time and money exploring the Shipibo textile forms, and experience and intuition tells me that this is a uniquely marketable item Stateside. Furthermore, I have set myself to the task of hashing out the psychological and visionary implications of the design forms embodied by the Shipibo art style. I strongly feel the visionary realm is the ultimate source and inspiration for all uniquely innovative and original artistic expression—as you might hear an ingenious artist like Van Gogh being described as “visionary” or “ahead of his time.” It seems like what is original is received as a gift from the source of vision in the old tradition of Romantic genius. This perspective towards the broadening and deepening of genres has been the hallmark since the Renaissance when great artists began to sign their artwork. Prior to the Renaissance, art was generally believed to be directly inspired by the divine and in no need of signature; hence, the genres were generally more formulaic and scripted. Still, many prominent artists of nineteenth and twentieth centuries (including photographer Alfred Stieglitz) ceased signing their artwork at a certain point in their careers.

Shipibo artwork bears no signature but, instead, bears the mark of the visionary realm. The Shipibo-Conibo people describe the perception by which their art form descends into physical form as “seen from the spirits and projected onto the body.” I have been surprised to notice that several of the color schemas used in hip-hop and graffiti art seem to reflect Shipibo art, which is quite ancient; while it is said there is “nothing new under the sun,” this reflection points to the possibility of art as a sort of universal emotional and visionary language that speaks from and to the heart—an art form more primeval and archetypal. There are indications that the designs of Shipibo artwork—as inspired by ayahuasca visions—are in fact non-analytic and non-linear designs flashed before the eyes of the shaman, who is the artist in ancient cultures. Such tessellations further reflect the absolute and infinite, suggesting a domain of experience beyond our own. Art in the Shipibo-style is a form of therapy that speaks directly to the deepest

and most profound realms of the human psyche—art seems to have originally served the function of healing the psyche.

For the Shipibo, in the ayahuasca vision, the Nishi Ibo spirit projects the luminescent geometric Shipibo designs in front of the shaman's eye—luminous and complete visions covering everything within sight. As soon as the floating networks of web-like hallucinations descend into the shaman's lips and halo, a melody is issued corresponding to the tiny visions. These textiles are the captured essence of the “visible language” hallucination complex at the heart of the DMT reality (Terence McKenna wrote of this idea). The hummingbird spirit, or Pino, described as the “writer” or “secretary” among the higher spirits, hovers above the patient and projects the pattern into the patient's body, bringing healing. This art is, in fact, medicine.

Let me suggest the possibility of a perspective on pop and hip hop art that broadens their horizons to include the folk styles of *all* marginalized sub-cultures on this planet. Several of the most successful artists of the twentieth century have taken just this approach—masters such as Andy Warhol, David Bowie, and Peter Gabriel. I would argue that much of the “edge” of hip-hop art derives from its cultural marginalization as an art form. When I look at Shipibo-Conibo visionary art, I see tribal art, folk art. Personally, I'd lose money just to host a gallery exhibition with this artwork properly mounted.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Part II: Ayahuasca

04/07/2009 Genero Herrera, Peruvian Amazonas

Last night we drank ayahuasca—the vine of the soul—for the first time. Exceeding my expectations, ayahuasca’s wisdom is only surpassed by the grace and elegance with which it heals the wounded heart. Over the years, I have worked in a range of transformative traditions, including Buddhist meditation, medical science, hatha yoga, and Zen. I have lived in monasteries, meditation centers, and retreated with the likes of Thich Nhat Hahn and Dr. Roshi Joan Halifax. I have filled myself with all manners of intellectual wisdom through books and research articles. I have investigated pharmaceutical science and psychology. The simple truth, for me, is that ayahuasca blows all of them out of the water—in terms of skill and efficiency, it is unparalleled as a vehicle of healing and spiritual development.



Ayahuasca cooking

A soft and powerful warmth of light, wholly welcoming, passed over me in the initial phases as The Medicine began working in my body and mind. As our shaman sang *icaros* (healing songs) over the first several hours, the visions were subsumed within a powerful and reassuring presence—a thick black serpent moving with an elegantly powerful and healing grace—then transforming into a pleroma of collonades reaching up into the palm-thatched roof—then dissolving into scintillae of light:

*“You can trust this completely,” The Medicine said with a clarity of perception and strength, “I am here to heal you.”*

The *icaros* brought a lot of light into the first ceremony, and I was completely at home in the trance. Some misconceptions I had were dispelled regarding The Medicine:

**Misconception 1:** *Ayahuasca tastes terrible.*

It’s not that bad. I have imbibed things that taste much worse—it tastes kind of like bitter hot chocolate.

**Misconception 2:** *“The Purge” is exclusively physical (i.e. vomiting)*

What is referred to as “The Purge” is the process by which dense and heavy energies are brought into the light and *purged* from the unconscious. The physical dimension of The Purge constitutes a miniscule fraction of the purgative process. This medicine is—in my experience—the planetary healer par excellence, the *sine qua non* of medicine. “The Purge” is the phenomenological dimension of what ayahuasca truly is.

In my first experience, I clearly perceived the light and power of the *icaros* as pressing out the dark energies of shame, guilt and, especially, doubt. I saw clearly that these energies had established a personality dynamic within me, preventing me from relating to others in a meaningful and sincere way. “All of these people are crazy,” I would hear in these energies, and see the walls I had erected in coming to know others.

