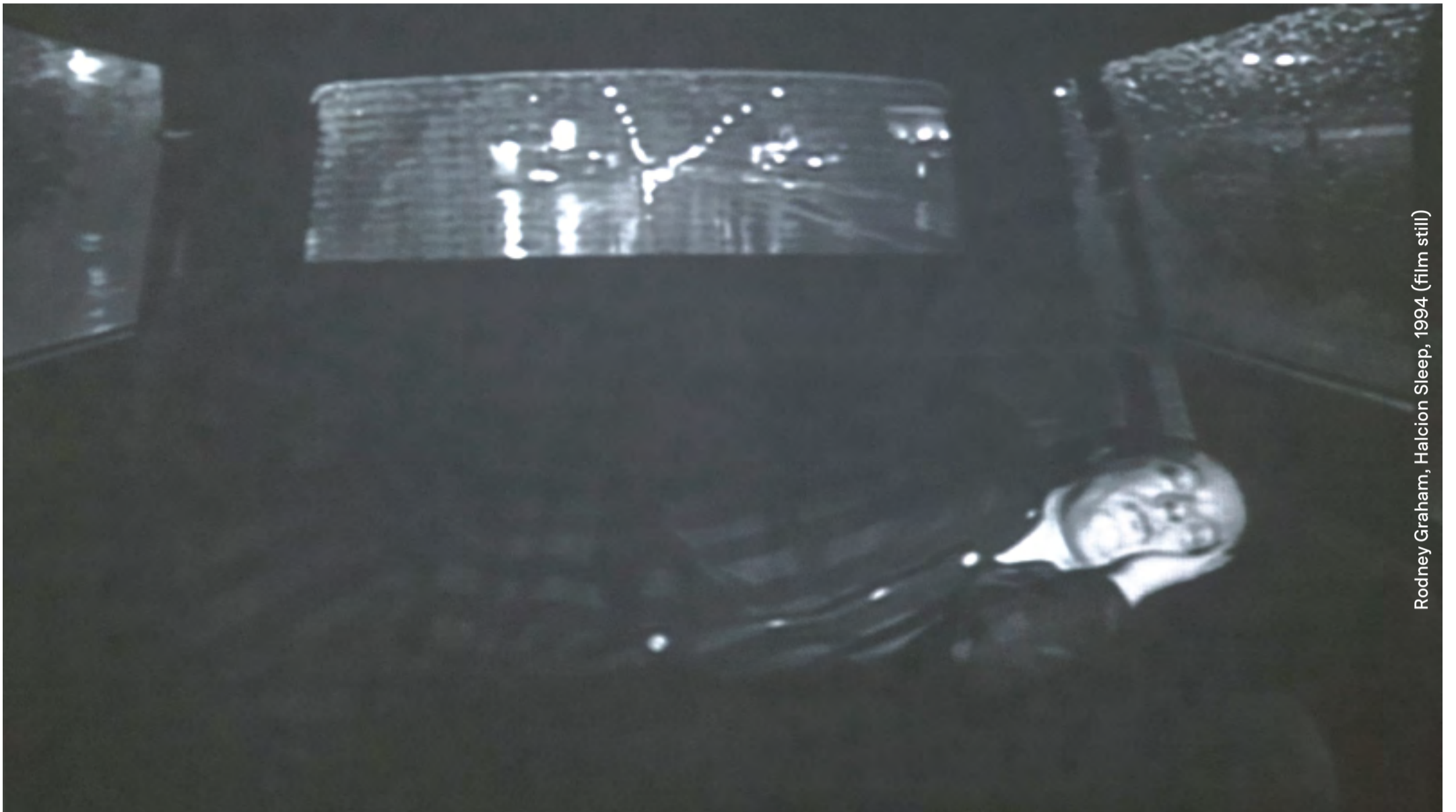


Activist Neuroaesthetics

Sleep and Altered States of Consciousness



Rodney Graham, Halcion Sleep, 1994 (film still)

Exhibition

With works by Elena Bajo, Katie Grinnan, Karen Lofgren, Tino Sehgal, Jeremy Shaw, Suzanne Treister, Rosemarie Trockel, Klaus Weber, and Sakiko Yamaoka.

Sleep and Altered States of Consciousness is the second of three acts in an exhibition-play that unpacks and explores the effects that new technological transformations might have on human consciousness and its various social and cultural expressions and permutations. There is a thin veil that separates the experience of sleep from altered state of consciousness as both sleep and the ingestion of psychoactive substances induce temporary changes in one's normal mental state. This adjacency is expressed in Andrei Tarkovsky's film *Solaris* (1972) which explores the effects of mass insomnia caused by a 24/7 lit environment that leads to a breakdown of cognitive control characterized by hallucinations and the experience of ghosts. This exhibition also understands how sleep and alternative states of consciousness remain stubbornly aloof from processes of subjectification and commodification defining, as it does, the edge of the next neoliberal frontier. As Jonathan Crary has described in *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (2013), "sleep poses the idea of a human need and interval of time that cannot be colonized and harnessed to a massive engine of profitability." Psychoactive drugs take this one

step further by expanding experience and consciousness, and, as a result, produce new and sublime forms beyond capitalism's grasp.

