

# **Taking Visionary Images Seriously**

**Orsolya Bajusz**

**bajusz.orsolya@unithe.hu**

with a heartfelt thank you for OZORA festival

## **Abstract**

This paper explores visionary images, particularly those inspired by the consumption of N, N-Dimethyltryptamine (DMT), a psychedelic known for inducing profound visual experiences. Departing from the postmodern ethos, I posit visionary art not as a mere reconfiguration of existing symbols and codes, but rather as a window to alternative realities. I delve into the ontological complexities posed by DMT, challenging conventional social constructivist frameworks in analyzing images originating from non-human entities or dimensions. I propose an analytical methodology based on compositional interpretation and visual framing, thus integrating a (hyper)spatial turn. This methodology explores the spatial dynamics and networks inherent in visionary images and speculates how such a constellation of agency between humans and nonhumans changes what it means to take images seriously and what mode of human expertise can pertain to such art. The conclusion extends the discussion to AI, and non-human intelligences, advocating for new methodologies that accommodate new epistemics. In summary, this paper contributes to image analysis methodology by transcending social constructivism.

visual studies, anti-constructivism, epistemic hierarchy, visionary art, psychedelic studies, image analysis methods

## **Introduction**

In the 20th century, the horizon of progress was teleological, envisioning human civilization moving towards an idealized secular, liberal social order. Now the horizon of progress (political, technological) is (hyper)spatial: the inside of the body, and new dimensions, such as described by string theory. This shift in perspective has inspired various forms of artistic expression, notably visionary art.

Visionary images are not postmodern: they are not made in a way a curator or a dj remixes and redistributes already existing signs and meanings. Instead, they are a window to other realities. If anything, they are channelled, not constructed (which means being made in a calculating and rational way). Yet they are not quite religious images: there is no dogma or religious institution behind them. Also, a contemporary audience would not consume images in a religious context: nowadays we live in an image-saturated environment, where however exciting, no image would be able to have such an effect as before mass media and digital technologies. Also overall our relationship to images is not hierarchical and unidirectional, we are all consumers and producers, just as well as curators and DJs: we each remix and redistribute signs that existed before, and through cultural and media consumption

co-construct our social world. Therefore, the impact of a visionary image in contemporary culture cannot be compared to that of a religious image in an archaic or feudal society. They are also social products. If visionary images are produced through traditional techniques, such as drawing or painting, then they will reference art history and the discourse of their own medium, in the sense that a painted image is always about painting itself. Digital technologies (AI, 3D or composite software such as Photoshop) are also social constructs, and when they are pixel-based (such as for textures of backgrounds) they directly reference existing things. What makes visionary images really exciting is their origin (other dimensions), and their non-human originator (such as plant spirits, or mushrooms). Therefore a truly visionary mode of relating to these images would be to take these originators seriously.

My study of N, N-Dimethyltryptamine, i.e. DMT (a type of psychedelic, vision-inducing drug), inspired art explores how can images be analyzed if they are not entirely social products, beyond a social constructivist framework.

DMT and its plant concoction, ayahuasca raise a number of ontological problems: it is simultaneously a teaching and healing tool, it provides protection, and it is both conceptualized as an intelligent entity and the object of scientific research. It is not addictive, in fact, addicts are treated with it (Mabit 1988, 1992, 1996, Nakazawa 1996), and it has a positive physiological effect. Its first clinical trials are currently underway now, in 2023.<sup>1</sup> The concept of a 'plant teacher' is so incompatible with Western science that Tupper and Labate (2015), examining its scientific status, directly suggest that the term 'cognitive tool' would be better than 'teaching plant'. To quote cognitive scientist Benny Shannon: 'Ayahuasca brought me, for the first time in my life, to doubt the validity of the Western worldview (2002:166)'.

I would like to emphasize that I do not want to take a position regarding the ontological status of the beings of DMT visions as I am not dealing with metaphysics, but rather with social sciences. What I elaborate on in my paper is the possibility of going beyond social constructivism when talking about images.