A couple things became clear regarding The Medicine. First, in the context of the shamanic healing traditions of the Amazon,



ayahuasca is seen within a spiritual cosmology. In this cosmology, the vine is directly perceived as a personified and spiritual teacher. So when ayahuasca is referred to as “The Medicine,” it is being designated as a spiritual presence that initiates the neophyte into the various “levels” and grades of spiritual perception. This is not a matter of rational understanding, as the very substance being purged tends to reside within the unconscious mind. My experience seems to indicate that the more irrational the manner in which ayahuasca tends to be working within one’s system, the deeper The Purge. This argument extends from the fact that what is *most* unconscious tends to be that which we are most unaware of, that which does *not* fit into our current level of conscious understanding. This is not to say that the unconscious is never subject to the rigor of rational thought and reason—simply that what is currently unconscious does not reside within the framework of what is rational thought for us. What this perspective emphasizes is that we must be humble to the present moment, and surrender the sort of arrogance and hubris that pretends to understand everything, be it scientific or spiritual. Ayahuasca sees beyond the metaphysical assumptions that tend to obfuscate hyper-materialistic—including scientific—and hyper-spiritualistic modes of perception. The jungle *breathes* as a living presence—for a solid hour I heard an angelic presence singing deep within the forest, compelling me into a period of “reality testing.” “What is this sound really? Truly, what is this voice deep within the jungle?”

When the *icaros* stopped, The Purge began for me though I didn’t vomit. For all of the difficulty of The Purge, there is something very beautiful and wonderful about it—something in me just knew that this was okay, that this was the deepest healing a person could go through. The cosmological framework in which ayahuasca is used reinforces this perception—it gives you exactly what you need, and only so much as you can take. During this period, The Medicine posed a question that has since become something of a personal koan for me: “Is pursuit of the Truth worth all of the suffering and uncertainty?”

My answer would be “yes,” but this answer does not penetrate into the depths of the question for me. What this question has become is a clarion call in developing my own faculties of spiritual discernment and investigation. It’s not a question with an intellectual answer, but instead one felt directly as an intuitive sense of the nature of The Medicine, The Purge, and the unconscious mind. What this question

showed me through The Medicine is my own potential, what the future *could* be.

Specifically, this question allowed me to probe the difficulties that have evolved in my relationship with my father, suggesting a link between my own struggle and my place within the revolution of consciousness as it is being mediated by The Medicine—but Medicine in the macrocosmic sense of what The Medicine actually is, and Purge in the sense of what The Purge actually is: the Truth. The Medicine is the infinite light of compassion and healing, the one and great spiritual Apocalypse that is the central gravity and mystery of life. The Purge is the manifestation of The Medicine within the time-bound dimension of cause-and-effect karmic conditioning and personal suffering—the light comes to bear on the darkness, and the darkness is purged. The alchemists refer to this central mystery of the path of the wounded healer as the *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, the *Lapis Lazuli*, the *Uniao Spiritus*. The two become one and we are healed.

“Where does The Purge go?” I asked The Medicine on the first night.

The truth is that The Purge and The Medicine are one. I have—finally—found my life and destiny. No one understood what I was doing, even mocked it—but this is the story of a man who journeyed deep into the jungle for healing, and was healed. A man has the right to heal himself, to stand in his truth. Here I am, as ever, standing.

#### **04/19/2009 Iquitos, Peruvian Amazonas**

Since shortly after the first ceremony, I have been mostly unable to write. The Medicine has suffused me with a guiding presence whose voice and vision for my life seems to have eclipsed my own. I have been in the midst of personal purging, and quite often The Purge extends out for several days beyond exposure to The Medicine. Several types of purging characterize the effects of ayahuasca on the system over time. There are fear purges, which seem quite common for me. This particular purge is characterized by a sense of urgency, fight-or-flight reflex, and feelings of constriction in the chest. There are rage purges, which are more caustic in nature, and seem to revolve about regions of stored trauma—emotional, psychological, and physical—local to the solar plexus. This purge occurred for me during the third and most powerful ceremony, and was experienced as a clearing of the solar plexus. Doubt

purges, according to Meghan (apprentice and intimate partner to our shaman), generally seem to involve thought spirals fixated on one theme. They frequently concern uncertainty regarding the people one is drinking with, life-course decisions, and the place of The Medicine in one's life and experience. My most common emotional purge at this point has been sadness, which is experienced as a sense of heaviness and malaise that is being squeezed like toothpaste out of my system. Sadness purges occurred uniformly towards the tail-end of the primary visionary experience, often initiating the transition from the *mediado* (a Spanish word that roughly translates as "meditation"; in ayahuasca shamanism, *mediado* is the period of visions) to the next phase of The Medicine. Then certain purges seem to work on the physical body.

I think it's important to emphasize again that The Purge is not necessarily entirely about letting go and releasing. It also seems to involve the capacity to look into areas of blockage and recognize in our woundedness a certain strength. Where I have purged rage and anger, I have also connected with the idea of the spiritual warrior that has been a guiding light in my search for the Truth. In this sense, The Purge can develop one's capacities of wise discernment.

Our second ceremony geared itself towards a specific area of focus and purge. The *mediado* itself came on quickly, hard and strong; I was entirely overcome by a thick, black wave of energy. The visions themselves were unsettling, rapidly oscillating and pressing me back down onto my pad. The sounds of barking dogs and crowing roosters—they crow at all times of the day and night—reverberated, echoes of the Apocalypse. Again I heard the voice of a woman singing deep in the forest, and some singing trees—four notes, spaced and rolling over the jungle canopy. Visions morphing then into a space I have dubbed "the killer clown," a madhouse of trickery and quite alarming.

*"You know, vomiting can be very efficient in purging things like this, if you'd like to push through it," The Medicine said.*

*"Would you like to vomit?" It gave me the choice.*

*"Absolutely," I replied, quickly sitting up, spinning around, and grabbing the bucket.*

I have never been so happy to puke so hard—it came up strong, hard, and was gone. Spitting into the bucket, I felt no desire



Genero Herrera

to wash my mouth out with water. I felt so much better. Immediately our shaman Luco lit some tobacco and calmly walked to my side, *chacapa* (a sort of rattle made from palm-thatch) in hand. With firm and precise snaps, our shaman rapidly toggled the rushing sweeps of the *chacapa* around my head. At times, the *chacapa* transformed into a blue and whistling hummingbird (in retrospect I have realized this hummingbird was the blue bird from my coca vision), flitting about the web of space with miraculous dexterity and agility of motion. The *icaro* was strong and grounded, solid arboreal energies poured off Luco, clearing The Purge and creating a field of protection. I saw Luco as embodying The Medicine—his *icaro* seemed to go on particularly long, after which he blew tobacco smoke into my crown, burping, and pressing some of his own energy in. Luco blew over my chest and back. Then, asking me to join outstretched hands, he blew smoke down my palms again, burping energy down the cupped tube of my palms. I felt light and clean. Interestingly enough, after this purge, the *mediado* and visions entirely receded—quite early—leaving me with the more dense and physically anchored energies of the various trees in the brew, and especially the *sanango* root cooked into the ayahuasca. The evening closed with a relatively light sadness purge as I lay under the mosquito net covering my bed. Certain purges are very calm, nurturing, and reassuring. This sadness was such a wisdom.