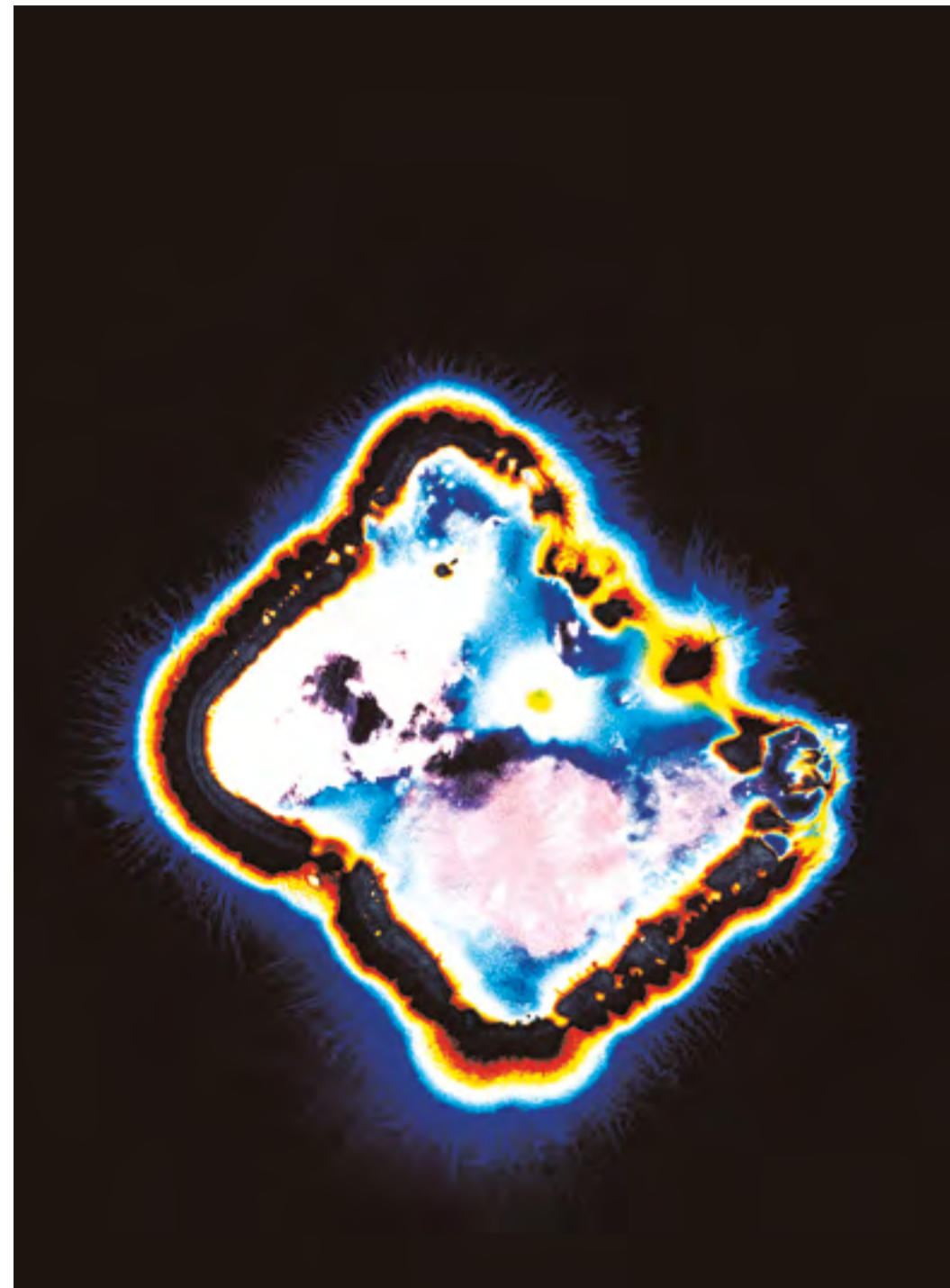
In cognitive capitalism, the brain and mind are the new factories of the 21st century and the neural commons is under assault. One of its key conditions is the amplification of already existing 24/7 markets and their global infrastructure for continuous work and consumption, especially its relation to data production and collection. Through new processes of reification, human beings become linked to these new technological processes of depersonalization and self-administration. For instance, billions of dollars are being spent to research various means to reduce decision-making time and to create virtual environments that engage attention more intensely, as well as to reduce the lost time of useless reflection, all in the name of increasing cognitive surplus labor. This externalization and commoditization, which is the essence of what Shoshana Zuboff calls the Big Other, needs to be understood as the next step on the horizon in a procession towards the commodification of sleep and other alternate states, as well as the coming advancement of a broad range of telepathic techniques of which brain-computer interface technology is just one example.