## **Visionary experience**

The common metaphor for DMT in English is the 'spirit molecule,' a term derived from psychiatrist Rick Strassmann, who noticed the religious, transcendent, spiritual experiences of subjects while researching the physiological effects of DMT. There are both synthetic and herbal decoction versions. The psychoactive potential of the synthetic version was discovered by psychiatrist and psychopharmacologist István Száva in the psychiatric asylum Lipótmező in Budapest, who could not get LSD under the Cold War conditions.

In addition to the patients, the study subjects were psychiatrists and psychologists, artists, and writers who volunteered to be research subjects (Böszörményi 1962). They reported

---

1

<https://www.technologynetworks.com/neuroscience/news/world-first-clinical-trial-explores-safety-and-efficacy-of-dmt-for-major-depression-343822>

alien landscapes, sacred geometry, and unknown beings (Havasréti 2021)<sup>2</sup>. The experiment leader István Száva (1958) interpreted the emergence of the spirit world complying with his era: *'When these experiences — God, strange beings, otherworldly creatures — appeared in our DMT studies, we did not philosophize about them; as psychiatrists, we classified them as hallucinations.'*

The previously cited Havasréti (2021) claims at that time drug use was not part of the socialization of literary writers, was not surrounded by a subculture like in the US, and therefore did not result in significant literary works as a result of the experiments. In the strictly atheist and materialist Rákosi era, it cannot be said that the era's social milieu (either mainstream or countercultural) inspired visions, as the experimental subjects could not even integrate the visions into their existing cognitive schemas.

The plant version of DMT is ayahuasca, from which a decoction is made. Oral DMT does not work on its own unless it is combined with a compound, a MAOI (monoamine oxidase enzyme inhibitor). The plant species added to the mixture may vary, but the alkaloids are the same. The indigenous Amazonians who first used ayahuasca, said the plants ('plant spirits') taught them how to make the decoction from two plants (*Banisteriopsis caapi* and *Psychotria viridis*). I would note here that I use the word 'indigenous' in a broad sense, referring to the traditional cultures of the Amazon Basin, which have different traditions about plant medicine in each region: different recipes, preparatory diets and different ceremony songs. It is a technology or rather a techne, because the consumption of the decoction is ritualized and thereby exerts its effect. Just as in the case of synthetic DMT, consumers report encountering alien beings, visiting other dimensions, and contacting non-human intelligence.

There is an essential difference between the natural and synthetic version: an inseparable part of ayahuasca consumption (since the decoction is taken during a ritual) is the contact with plant spirits and the earth goddess, which (unlike by the psychiatrists of the Rákosi era) is actively supported by leaders of tribal and contemporary rituals. The descriptions of the first Western users<sup>3</sup>, who visited the Amazon region, are very similar<sup>4</sup> to the visions of the DMT experiments carried out by communist-era Hungarian psychiatrists. Cognitive scientist Shanon (2002:318) also asks why he, who knows almost nothing about indigenous cultures, has seen things similar to the visions of indigenous people. In search of the answer to this question, he decided to conduct systematic research on ayahuasca visions, which concluded that the visions could be typified and that these visions were not projections of the dynamics of the human psyche. Moreover, the research has led him to fundamentally question psychology's notion of what it means to be human (2002:171). Historian of religion

---

<sup>2</sup> to cite an example from the original: 'A világegyetem elemeit van szerencsém látni e pillanatban. Az az érzésem, hogy az alapelemeit látom. Mintha a mikroszkóp alatti ázalékokat, ostoros lényeket látnék fekete-fehér színben. De borzasztó, nem tudom magam kifejezni kellően. (...) Most már némileg színek is szerepelnek. Mintha egy kagylót látnék, de a szivárványszínek gyorsan bomlanak'