That next morning, shortly after sunrise, the shaman recommended we bathe in the fresh waters of the river as a way to wash The Purge off completely. We lounged about lazily in hammocks throughout the day, eating lightly and talking softly amongst ourselves. With each ceremony, the group grew in silence and companionship, forging connections gilded by tightly woven synchronicities, and a mounting sense of compassion for one another.

All members of the group experienced our third ceremony as the strongest. I have yet to develop the type of grammar that communicates the nature of the sort of *mediado* we moved through during the first three hours of this experience. Three of us in the room dropped into a synchrony-space, clearly aware of one another's thoughts and energy fields. It felt like dropping out of the frenetic and mechanical obsessions of my mind, and the conditioned mind and pain-body of American consciousness. This sense of dropping out was simultaneously accompanied by an oceanic and surging tide, deep and satisfying, from the wellspring of consciousness. The visions

swayed soft and purple over the clear waters, delicate petals rotating as they cast warm and infinite light crossing rotund geometries. More than anything, this ceremony instilled a sense of hope for future possibilities, revealing the potential of a life guided by the light of Truth and compassion. It was all so obvious, so clear.

This deep light of The Medicine appeared to invite and reveal certain spirits. In the depth of the visions, a very clear psychic channel opened up between Gratefulbear and me. I sent her love and affection, and she received it. During this period of openness between us, we shared a hallucination complex in which the mushroom spirit came to us. The Medicine would invite in this spirit, then draw us back from the scene and deliver a sort of narrative. While separate messages were given to each of us regarding the mushroom, the visionary component was largely shared. “The mushroom is also a way, but it can be valuable to really exclusively focus on one medicine for certain healing,” it communicated telepathically. “The mushroom tends to guard its secret with a certain jealousy that can be tricky to work with, if you are not skillful with it,” said The Medicine. The communication was perfect, and the message insightful.

As the *mediado* passed, there was a moment and The Medicine was very clear. “Okay, I think you are ready for a bit more of this,” it said, and a thick sadness purge began pressing out of me like snakes. I felt as if the light had been invited so deeply into my system that it was massaging and drawing out the purge. The *mediado* intermittently returned in deep waves throughout the night, and I was hallucinating well past the time we again bathed in the river that next morning.

In the time between ceremonies, bonds rapidly developed between those who had come together to heal and learn from The Medicine. One of the many miracle stories we heard was that of our wheelchair-bound companion, Theresa, who had been almost entirely paralyzed after a snowboarding accident had damaged her spine in the cervical area. After several years of fruitless searching within the range of Western medicine, she turned to alternative medicines, including ayahuasca in Peru. She credits ayahuasca with re-wiring areas of her nervous system, returning sensation to most of her body, and allowing for increasing functionality in her hands. Her presence was so sweet, solid, and reassuring. Her gorgeous smile was set below the clearest blue eyes I have ever seen.

Margie and Erin were a couple on a multi-year spiritual

odyssey that had taken them all the way across the United States, building escape velocity, then quantum leaping out of country and across Ecuador to Peru. In Peru they discovered ayahuasca, which Margie credits as the “turning point” in her struggle with diagnosed bi-polar schizophrenia.

The final ceremony was largely physical except for a very brief period of *mediado* centered around extracting “fear bubbles” that entered as a result of a couple of mushroom experiences where I went overboard with dose and blacked out. I have been told that, because of one’s degree of openness, and the lack of protection in such a state, certain unwholesome energies can enter, and form sacks. The Medicine associated these energies with the mushroom, and invoked the mushroom itself. For perhaps ten minutes, I was in a state virtually indistinguishable from perhaps two grams of potent *cubensis*. The driving and alien quality was unsettling, so I invited The Medicine in—it revealed these sacks of fear throughout my chest and began removing them. “These sacks are causing the rashes you get in your armpits; they are full of grief and suffering.”

As it happened, a week after this purge I mysteriously broke out—late one evening—with a very large rash that extended from deep within my armpit across my chest and back. It didn’t itch at all, but was extremely unsightly and covered my body. I took several showers, blew *mapacho* smoke over it and, after perhaps four hours, it completely vanished. As it was disappearing, I distinctly saw a presence over my right shoulder that firmly tapped my shoulder and was gone. I may have been—in some sense—possessed. When it lifted, I was more peaceful and solid than I can ever remember being. My anxiety is pretty much gone, which is a real miracle. I feel myself less bothered by daily situations and other people. I am more social and comfortable in social situations. The therapeutic impact of The Medicine is unmistakable. We are leaving tomorrow for another session. Miracles and healing abound:

*limpia, limpia ayahuasca  
puro, puro medicina*

#### 04/20/2009 Iquitos, Peruvian Amazonas

Yesterday, shortly before we were to leave Iquitos for the Infinite Light ayahuasca center at Genero Herrera, I made the snap decision to stay put and continue recovering from and integrating our last session with The Medicine. There were some concerns about the intensity and pace of the Infinite Light approach, and our party—which includes a third person from New Mexico—welcomed the time for rest and reflection. There were several signs encouraging this course of action, and things have opened up nicely since. We have decided to rent a house—out beyond Iquitos in the community of Santa Tomas—with four bedrooms, kitchen, and a backyard that descends straight into a lagoon off the black water Rio Nanay. The water itself is clean. The pace of life, as well as medicine-work, is significantly more in tune with our needs. There are three local *curanderas* serving ayahuasca and other plant medicines—we have been told that they almost exclusively focus on members of the local community instead of gringos. Our new Greek friend Nikolas—who has worked with shamans in the area for fifteen years—said he felt we specifically needed this work and healing, and told us not to open it up to other foreigners. Kind of an interesting development, I look forward to seeing where it goes. In the next several days, we will be gathering supplies to settle in comfortably. I seem to be purging something really deep, perhaps some addiction-energy. I seem to be fairly lethargic; I think the five ceremonies per week was too much. The ayahuasca itself seemed to indicate that two or three per week is my limit. Clearly, I need to work on personal limits.