As we saw in the first part of this Activist Neuroaesthetics exhibition, the brain without organs is one apparatus at odds with this future conundrum, and the brain's neural variation and its neural plasticity form its toolbox. Foundational for this exhibition is the role of psychedelic drugs, especially ayahuasca, in estranging and retro-engineering the organization of a sculpted and politicized semiotic brain. In cognitive capitalism, the attention economy is essential to the production of valorization and its neurobiological analogue salience. As such, ayahuasca's newly found popularity might offer a reprieve from the subjugating effects of advanced data surveillance and normalization that depend upon coherent, consistent and patterned interactions with the world

wide web and its machinic algorithmic intelligence. Might this system be put in jeopardy by the effects of drugs that alter perception, produce hallucinations and drive the mind back into self-reflective contemplation? Ayahuasca's effect upon divergent thinking and enhanced mindfulness-related capacities are cases in point that affect our free choices and the production of a future full of chance encounters. *Sleep and Altered States of Consciousness* reopens the future that has been denigrated in cognitive capitalism.

"When they think their land is getting spoiled, the white people speak of "pollution." In our language, when sickness spreads relentlessly through the forest, we say that *xawara* [epidemic fumes] have seized it and that it becomes ghost."

Davi Kopenawa



Jeremy Shaw, Unseen Potential (Psilocybe Utopia, a.2), 2020

In the Unseen Potential series, Shaw employs the obscure form of Kirlian photography - named after its Russian inventor Semyon Kirlian and used to capture the phenomenon of electrical coronal discharges that naturally occur around objects - considered by some to be their aura. In complete darkness, Shaw places the plant directly on an unexposed piece of Polaroid land-film, situated on the copper plate surface of a Kirlian camera and ignites a high voltage charge through the film and into the plant. The empirical process employed here produces images that fit the cultural lexicon of "the psychedelic" itself.



Tino Sehgal, This Exhibition, 2004

In the performance an invigilator suddenly and unexpectedly falls to the floor, seemingly struck by some undefinable brain disorder. As if in a trance she or he begins to recite the press release of the show. For 'Sleep and Altered States of Consciousness' Sehgal's early performance is interpreted by three individuals.



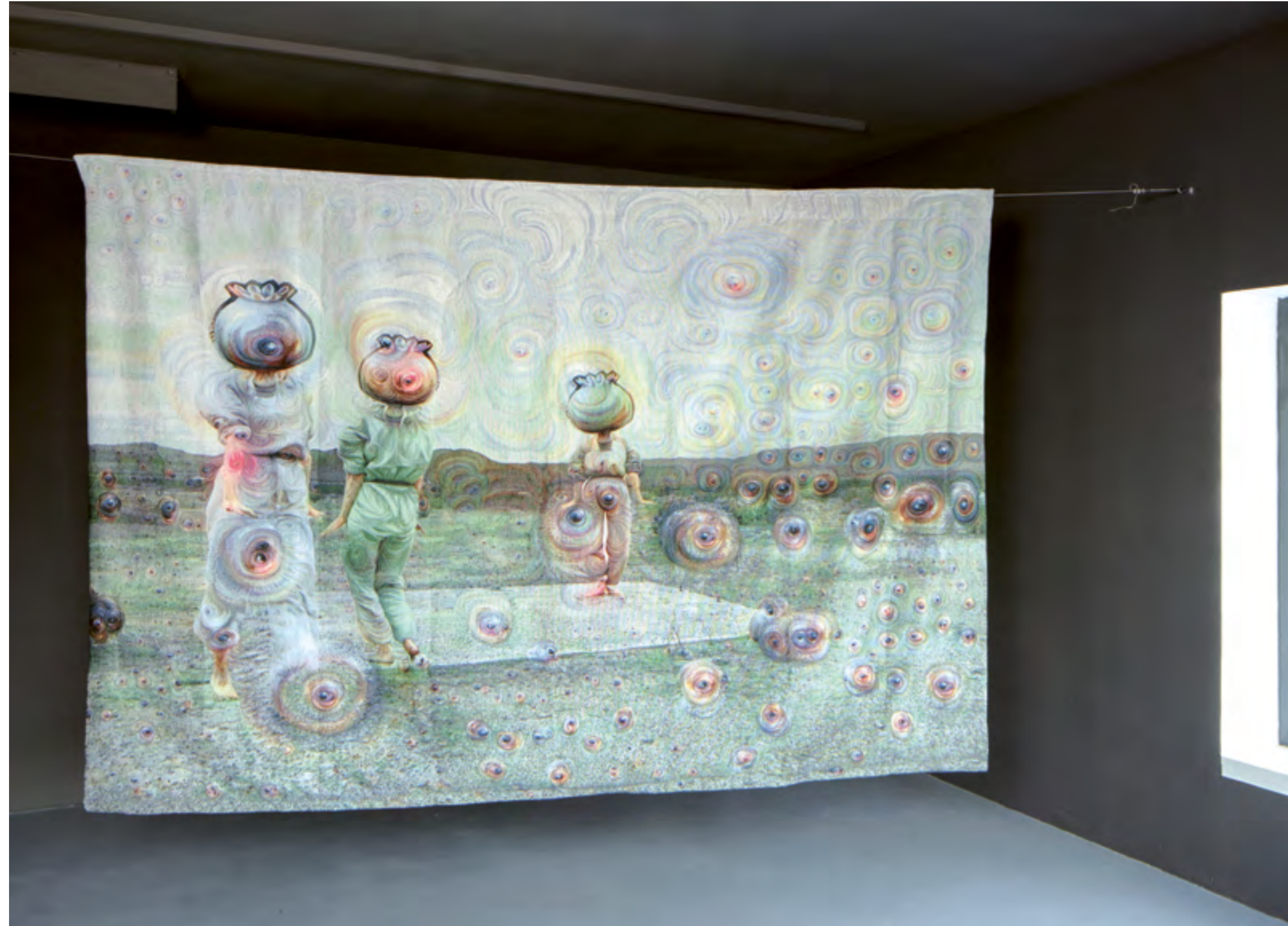
Katie Grinnan, Data Mind Geo-Phonics, 2018 (installation 2021)