<sup>3</sup>See more: Williams: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/54847411.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> 'The first visual experience was like fireworks. Then a continuously creating power produced a wealth of simple and elaborate flat patterns in color. There were patterns that consisted of twin repeats, and others geometrically organized with rectangles or squares that were like Maya designs or those decorations which the Chamas paint on their thin, ringing pottery. The visions were in constant flux. First intermittently, then successively, the flat patterns gave way to deep-brown, purple or green depths, like dimly lighted caves in which the walls were too far away to be perceived. At times snake-like stems of plants were growing profusely in the depths, at others these were covered with arrangements of myriads of lights that like dewdrops or gems adorned them. Now and then brilliant light illuminated the scene through photographic flash, showing wide landscapes with trees placed at regular intervals or just empty plains. A big ship with many flags appeared in one of these flashes, a merry-go-round with people dressed in highly colored garments in another.' (Kusel 1965:64-65)

Tramacchi (2006) also compiled a typology of DMT visions based on interviews recorded in Australia, in which the same elements and motifs appeared as in Shanon's study: e.g., disembodied eyes, felines, and snakes.

Psychiatrist Rick Strassman, who re-named DMT as 'spirit molecule', devotes an entire chapter (2010, IV) to the explanations of DMT beings and the dimensions they 'inhabit' outside biological and psychological reductionism. The Freudian approach based on the expression of repressed desires is not considered expedient by him, and he sees a problem with the Jungian approach in that it considers visions as representation and mental construction. Instead, he thinks it is possible that DMT helps consciousness leave the body and move into other dimensions, and he states this is what happens objectively during the journey (2010:314).

Separations such as spiritual and non-spiritual world only make sense within certain cosmologies. As Nicole Zillo Roitberg, one of the directors of the Floresta dos Unicórnios Institute for Healing based on Indigenous Traditions (interview with Szabo, 2017), says, 'For indigenous communities, the spiritual world is not a church where they go to pray, but is present everywhere and always. The spiritual world interweaves our daily lives and is affected by activities such as singing or weaving.' Similarly to how the spiritual and the material are one world, there is no separation between representation and represented. Based on the indigenous<sup>5</sup> conception of art, it is not even possible to speak of representation along Western concepts. To further quote Roitberg (2017): 'When an aboriginal goes hunting, he first sings a song about the hunt, taking in an agent made from one of the sacred plants of the tribe, which causes his vision to attack - which is nothing more than a spiritual vibration in the spiritual world. As a result of this vibration, the animal approaches him, so to speak, offers himself, thus becoming the prey of the hunter.' Or as Feldman (2016) says about Shipibo art: 'Painted and sticked kené patterns remain a unifying visual component of the community - it is the abstract visual representation of the ebb and flow and spiritual pathways of community life and learning among the Shipibo- a design element that unites Amazonian communities.'

In this description, visions shape the world. There is no sharp line between image, image materiality, and outside-world materiality. We can clearly state that these visions are not representations (because there is no separation) since in that case, the representation should be the actant instead of the represented. The plant is inseparable from the energy active in the spirit world and from the image, which is both a mediator and a manifestation of energy.

### **Making sense of visionary images**

In the following, I introduce common frames of references and analytical dimensions pertaining to such images.

One analytical dimension is the social. If they are inner images relegated to the psychological domain (personal and thus psychoanalysable images), their analysis would also pertain to social phenomena, as the life-world of a human being is inalienably social. One such frame of reference (social milieu) is a broader psychedelic subculture, which is

---

<sup>5</sup> I use the word 'indigeneous' in a very general way, meaning tribes where the ayahuasca decoction is traditionally consumed.

evoked for example when ceremony participants talk about 'visuals'. At parties, aesthetics is mostly a subcultural marker, although visuals do have a direct affective function, making the rhythm of music even more perceptible through the senses, as visualisers generate images based on the rhythm of the music played. So when the ceremony participants talk about a vision as a visual, the question is not framed in terms of whether the participants communicated with other intelligences (speech is inherently human), but whether they had all the necessary party supplies. Another analytical dimension is beyond the social. Within an entheogenic discourse/animistic worldview, they are visionary communication from the spirit world.

If visions are not originating in the human psyche, then they are not the manifestations of human logic, or human knowledge or intelligence. Within this framework, the plants are the originators of the visions, ie very active non-human actants.