One of my best friends stateside was in touch recently; we’re missing friends and friends are missing us. The United States—for all its affluence—can be such a difficult place to live in for certain people, especially individuals who seem uniquely constituted as “scouts” in this time of evolving consciousness. When I left the US, it was with a profound sense of urgency. I felt a great deal of strain in having lived in a country that has been at war for seven years. I was plagued with anxiety, uncertain as to the direction which was my heart’s path.

#### 4/26/2009 Santa Thomas, Peruvian Amazonas

After several very harrowing days, we seem to have settled into our new home in Santa Thomas. Tomorrow we will walk up into



the deeper jungle and visit our Greek friend Nikolas, who appears remarkably competent in alternative healing and the plant medicines of this area of the Peruvian Amazon. I am feeling optimistic after a rough couple of days. I just walked about the house, blessing each room with fragrant incense, and the sky is dumping a torrential rain right on top of us. The roar on the roof is deafening, and it is quite late. Several things have unfolded in recent days.

Some days back I began chewing coca in the epic style and, at a certain point, blacked out and was incognito for about forty-eight hours. Friends watched me closely, but I was clearly not local to my body and chewing coca constantly. I'm told I visited the market, went out for dinner; I have absolutely no memory of these events. I think the ayahuasca can really make one sensitive in the extreme to other plant energies. I apparently talked little except grunts, and slept a great deal in between. All I remember is chewing some coca, laying down for bed, and then "coming to" forty-eight hours later with people telling me strange stories and giving me strange looks. Somewhat disturbing, really. I'm just glad I was being watched over, and it seems to have served some purpose.

Shortly after emerging from this fugue, I was informed that my stepfather had suffered a cerebellar stroke, which compromised certain motor functionalities but did not leave him paralyzed. He's a tough ol' guy, he'll pull through this and be the better for it. He is constantly in my heart these days.

We gathered supplies for the house, and cooking materials: pots, basic amenities, food stock including lentils and quinoa, produce, buckets for washing clothes, utensils, towels, necessities. I'm quite tired of the hustle and bustle pace of the Belem market, and look forward to a rest day tomorrow.

Tonight, Gratefulbear and I really settled into this spot, and there was some clarity. I realized that the casual drinking I've been doing on the road is causing a lot of problems and preventing me from reaching this domain of possibility the ayahuasca makes available. So the alcohol is out the window again. I seem to have a genetic predisposition to use alcohol in a destructive way, although it can be quite subtle. The house itself is rustic style, made of polished driftwood and quite spacious, with an immense living area and an open kitchen with ample counter space. Upstairs is a landing—where we've hung hammocks—leading out to a porch overlooking the central park. We

are surrounded by the Rio Nanay and, excepting for a couple hours of discothèque in the evening, it has become quite a nice place. Tonight we lay in hammocks upstairs and spent gentle time with candles, chewing a little coca and relaxing. Our traveling partner Azalea seems to have vanished for the night; not sure where he is directed.

Tonight I discovered a very good method for ingesting coca. One starts with coca powder, then adds a small amount of sodium biphosphate and just enough water to turn it into a paste. The paste is then shellacked across the cheek and left there. I imagine this would be very pleasant with cacao nibs and some sweetening agent, plus tobacco. This may be the way to work with this jungle coca, which is significantly tougher, with thicker and raw leaves. It needs something to really get it cooking; the tobacco seems to be the kicker. It feels smoother, calmer—more grounded and clear this way.

#### **05/06/2009 Santa Tomas, Peruvian Amazonas**

*A sixty-ton angel falls to the earth  
A pile of old metal, a radiant blur*

—Porcupine Tree

Last night I dreamt I was gazing out the back window over the jungle at a scene as it was being dictated to me by a being like a sorcerer. The sorcerer held a red cloth over the window, and a portal opened in the cloth, revealing a group of flying saucers gently hovering over the dense forest canopy. Grinning mischievously, he said, "the world's window is open to you, whenever you are ready," and I heard knocking, rapid tapping at the doorway. Then, between waking and sleeping, I was still hearing the tapping at the door. Now awake, I was sitting up in bed and still hearing the knocking. "Who the hell is that so late?" I thought to myself, reticent to get up and check the door. But we're out in the middle of nowhere; the street is entirely quiet. Azalea knocked on my bedroom door. "Hey, did you hear that?" he asked, and we both walked downstairs to check the front door. Nothing, but the house is dancing in spiritual energy. We're all wide awake.

Since my last experience with the ayahuasca, the extraterrestrial situation has been foremost in my mind. Beyond the animal morphs, visions, and transformations—out past the plant spirits—a doorway opens. A doorway to other worlds, watched over by harbingers of



Toucan

intergalactic and trans-dimensional energy. The harbingers suggest that plants—when fully received—transform us into antennas for energy which we, in turn, hardwire and channel into the collective species. So not only is the act of drinking ayahuasca a plant-animal symbiosis, but that symbiosis brings our world into the light of all worlds. Returning us to the heart and cradle at the galactic center of our souls, the plants heal alienation from self, society, and world by connecting us to what is Otherworldly.