For the sculpture group Grinnan appropriates the apparatuses of a sleep laboratory to instigate a graphic score that delineates an improbable relationship between landscape and mind as a poetic syntax. To this end she utilizes a data set derived from delta waves from a sleep study at the Laboratory for Noninvasive Brain-Machine Interface Systems at the University of Houston in Texas, where Grinnan was hooked up to a 64 channel EEG machine.



Jeremy Shaw, DMT, 2004 (installation 2021)

DMT is documenting an experiment in which Jeremy Shaw administered the hallucinogen dimethyltryptamine to a group of friends and videotaped their experiences. DMT is one of the major psychoactive compounds found in various shamanistic compounds (e.g., ayahuasca, and yagé) and has been used in South America for centuries. More recently it found its way into Europe and North America as a recreational drug.



Elena Bajo, The Dance of the Opium Poppies, 2021

The tapestry is part of the project "A Growing Wave Breaks in the Shore of Time (Tomorrow I was a Plant)", part of a bigger body of work that is called the "Cosmic Distress Series", that investigates psychoactive plant systems as narrators of their own ecological consciousness from an Eco-Psycho-active feminist perspective. In this project, the human brain becomes a plant brain, human becoming plant,

plants being channeled by humans, the materialization of the psychoactive effects visible and discursive. The carpet itself was generated by passing a documentary performance image through DeepDream, Google's computer vision program, that uses a convolutional neural network to create over-processed hallucinogenic images



Klaus Weber, Proposal for Fountain for Public LSD Hall, 2003
(installation 2021)

In the original proposal Weber had designed the fountain as part of a public hall. A box with one-way glass, to look out but not in, centrally placed, from which to enjoy a drink from the LSD-Fountain. One can sit inside the hall and watch the city without being watched. This can be compared with the experience of a traveller - albeit in an altered state of mind.



Sakiko Yamaoka, Best Place to Sleep, MitsubishiBank Headquarters
Nihonbashi-chuo, Tokyo (photo: Yoshinori Niwa), 2007

Yamaoka utilizes performance art to focus on themes such as body/mind consciousness and kinaesthetic experiences. The ongoing performance series "Best Place to Sleep" is referring to sleep as a biopolitical state that is physiological and social at the same time. By sleeping in the most unlikely public places worldwide the artist uses sleep as a possibility for aesthetics as well as a proposition for unthought while discussing napping in public as a national habit viewed from a feminist point of view.



Karen Lofgren, *Las alimentadas*, 2017-2020 (installation 2021)

Las alimentadas are solid wood pieces that carry the chemical and material traces of transformational rituals. Starting in the Amazon rainforest the artist worked for months on pieces influenced by ayahuasca ritual as well as animist principles that guide everyday life in that region. Carved with a machete out of soaked balsa that had been floating for years in the river, they were brought to the artist's studio in LA, dried, sanded and then 'fed' through their top openings with ayahuasca, mugwort tea, and other psychedelic alkaloid herbals.

Karen Lofgren, *The Curse and the Cure (Imperial Ghost)*, 2018

Copying the leaf of a *Victoria Amazonica* in resin the artist purposefully places the beholder in between empathy and horror by creating a surface that is sculptural as well as resembling dead flesh. Enriching it with antimony powder, wool, mud, blood, and artificial onyx it reminds us of the traditional role of the plant as bearer of curses and means of their cure therewith engaging in a greater dialogue of the Americas from an eco-feminist and decolonial standpoint, looking at the roots and history of oppressed knowledge.



Suzanne Treister, *HFT / Botanical Prints*, 2014-15

Was consciousness may be a giant algorithm? And where was the universe in this algorithm? These are fundamental questions for Hillel Fischer Traumberg an HFT from London who inserted the molecular formulae of a hundred or so known and documented psychoactive plants into the codes of his trading algorithms. Later he compiled a gematria chart of all the plants, listing their botanical names alongside the top 20 companies in the FT Global Financial Index. He then programmed the algorithm to collate and transform the shown botanical prints.

“A discourse on drugs in general will always be an ideological discourse, a discourse with no other meaning than that of social control and adherence to a system of values that is neither concerned with knowledge nor with truth. The context of the general discourse on drugs is a political context in the worst sense of politics. A context in which knowledge and science are not tools of discovery, criticism, analysis and truth but simply tools to justify a political position: the power of one group over another; and social control is the vector of this power play. Do we know yet another sense of politics? Are we left, socially, with any other practice of politics? The vast majority of political speeches refer, in one way or another, to “drugs.” The question is whether it is time to liberalize or whether the drug device, essentially ideological, is still a necessary instance of social control. And even if there is a different example given each time; of marijuana and its medicinal virtues, or of cocaine and its international cartels, it always refers to the same general idea, that of the drug, which, like Christ, has become a logos of meat and bone.” Rafael Castellanos, “Toxicomanías” in *Psychotropisms: Drugs, specters and hallucinations for the transformation of the present*



Art for sleepers, art by sleepers and art as sleep.

by Shu Lea Cheang and Matthew Fuller

How can we have an aesthetics of sleep?