As the snakes—black and white, and fused—ascended the monolithic world-pole, a light went with them. Clear and straight, their path smoothly spun about the central channel and, reaching the top, lit up my crown. “It’s an aviary, a birdhouse,” I crooned. It is circular and smooth with ovular holes carved out on every side reaching deep into the center of my skull. Then out popped the very white bird I have sensed for years, wings spread in resplendent beauty. Black beak and empty eye sockets lit from within by luminescent and translucent azure light, vision omnipresent across all senses and out into the beyond. As it moved, the serpentine light followed in time, lighting up the holes with a gentle and healing warmth, revealing every nook of the spiritual structure of my body. “Your third eye is a landing ground for ascending and descending spirits, a portal.” The bird glided softly about the house, clearing insects and dark energies from my spiritual body. In time, all things transform: all is change, all is flux and light, all is food for the soul’s flight from the corporeal.

Then deep energies start moving from the center of my skull, a window opened and I sensed a confluence of inter-dimensional gravities as the inside of my head felt pulled open from the center. A channel opened upwards and there is a thin cloth—made of the most delicate material—that lit up from beyond, and on its surface I saw several thin beings. Mantids frenetically scampered at the doorway, peeling back the edges and opening the portal up completely. The beings are linked at the wrist and smiling as they turned in a circle, peering down the dimensional tube and out onto the scene below. “We open the intergalactic energies,” they said, “and when the time is right, you will travel with us to our own starswarm.” I felt them pulling me up through my crown. “Do you hear it?” echoes Azalea. “That low humming, it’s a UFO,” and they quickly vanish. It was brief but very real and quite compelling. The UFO encounters have been very matter of fact, as have those encounters with more spiritual and earth-bound



energies. But energy no doubt, something alive and vibrant, beyond the human sensorium, yet contained as a potential within it.

Since this last ceremony, I have been pretty “out there,” really. Perfectly anchored, but something has most definitely been stirred up. More than ever, I am beginning to see there is a truth to these energies that is “realer than real.”

### **05/08/2009 Santo Tomas, Peruvian Amazonas**

Tonight we drink pure ayahuasca-chacrana for the final time here in the jungle. The full moon crowns a sky bejeweled by stars, with Sirius shining bright and blue in the southern sky. Chimes waft through the air, the delicate shimmer of an intelligence best described as transcendent. Today we chewed fresh coca leaves straight off bushes gathered up the Rio Napo. The fresh coca is exquisite, flavored with a gentle menthol. I feel I have arrived at a place of mastery with the coca; it is a powerful ally. The coca specifically seems to accelerate The Purge, perhaps explaining the partnership between coca and ayahuasca envisioned in the Witoto mythologem. My final chew was perfect, a balance of the warming energy of the coca plant and the activating agent. I spent several hours wrapped in the coca trance as I swayed gently in my hammock, thinking: “it’s time for ayahuasca.” Today we cooked our first batch of ayahuasca. Layering fresh vine of the *cielo* variety—a word that translates to mean heaven in Spanish—with emerald green *chacrana* and pyramidal *chaliponga*, the aroma of fresh ayahuasca is in the air. Something is opening up within me, a powerful sense of the plants and the world beyond. I feel clear and alive, the pace of things has shot through me and the very rhythms of the jungle coarse through my body. There is no doubt at this point that the transformation is occurring at every level of my being, I feel like a new person.

### **05/09/2009 Santo Tomas, Peruvian Amazonas**

The pure chacrana-caapi brew we imbibed last night—made by the shaman—was hands down the most clear and powerful of the brews thus far. *Suavecita*, in the shaman’s own words, smooth as silk. There be dragons in this ayahuasca. The onset was particularly slow, taking a full ninety minutes to completely develop. The presence of

the old growth vine was quite clear, and the purgative aspect was particularly pronounced on the physical plane. I puked for the first time since the second ceremony, and puked *hard*. As the first set of visions surged, both Azalea and I took a second dose. After gagging down my dose, the visions truly took me away. The night unfolded in a reverie of songs, whistling, and vivid hallucinations.

Early on I was seeing alligators, eyes cold and feline, over the surface of still pools of dark water. For perhaps thirty minutes I moved through a powerful fear purge, releasing yet deeper levels of anxiety and urgency—my heartbeat was strong and steady throughout. Azalea and I sang and whistled together, my first time risking this particular avenue of channel and expression within the trance. The singing facilitates clearing, opening up and protecting the space. At several points during the night, I clearly heard spirits. The ruffle of feathers surrounding my head. A scampering up the perpendicular wall.

Azalea opted for a third dose, and just being proximal to his drinking activated nausea for me. Then after he drank, I very clearly tuned into his third dose. As the wave of visions pulsed from his body into our field of synchrony, I said, “There’s something else here. Something I hadn’t noticed before. It’s like a field of our minds.” An antenna extended from my chest, “calling all worlds,” and a galactic sun rose, a beacon in the soul’s dark night. The alligators lurked in their dark waters as the antenna towered from out my crown, a great and ivory monolith. Then, pulsing with energy, I gazed around me in wonder. Cocooned in a shining dome, glistening, and tastefully lit.

“I am the UFO,” it echoed. “Ashes, ashes, we all fall down.” Irreverent fits of ecstatic laughter, and the worlds opened before me. Spirits gyrating and beckoning, uncoiling DNA spasms—a seamless fabric—smooth as silk—and the alligators broke free from the genetic matrix and—sprouting wings—took flight. Dragons in sequence taken to avian flight from out the top of my crown, in deep and luminescent scarlet spinning disks through the house and out the roof. “We have lift off”—and it was all so simple and clear.

The galactic vistas opened up as the dragons escaped the well of gravity, re-forging my DNA and creating me anew. World upon world, stacked like books in a library, and open for me to read. What great fortune to have been opened to these dimensions of experience, to have beheld—not simply believed—the transformation as complete. Renewal. The thread has unwound, a coil of flesh and blood releasing

the knot. Seven ceremonies, a full moon, and light everywhere.

\* \* \* \* \*

This afternoon here in the jungle, and on the tail of our ayahuasca experience, was somewhat sluggish, a normal reaction to several weeks of pushing the envelope emotionally and psychologically. We seem to need to eat more, so have increased our calorie intake. I spoke with a close friend this evening about beta-carboline combinations. He expressed prudent reservation in regards to the psilocybin-harmine synergy specifically. I don't know, I find the vine to be specifically healing from an energetic perspective, as a bridge between the plants. There is certainly something magical to *Banisteriopsis Caapi*, this I cannot deny. But what is its place in terms of tryptamine synergies? The case of Terence and Dennis McKenna in *True Hallucinations* speaks to the destabilizing impact of this particular combination—psilocybin and harmala alkaloids—but is their specific situation representative of this synergy at large? I wonder how the integration period will unfold. Specifically, the re-ordering of DNA seems part and parcel to the effects of the harmala spectrum of alkaloids. It has even been suggested that harmine and harmaline are neurotoxic at some level, though I suspect this may only apply to doses well beyond what is therapeutic. Therapeutic doses may, I suspect, serve in re-building the serotonin system. In my case, as it has been compromised by intensive MDMA use, this may be quite a useful thing. I feel quite good, clear. Crazy but good.

Our tentative plan is to find a place at higher altitude—with a lower temperature—and hunker down for a bit. The effects of the extreme heat seem to be cumulative at a certain level—it can be particularly difficult to sleep well when it's 90 degrees plus, with humidity. Gratefulbear seems particularly worn out—the jungle is quite a rigorous climate for long periods of immersion and travel. These rigors compounded by the focused and regular work with ayahuasca, and we're some tired puppies. But a lot has been cleared, and our spirits are good. We look forward to cooler weather nonetheless.

05/13/2009 Lima, Peru

Several days of manic chaos and we have unexpectedly found ourselves back in Lima. From Iquitos we traveled by plane to Tarapoto, on the frontier of the jungle and a corridor into the foothills of the Andes mountain range to the West. The temperature and humidity were both significantly reduced as we landed amidst a sun setting over the dark green hills of a sparse highland jungle. The region just south of Tarapoto down the road to Tingo Maria is a major source of the coca exported in paste form to Colombia for processing into pure cocaine for the American market. Certain figures place this region as the source of 65% of the cocaine that is exported to the United States on a yearly basis. As a result, DEA and federal police presence surrounds Tarapoto.

Starting in the early morning on our second day, mobs of marauding *mototaxis* carrying screaming Peruvian protestors flooded the streets. Stripping the vehicles of their roofing and parading them about the central square and throughout the city, the protestors shut down storefronts everywhere they went. Our first Latin American strike. Protesting the presence of oil companies in their native homelands, joined by local Tarapoto residents opposed to drilling and the destruction of clean ground waters in their “city of palms”—theirs is a stance I fully sympathized with in spite of the inconvenience. The markets were closed, the shops, most of the restaurants—those restaurants still left open quickly ran out of food due to the closure of the market. The roads leading in and out of Tarapoto were all blocked, including—on the first day—the entrance to the airport. On more than one occasion I witnessed men speeding about on the back of *mototaxis* holding wooden and makeshift spears, tipped by affixed nails, and clearly unfriendly to enemies. Local police endured the strike in good humor, calmly overseeing the emotional tide with minimal involvement. For two days we hid out while the strike raged on outside, and on the third day made prompt flight reservations to Lima. Stealing away from our hostel in the late afternoon, our tense *mototaxi* ride to the airport took a back route, arriving in plenty of time for our flight.

This time, Lima came to us as a momentary relief from the *blitzkrieg* intensity of the Amazon and jungle; the forest is a reality truly more than one could imagine, powerful and overwhelming. Admittedly, a great deal of my time in the jungle was spent exhausted

from dehydration and the constant and looming presence of intensely direct sunlight reflecting off each and every surface. The jungle tests your mettle every step of the way. Living this close to the bare bones of the physical and natural world casts the heart and soul in pure gold; the jungle “shines.” Very soon I will be in a place to retrospect concerning ayahuasca and the jungle.

A wafting tide of cool mist washed over Lima early this morning. We have eaten particularly well. Earlier in the morning we picked up a good amount of Tinga Maria coca and llipta from the plant market in central Lima. The market was quite hectic, the coca excellent. Tomorrow we head down to Arequipa and the Colca canyon. I knew we would be back here.

### **05/15/2009 Huacachina, Peru**

After an exhausting day in Lima, we bussed last night to Ica—along the southern coast of Peru—and quickly taxi’d to the lagoon at Huacachina. Colonial architecture encircling an idyllic lagoon and further surrounded by looming and pristine sand dunes, Huacachina is the very picture of a desert oasis. The air is warm during the day and flows into cool and stark evenings. Local hotel management has proven particularly friendly, a welcome respite from the gentrified hostility that is Lima. We settled in nicely to a room overlooking the lagoon, tastefully painted in textured reds and yellows. After a substantial dinner, our group fell into a deep and dream-filled sleep.

I dreamt we had returned to the Amantani Island, all the same excepting the mountain path to the Pachamama ceremonial ground was entirely transformed. Much steeper, ascending a towering peak. As we climbed in a group, scarlet dragons came pouring out of caves tucked into the stony cliff faces. The grey stone, winged lizard scales, my feet bare with skin on solid earth, echoed something archaic. The sense of proximity to the barebones planet—life and death, joy and suffering—felt ancient, sinewy, and strong. I awoke this morning somewhat groggy, tired from the rigor and intensity of travel. How we’re surviving all of this is beyond me sometimes.

A word on the rigors of travel. Many seem to hold the misconception that travel of this nature is all fun and discovery. More often than not, the fun is eclipsed by the challenge of getting from point A to point B. Sleepless nights in dingy hotel rooms are common

fare. Many a traveler suffers from insomnia, unable to adjust to the constant changes in one’s sleeping situation. Noise constantly lurks as a possibility in the background, and comes from the most surprising of sources: all-night music of the most awful sort, loudspeakers, and planes flying just overhead (oops, we’re next to an airport). Hectic taxi-rides through hellish traffic, people almost constantly ogling the crazy gringos. In markets, one remains constantly on-guard for pickpockets and other unsavory characters. Lots of rest is prudent; I spend whole days in virtual isolation simply resting. Rest and hydration, both very important.