What does it imply to have an aesthetic relation to the world without being awake? Art, attending to which usually implies being alert, but which also has a long history of working with the everyday, the mundane, the bodily, and the imperceptible or intuitive, is one resource. Equally, how might we rework things that are often outside of art, such as medical processes, or brewing, so that new conditions for sleep arise?

Some approaches:

Duration. Projects that work over a period of time involve variation in waking state and provide a terrain for moving across from wakefulness to sleep, with soundscapes and language to accompany and texture it.

Transposition. Refining everyday activities such as the making and taking of food and drink, the doing of various approaches to exercise and movement, by transposing such activities into an art context.

Instituting. We seek an imagination of what the institution might look like were it to recompose itself in relationship to other kinds of bodily state.

Recording. What archives of sleep can we find in film, books, sound, art? What records are made by and of sleepers? What kinds of archives might be assembled for sleepers, when they are awake, to understand this third of life? We work with sleep science to create an archive of records of sleep made with sensors, graphs, numbers, and so on.

Rethinking. We open the question of the organism up to experiment and enquiry. Sleep can be understood as placing us in a position of vulnerability; which can be something we share with the nonhuman participants in the world and it is a valuable condition from which to think and to act.

This text is an excerpt from the exhibition description for *Sleep 79* organized by Shu Lea Cheang and Matthew Fuller at Taiwan Contemporary Culture Lab C-Lab in 2018.

Photo caption: Audrey Tang reading Mozilla Common Voice, *SLEEP79* (2018) by Shu Lea Cheang and Matthew Fuller at C-Lab, Taiwan

“A revolution in approach to the use of the human brain is said to have begun in 1902 when William James published his work *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. In this work there appeared sections on ‘saintliness’ in which James reported an erosion of the boundaries of selfhood, as well as on ‘mystical experiences’ which had the character of transience, ineffability and most important, of contact with a body of implicit knowledge not accessible within normal states of attention. A later, little known, but extraordinary work was published by Marghanita Laski in 1961, entitled *Ecstasy: A Study of some Secular and Religious Experiences*, a comprehensive lay survey of reported ecstatic experience from hundreds of subjects, and a compilation of examples from the history of literature. Once the 1960s had kicked in, works treating the subject of non-standard experience began to abound, the most significant ones created by researchers exploring chemistry-induced non-normal states such as Ralph Metzner, Timothy Leary and most impressively by analyst Stanislav Grof. Other notable figures in the field were the psychologist Abraham Maslow whose work on “peak experiences,” extraordinary moments in a life during which profound experience of understanding, love, or connected wholeness grip one, gave way to what came to be known as “transpersonal psychology” and around which a school of thought was founded (and remains active today). These works were all principally secular in focus and interest, yet they also directed attention to previously unacknowledged human biological capacities and endowments capable of redistributing social action and meaning in fully radical and cosmic ways.”

Sanford Kwinter, “Are you experienced?” in *Psychotropisms: Drugs, specters and hallucinations for the transformation of the present*



Sakiko Yamaoka, Come With Me Ginza, (Tokyo 1), 2009 (photo: Ayano Shibata)

24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep

By Jonathan Crary

24/7 is a time of indifference, against which the fragility of human life is increasingly inadequate and within which sleep has no necessity or inevitability. In relation to labor, it renders plausible, even normal, the idea of working without pause, without limits. It is aligned with what is inanimate, inert, or unaging. As an advertising exhortation it decrees the absoluteness of availability, and hence the ceaselessness of needs and their incitement, but also their perpetual non-fulfillment. The absence of restraints on consuming is not temporal. We are long past an era in which mainly things were accumulated. Now our bodies and identities assimilate an ever-expanding surfeit of services, images, procedures, chemicals, to a toxic and often fatal threshold. The long-term survival of the individual is always dispensable if the alternative might even indirectly admit the possibility of interludes with no shopping or its promotion. In related ways, 24/7 is inseparable from environmental catastrophe in its declaration of permanent expenditure, of wastefulness for its sustenance, in its terminal disruption of the cycles and on which ecological integrity depends.

In its profound uselessness and intrinsic passivity, with the incalculable losses it causes in production time, circulation, and consumption, sleep will always collide with the demands of a 24/7 universe. The huge portion of our lives that we spend asleep, freed from a morass of simulated needs, as one of the great human affronts to the voraciousness of contemporary capitalism. Sleep is an uncompromising interruption of the theft of time from us by capitalism. Most of the seemingly irreducible necessities of human life – hunger, thirst, sexual desire and recently the need for friendship – have been remade

into commodified or financialized forms. Sleep poses the idea of a human need and interval of time that cannot be colonized and harnessed to a massive engine of profitability, and thus remains an incongruous anomaly and site of crisis in the global present. In spite of all the scientific research in this area, it frustrates and confounds any strategies to exploit or reshape it. The stunning, inconceivable reality is that nothing of value can be extracted from it.