### **05/17/2009 Huancachina, Peru**

I’ve been quite sick the last two days, waking up yesterday with a wicked case of diarrhea, promptly vomiting. I hardly got out of bed except to eat a few times. This seems to happen as we move from city to city, re-acclimating to the nascent bacteria at each stop. Last night—after a few hours of restful sleep—my uneasy bowels woke me, sending me to the traveler’s porcelain god for several hours of worship. I slept late this morning, and have been drinking a lot of water. Coca helps, though I have slowed down with it in general. Azalea is in town getting me the probiotic supplement they use around here—it actually works really well.

### **05/25/2009 Arequipa, Peru**

Two days ago we arrived in Arequipa. A grueling overnight bus through a barren landscape of dunes—the sun over the dunes soothed a mind exhausted from yet another sleepless night. Arequipa reminds me of Cusco in many ways, with colonial architecture and a high desert atmosphere. Overseen by immense and looming volcanic peaks, the central square is constructed almost entirely of white stone.

Yesterday we visited the museum at the University of Santa Maria, showcasing the ice maiden “Juanita,” as well as relics discovered at her tomb site on the top of Mount Ampato. She was killed in a ritual ceremony of offering to the mountain, a “pure sacrifice.” I’m tiring of travel at this point, irritable and low energy.

## 05/31/2009 Chivay, Peru

The valley here in Chivay reminds me of my home in New Mexico—dry, sparse, and close to the sky, which grows more black than blue as you ascend. A preponderance of *Trichocereus Peruvianus* covers the hillsides, topped in crags of light and graying stone. Terraced farming graces a landscape surreal for its elevation and clarity. We walked the two miles down the valley to local hot springs, bathing briefly in a sun too direct for hot water. Returning shortly, we have been chewing coca; it helps greatly with the altitude we have reached at 11,500 feet. I feel more comfortable here, chewing coca and relaxing.

The bottles of ayahuasca leaked on the bus ride from Arequipa, soaking my backpack all the way through, and filling the bus with an aroma both intoxicating and rich. Pulling the bottles out and laying them on the ground sans vigilance, they rattled about the floor of the bus, sliding down the rows and all throughout the cabin. I could only laugh at how ridiculous was this scene, with frenetic Hispanic music blaring in the background as—descending into the valley—we miraculously survived one hairpin turn after another, sending the bottles careening from corner to corner. The Medicine tossed about “every which way but loose,” as the saying goes, and dry Peruvian smirks greeted us as we gathered our bottles from the bus aisle and disembarked at Chivay. Last night, we ate an excellent meal off the Plaza de Armas.

## 06/02/2009 Cobanacondae, Peru

Last night we slept at Pinchollo, a small pueblo at 11,800 feet. A forest of *Trichocereus Peruvianus* lines the road from Chivay, obelisks snaking our way past the valley into the Canyon de Colca. Though not so dramatic and sheer as the Grand Canyon, the Canyon de Colca descends graceful and slow to the Colca River 3300 feet below at its base, and from rim to base is some twice the depth of the Grand Canyon. Neatly tucked between two large and snow-peaked mountains, the barren and high desert reaching up into a dark and cloudless sky. We clearly felt the elevation last night, though not so bad as in Cusco. I feel quite at home in this cold and dry climate which reminds me of the American Southwest. Pinchollo, nondescript excepting a lone hostel off the plaza; sleep likewise uneventful and dreamless as we caught a



Chivay

bus to Cobanacondae in the morning.

People laugh often in Cobanacondae. Women dressed ornate in their tradition, faces wrinkled in smile, fading at the edges. A weed-strewn landscape amidst a crown of snowy mountains in sphere about this modest canyon town. A bleary sun sets over stone and sand, bringing shadows all too cold for their desolation. We sit on stony seats. An old man hobbles by with his cane. Every town needs a rambling old man, hobbling with his cane about the central plaza, and “full of the Spirit”:

*“My house is for Christians, not drunks,” he says.*

*“I’ll drink to that,” I think, smiling politely and ruminating heretically.*

*“For there has never been a more wretched hive of scum and villainy.”*

The very hierophant and shadow of a soul windswept into voidness. For my cup, though full, has always been a dirty one, chipped at the edges and swimming in sediments all too noxious. I have not showered in days, and the nights often pass sleepless, blinkless, gazing

into the white and saltine brilliance of the waning moon.

“For we shall be the earth’s own salt,” I think again, groaning in self-deprecation.

Sinoidal, the midnight sky tides across the days that come and go without memory of their fading into mornings all too early for eyes so lidless. Brisk breezes blow subtle as the sun’s final rays blaze needle-like over an infinitude of desert spaces escaping off mountains clinched in the snows that peak them.

### 06/16/2009 Cusco, Peru

I awoke early this morning, after a sleep that—it seemed to me—never actually occurred, heart pained over so many years of loss, regret, so many mistakes. Feverish, I impulsively rushed out of our hostel room and down cobblestone steps framed on either side by tightly knit brickwork in the Incan style, the valley stretching out below in a dark orange *terra-cotta* ocean of syncretic Incan-colonial architecture and style. Brisk and rushing past the central Plaza de Armas and straight to the food market, buying bags full of fruit, nuts, and bread, then wandering onwards, turning dusty and solitary corners into the most impoverished corners of the city.

Roger of Wendover, in 1228, recounted the legend of the “Wandering Jew,” a shoemaker who—on Christ’s road to Calvary—struck Jesus when he stopped for a second to rest while carrying his cross, saying “Go on quicker, Jesus! Go on quicker! Why dost Thou loiter?” To which Jesus, “with a stern countenance,” replied: “I shall stand and rest, but thou shalt go on till the last day.”

Finding myself hopelessly lost, disoriented, and heartbroken—ever running on “till the last day”—I collapsed for a moment’s rest on an old and cracked cornerstone where two roads crossed. Opening up the bags of fruit and food, the only thing I could think to do was hand out the fruits and foods to the passing valley peasants, carrying their heavy loads in colored wraps about their backs. Toothless smiles—weathered wrinkles reaching into heaven—eyes wreathed in earth’s “meek inheritance”:

*Love lost, such a cost,  
give me things  
that don't get lost.  
Like a coin that won't get tossed  
rolling home to you.*  
—Neil Young

Such a mystery that inevitably one arrives at a crossroads—taking up the yoke (Matthew 11:29)—choosing a path, and thinking all the while we have made some sort of decision for ourselves: mistakes we’ve made, friends we’ve lost, things we regret, people we love. But most of all, we think we have made the decision to return home, to take that path which returns us to a God we believe has abandoned us. How entirely mysterious that on this road, the only decision we have ever made is retrospective. That, according to Joseph Campbell’s “monomyth” idea, we are called to God, receive the blessing of the Holy Spirit—then, returning home to family, friends, and one another, we can once and finally sigh—in good humor—with a joyous and lighthearted sense that one indeed, “took the road less traveled” (Robert Frost), regardless of the path taken. We’re never separate from God, for all of life’s pain and suffering. Not a single blade of grass is ever forgotten.

Laughing as the peasants smiled, patting my back and gesticulating in Spanish I only dimly understood, I looked down at my feet. “My God, what a fool I am”—for in my manic fervor I had forgotten to put shoes on, and was wearing only socks. I think we need a better word for this sort of thing than *irony*, or *humor*, or *foolishness*. I prefer to think of the rough, hard, and solid feeling of cobblestone on my tender feet as that by which:

*On His clothes and His thigh He has a name written:  
King of Kings and Lord of Lords.*  
—Revelation 19:16

That this path, so full of pain, sorrow, and loss, and yet: “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”



06/21/2009 Cusco, Peru

*The nature of things is in the habit  
of concealing itself*

—Heraclitus, Fragment 54

Our path escaped ahead of us—three still—up the narrowing valley again to Ollantaytambo. Stopping over at Písaq, the narrow market alleyways crushing in upon us from every inescapable direction. That night, I caught a chest cold that accompanied me up the valley, there and back again. Part of me—my body—appears to be well on its way home, though I am slow to follow. My mind returns to the thick and meandering nostalgia of Rilke's *Book of Hours*, with its aura of tempered urgency. Kneeling at the feet of the dead, honeyed mummies.

Azalea brought up a most interesting point regarding the gravity of places such as Peru, Cusco, and Ollantaytambo. Here the worlds crossed in irreconcilable fury come thundering down the mountain, cracking law's chiseled stone with crushing wonder. Living in ours, a world bereft of wonder, we are sent out on the dark steeds of a terror that drives us to places too narrow for the treading of human feet. Our feet fall out from beneath us, harnessed by the windswept shadow of a thousand crashing hooves. In that darkness, earth's first flower blooms. Without accord or reason, blooming and springing without eyes to see, ears to hear, nor even feet to tread the soft and warm cradle of those shimmering fields tipping the starlight petals.

The night in Písaq passed in a fever of lidless insomnia. Gratefulbear and I huddled in the weathered and running ink of discarded newspaper headlines, swept in hysterical fitfulness out the door into world's abandonment. Bed sheets damp with the corporeal uncovering of that essential and blotting nakedness by which hell becomes the crossing of heavens: a life un-lived to completion.

That next morning, we followed our weary feet down, and drew deep of the well which, beckoning the high mountain waters of one of the many tributaries of the Urubamba River, thunders past into a chiseling absence. Reaching up into empty words, empty and hollow filial-hood spinning wild into an arching, tympanic canvas come crashing down over our calcified skulls in one blinding blow. Across the courtyard and gliding on feet as cracked as the mountain stones on which the empire of the Inca fell, here at Ollantaytambo, and escaping

to places concealed in the high reaches of cloud and rain forest. Old Man, voice a tumbling of hooves in a Castilian pierced through with aspirations of Quechua.

The last afternoon in Ollantaytambo, we returned up the valley to Cusco, again ascending the ridge up through Chinchero. Beauty struck me all around in sheltered intimations like a flickering candle cradled in the windy night. That night proceeded dreamless, a white and silken blanket of unwritten words across a weary canvas. The next morning I proceeded slowly—with a tempered and evolving urgency—once again to the San Pedro market.

Through the stampede of revelers celebrating the solstice and “rebirth of the sun,” the most holy of events in Incan cosmology, I took a moment's rest at a bench. Carrying his box of work supplies and walking directly in my direction, a young boy—tapping my shoe—asked, “shoeshine, Meester?”—and this moment spilled into the future, alone in the hostel room. My vertigo/labyrinthitis flaring through fontanelles and soft wisps of baby's breath on my bald head. Looking about in a circle, the walls crashing in about me; body, space and time entirely alien and barren. Abandoned on this earthen wasteland, but a seed planted inside—a seed whose growth precludes a concealing, covered with a dark earth only ever rich for its lack of tending. A strange planet, a planet to which we do not belong. Our roots go much deeper. Yet sprouting, bringing sensory experience into full and conscious focus.

Pulling out several tins of colored powder, he took out a rag and wiped away a first layer of dust, beneath revealing a soft tone of skin. His hands black with polish and the aromatic vapor of turpentine escaping morning's coil in splinters of sunlight across the fading grey stone of the market basin. My feet, bathed in the sweet touch of a childhood both profane and holy, stood at the mother's head and looking down. Taking the tins of powder and nimbly lifting raised wisps of each color on the edge of his finger, then smearing in circles he closed the container and shaking it vigorously opened it back up.

“You like this color, Meester?”

With face upturned and eyes locked across moment's passing. Baffled and laughing, sometimes I am the one standing still and conscious of the suffering at my feet. Yet still somehow the one suffering and at the feet of the Beloved.

“Except that you become as one of these,” colors mixed in a

cheap tin, and I “saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.”  
(Revelation 21:1)

*Consummatum Est* (it is finished)

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