It should be no surprise that there is an erosion of sleep now everywhere given the immensity of what is at stake economically. Over the course of the twentieth century there were steady inroads made against the time of sleep – the average North American adult now sleeps approximately six and a half hours a night, an erosion from eight hours a generation ago, and (hard as it is to believe) down from ten hours in the early twentieth century. In the mid twentieth century the familiar adage that “we spend a third of our lives asleep” seemed to have an axiomatic certainty, a certainty that continues to be undermined. Sleep is a ubiquitous but unseen reminder of a premodernity that has never been fully exceeded, of the agricultural universe which began vanishing 400 years ago. The scandal of sleep is the embeddedness in our lives of the rhythmic oscillations of solar light and darkness, activity and rest, of work and recuperation, that have been eradicated or neutralized elsewhere.

Nonetheless, sleep is now an experience cut loose from notions of necessity or nature. Instead, like so much else, it is conceptualized as a variable but managed function that can only be defined instrumentally and physiologically. Recent research has shown that the number of people who wake themselves up once or more at night to check their messages or data is growing exponentially. One seemingly inconsequential but prevalent linguistic figure is the machine-based designation of “sleep mode.” The notion of an apparatus in a state of low-power readiness remakes the larger sense of sleep into sim-

ply a deferred or diminished condition of operability and access. It supersedes an off/on logic, so that nothing is ever fundamentally “off” and there is never an actual state of rest.

This text is an excerpt from 24/7: *Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* by Jonathan Crary (London/New York: Verso, 2014).

“I am not so foolish as to equate what happens under the influence of mescaline or of any other drug, prepared or in the future preparable, with the realization of the end and ultimate purpose of human life: Enlightenment, the Beatific Vision. All I am suggesting is that the mescaline experience is what Catholic theologians call “a gratuitous grace,” not necessary to salvation but potentially helpful and to be accepted thankfully, if made available. To be shaken out of the ruts of ordinary perception, to be shown for a few timeless hours the outer and the inner world, not as they appear to an animal obsessed with survival or to a human being obsessed with words and notions, but as they are apprehended, directly and unconditionally, by Mind at Large—this is an experience of inestimable value to everyone and especially to the intellectual.”

Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception*



Ayahuasca and the reencounter with a millenary spirituality

By Florencia Portocarrero

Ayahuasca is a Quechua word whose roots are “aya,” which means soul or a dead person, and “huasca,” which means rope or vine. Therefore, it could be translated as “vine of the souls” or “vine of the dead.” Its use has spread through almost all the indigenous cultures living in the Amazon basin of Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela and Brazil. In addition, in recent decades its internationalization has begun, thanks both to its medicinal and/or therapeutic use and its adoption by a series of religious cults – natives of Brazil but with thousands of followers around the world – based specifically in its ritual and regular use¹.

Ayahuasca is a powerful psychotropic substance which results from the lengthy cooking of two Amazonian plants: ayahuasca, which is a vine, and the leaves of a bush known as chacruna. From a strictly pharmacological point of view, chacruna, whose active ingredient is DMT², is the awareness-expanding element. However, chacruna or ayahuasca taken on their own have negligible psychotropic effects.

Some studies claim that DMT is a substance endogenous to our bodies. That is, it is naturally produced in the bodies of all human beings, and it plays a fundamental role in the visualization of dreams, mystical experiences and near-death experiences. DMT is

regarded as one of the most powerful entheogens³ in existence, but unfortunately it is on the international list of prohibited substances. For that reason, despite the fact that the use of plants with entheogenic properties has a long tradition as a tool for the exploration of the human psyche, almost all scientific and academic investigations have been suspended during the past thirty years due to the prohibitionist policy of the United States.

Along those lines, and as Alfredo Iturriaga and Ronald Rivera state, the first step towards understanding the legal status of ayahuasca in an international context is to make a categorical distinction between its use as an ancestral medicine and a laboratory-produced DMT. Ayahuasca is not a drug but a medicine whose beneficial effects are widely proven. In the case of Peru, it has a tradition of more than 5,000 years and was recently declared part of that country’s cultural heritage. The cultural genocide of the Amazonian peoples due to their evangelization or enslavement during the rubber boom was not able to wipe it out, nor did the recent waves of terrorist violence against such groups.⁴

One of the main characteristics of indigenous healing with ayahuasca is that it pertains to a cosmology or understanding of the universe that recognizes a multiplicity of spirits and forces actively intervening in our lives. “To return to the *maloca*” [the ceremonial long house] is the term the indigenous peoples of the Amazon, represented by an entity known as the Coordinator of the Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon Basin (coicA), employ to explain their understanding of wellbeing. For them, “to return to the *maloca*” means “to recover our ancestral knowledge and harmonious relationship with the environment. To understand that we are not individual but collective creatures, living in a circular time where the future is always behind us and the present and past ahead of us, with the individual and collective teachings and lessons of the process of an immemorial life.”⁵

In this context, the ritual of ayahuasca plays a fundamental role, since it works as the gateway to re-establishing a sacred relationship with those elemental forces. It is a healing process which reintegrates the patient into a larger reality and takes place within a holistic process in which the physical, mental, material and spiritual dimensions of life are fully acknowledged and honored as part of a dynamic and indivisible whole. While it is the plant that heals and teaches, the role of the *curandero* or shaman is to provide the conditions in which this intimate and profound contact between the plant and the patient may take place.

The tool the shaman uses to achieve that are the *icaros*, chants which show the patient the ways in and out during the trance state. Apart from the *icaros*, the shaman does not speak much: he does not try to explain or draw lessons or conclude. The ayahuasca experience tends to underline the fact of being alive. Its aim is to restore the patient’s equilibrium by allowing something stuck to run again.

During this process, the purge is very important. The ayahuasca cleansing is integral and enables the patient to purify the negative feelings stored both in his body and mind. In the ayahuasca experiences there are several stages: very organic moments of

pure sensibility and moments of extraordinary lucidity which heal and lead to self-knowledge. “Compared to psychotherapy, which is a long-term process, ayahuasca enables you to see everything in a single session.”⁶ In addition, the word plays a much less important role, it is not even felt to be necessary. There is a natural understanding that remembering is not important, healing does not involve recalling what was experienced, but lies, instead, in the very experience. “There is no loss of awareness. On the contrary, it is a state of expanded awareness.... ayahuasca is not dissociative but integrative.”⁷

In *The Antipodes of the Mind*, Benny Shanon argues that all of the mental functions which we associate with the human condition—including memory, imagination and language, among others—may have arisen from interactions with entheogenic plants⁸. Thus, Shanon suggests that the hallucinatory effects of these plants might have been decisive in our evolutionary leap and that the origin of many, if not all, of humanity’s cultures and religions may lie in them. In fact, a new way of interpreting these vegetal compounds is to regard them as inter-species pheromones that spread information from one species to another in order to mediate our relationships with the environment.

Currently, many practitioners of ayahuasca claim that this medicinal plant might become a catalytic influence in the awareness shift regarding the world environmental crisis. Furthermore, the COICA indigenous communities are ever more aware that the suppression of the religious use of psychoactive plants is a matter of civil rights and its restriction amounts to the repression of a legitimate religious sensibility, based on relations between men and plants which have existed since time immemorial.

This text is an excerpt from “Thought on Wellbeing in the Contemporary World: A Comparative Approach,” by Florencia Portocarrero in *Psychotropisms: Drugs, specters and hallucinations for the transformation of the present*, published on the occasion of the Psychotropisms seminar organized by Victor Albaracín and Warren Neidich within the 44th National Salon of Artists in Pereira, Colombia.

6 The shaman Rawa Muñoz in a conversation with the author (August, 2016).

7 Ibid.

8 Benny Shanon, *The Antipodes of the Mind: Charting the Phenomenology of the Ayahuasca Experience* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002).



3 Entheogens is a term to describe the properties of some medicinal plants like ayahuasca and avoid the connotations found in the words hallucinogen (which is regarded as imprecise and pejorative) or psychedelic (which is too closely linked to the counter-culture of the 1960’s).

4 Alfredo Iturriaga San José & Ronald Rivera Cachiue, *Ayahuasca: técnica aborígen del autoconocimiento, de la selva su espíritu* (Lima: Rumi Ediciones, 2016).

5 Coordinadora Andina de Organizaciones Indígenas (CAOI), *Buen Vivir/Vivir Bien: filosofía, políticas, estrategias y experiencias regionales andinas*, (Lima, www.minkandina.org: 2010).

1 The best known ayahuasca churches are: Barquinha, Igreja do Santo Daime and União do Vegetal.

2 N,N-Dimethyltryptamine is a tryptamine alkaloid with an indole nucleus found in many plants and live beings.



Rosemarie Trockel, "Sleeping Pill" (1999) "Laboratorium," Installation view at Photography Museum, Antwerp, 1999

Rosemary Trockel, excerpt from the 1999 catalogue accompanying the installation in the German Pavilion (Venice) in 1999, text by Lisa Zeiger

Since the original Sleeping Pills were lost since their invention in 1999, the exhibition opted for a documentation. "Just as dreams decompose when we wake from them, so the Sleeping Pill was an evanescent, three day sleep-in, during which it's changing characters were filmed. ... Trockel designed these prefabricated edifices as prototypes for a new kind of a permanent structure she dreamed of disseminating throughout the urban landscape for every age and social class. The Sleeping Pill would provide an utopia for fellow-feeling without the leash of ideology..." (cat.p.20-21)

Laboratorium was a contemporary art exhibition held at the former Provinciaal Fotografie Museum (now Fotomuseum Antwerp) in Antwerp, Belgium, from 27 June to 3 October 1999. Initiated by Barbara Vanderlinden and co-curated by Hans-Ulrich Obrist, experiments and laboratories were set up for six months in the museum and at various locations in the city. One of the participants was the German artist Rosemarie Trockel. Her contribution consisted of an installation entitled Sleeping Pill, a futuristic relaxation suit consisting of a pneumatic white plastic dome about eighteen feet high. The prototype of this new type of sleeping structure was built in April of the same year. The artist had designed it in collaboration with architects Tim Power and Lorenzo Bini, with whom she first tested the idea during a three-day sleep-in in an industrial building on the outskirts of Cologne. In June 1999, Trockel developed a version of the project in a triptych installation for the German Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. The prototype was only shown twice and never realized. It was Trockel's wish to spread this sleeping structure throughout the city – in high streets and malls, department stores, train stations,

airports, and convention centers. But just as dreams fall apart when we wake from them, Trockel's dream of a sleeping structure remains unrealized. For us humans, who are naturally interested in unknown things, these unrealized projects have a special aura; they refer to a potential for something that we may someday achieve. Trockel's work often explores the human body. The artist said that "Sleeping Pill was an illustration of the exhausted, powerless body."

Barbara Vanderlinden

"The aim is to balance the terror of being alive with the wonder of being alive."

Carlos Castaneda

Syzygy, 2013

Syzygy is an installation composed of sleeping figures seated in positions that resemble those of weary commuters at train and bus stations. Even as they sleep with bent heads, some of the figures clasp at their bags, revealing a degree of restlessness and awareness of surroundings even in a state of near-surrender. In philosophy, the term "syzygy" is used to denote the union of two opposites. In astronomy, it refers to the linear alignment of celestial bodies within a gravitational system. Syzygy is also the name of an artwork familiar to Kallat since art school days—the seminal stop-motion film made by Akbar Padamsee in 1970. Syzygy is among several works by the artist that probe the nature of sleep as a way of receding from the world and the ordered time of a working day—a temporary voyage into an eternal, meditative space that each of us takes to sort through the clutter of our wakeful lives.

By Nandini Thilak



Jitish Kallat, Syzygy, 2013

Nobody There. Sleep as Protest



Elisabeth von Samsonow, *The Symptom and the Cure*, 2016 (film still)

by Elisabeth von Samsonow

Delirium and Indignation

Recently, interest in the phenomenon of so-called ‘lucid dreams’ has been on the rise. A slew of handbooks and scientific articles has explored this type of dream that features one particular anomaly. In lucid dreams, one does not suffer the content, the events of the dream; one is not torn away by strange occurrences. The lucid dreamer steers the dream and—this is the distinctive feature—knows that they are dreaming. Now, this sounds as though we have experienced a renaissance of mantic dreams as compensation for the political subject becoming ordinary. Being able to steer one’s own dream not only allows the dreamer to have adventures unthinkable in waking life, such as a garden variety of border-crossings, but also to go through training sessions that have a positive effect on one’s performance in waking life. Spreading beyond the ambush that lucid dreamers experience in their dreams and afterward—that is, beyond the thoroughly remarkable quality lucid dreams may have—is a massive intervention into the world of sleep in the form of optimization concepts. Dreams are no longer to be governed by the characteristic semantic break with waking life (in which psychoanalysis specialized), but instead are to be more tightly linked to waking life, directly, with little force, and to share with it the navigational authority over events. Scholars speak of an ability to learn and improve lucid dreaming; one can engage in sports so that one wakes up fitter than before, or practice things one is usually afraid of. The prophetic dimension of lucid dreams has slipped through secular society’s fingers, which is why indispensable prerogatives of waking life—fitness, mastery of all situations, flexibility, etc.—intrude into the evacuated zone.

HYPNOS as PROTEST

Why should we care? Because we need to ask why we don’t even trust sleep and this specific form of delirium anymore. Sleep and its dreams represent

acts of inner emigration, a slipping-away, a recession, a regression implying a loss of control that shouldn’t exist. Frank Maurice Welte discusses how the Gnawa ethnic minority, who migrated from Mali to the Maghreb, compensated their assimilation trauma by establishing trance communities primarily headed by women. Welte’s accompanying narrative emphasizes that this delirium emanates from an autonomous authority operating from within, which is to say, an authority that is given divine status and must therefore be obeyed and venerated instantaneously. Welte describes this process as an inward autonomization that wants to heal external subalternity dialectically. One cannot be reached in this altered state, not even by police. In its difference, the internal institution of the trance society threatens the external institution. Therefore, it is not only the trance dancers, the possessed (i.e. those who are utterly delirious), who lose control, but also the ones who are awake, those who keep watch, who surveil. Access to the actual going-ons is prohibited for the agencies tasked with surveillance, which is why the sleeper, the dreamer, the obsessed, is protected by their own uncanniness. The sleeper is unreachable, removed, relocated; s/he is not at home and doesn’t react to the panoptical surveillance eye. What the surveillance camera records may be the camouflage of a Nothing that could be all kinds of things. Delirium means escaping access, being in a double withdrawal, an auto- and allo-withdrawal. The pairing of police or judiciary and sleeper is particularly interesting. Here, hierarchical or hegemonic structures determine that sleep is forbidden in the face of authority. Systematically induced hypnoses like the ones of the Gnawa are stylized as “institutions,” as “authorities” with a distinctly subversive character. The idea of surveillance is shattered by this anti-authority.

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This text is an excerpt from “*Nobody There. Sleep as Protest*,” by Elisabeth von Samsonow available in full in English and German online at AOWC

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