### **Conflicts, and contestation of agency**

Notions about 'teaching plants' and the relationship with them are completely out of line with mainstream political paradigms, as the debate over drug policy in general for many decades has been about whether consumers should be treated as criminals or patients (medicalization vs criminalization). In contrast, in traditional ceremonies, no one has to pathologize themselves: in general, teaching, protection, healing can be sought, and they are interconnected because disease and health are different in cosmologies outside of modernity, which is based on body-soul / nature-culture separation (see, for example, George, 2020).<sup>6</sup>

As a medicine, DMT performs well: empirical data on psychedelic drugs support that they are, in general, much more effective than either SSRIs or psychotherapy.<sup>7</sup>

Personal accounts of the use of DMT are growing, with some notable examples, such as the CNN reporter<sup>8</sup> who developed post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in war zones, and credits psychedelics with saving her life. She established a foundation for supporting journalism covering natural medicine, cognition, and entheogens. American podcaster star Joe Rogan loves DMT so much that a drug-inspired tattoo covers his arm and his question became a meme: 'Have you ever done DMT?'<sup>9</sup>

Many people who claim to have their lives made better by DMT use it within a spiritual context, discursively framing it through animist terms. There is a contestation to such use, by

---

<sup>6</sup> Often, the etiology of physical sickness is considered the result of spiritual, rather than physical forces; therefore, treatment often entails psychoactive rituals that bring humans closer to the spirit world (Schultes, 1976):

<sup>7</sup> See for example:

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/psychedelics-as-antidepressants/#:~:text=Compared%20to%20selective%20serotonin%20reuptake, reversal%20of%20depression%20is%20observed.>

<https://newatlas.com/health-wellbeing/psilocybin-therapy-major-depression-trial-results-johns-hopkins/> (Time of download: 06/08/2021)

<https://www.verywellhealth.com/psychedelic-psychotherapy-clinical-trial-depression-5179610> (Time of download: 06/08/2021)

<sup>8</sup> Amber Lyon: <https://reset.me/story/how-psychedelics-saved-my-life/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DEsCPOdPTM4>

psychologists, professional lobbies, and biopolitical organizations. Limiting perception and designating acceptable channels of perception is a matter of governmentality. Privileging of subjective knowledge would devalue conventional expertise and thus they would lose their disciplinary power. If everyone can have their own connection to gods, i.e.

(hyperdimensional beings, objectively existing, disembodied, intelligent entities) through plant spirits who bestow visions, then image and somatic experience would be valued beyond rational, fact-based discourse, as literacy, text and speech is fundamentally human and happens on the register of the social (see Bajusz 2023).

An example of taking away the agency of the plant is the banned 2013 TED talk of Graham Hancock about how ayahuasca cured his marihuana addiction. According to TED, 'it suggests a world view in which DMT can connect users directly to 'seemingly intelligent entities which communicate with us telepathically'. Graham Hancock does state he makes no claim to the reality status of these entities, but he also argues that they can teach and heal us, claims that are well outside orthodox scientific thinking.' Therefore, TED is not arguing with Hancock's subjective experience in the name of science, and since Hancock has not objectively claimed the realness of DMT beings, TED is disputing their agency. TED ultimately states that visions (and the figurative elements that intelligently communicate in them) cannot heal and teach — because this is not 'scientific'<sup>10</sup>.

Being able to communicate with an intelligent entity that exists in another dimension fundamentally changes where the horizon of experience is. The temporality of spirits and visions is not linear, and its logic is not causal logic. Yet nowadays such a worldview is also slowly becoming more and more mainstream: the Pentagon 'officially' inaugurated hyperspace with the UFO reports, and it is widely acknowledged that a large part (current estimate is 95%) of the universe is dark matter and dark energy.

### **developing a possible analytical framework**

If plants, inseparable from plant spirits really are visionary knowledge mediators, then what most people can do is formulate human knowledge from channelled knowledge. Objectifying and externalizing subjective experience is ultimately the domain of art. The task of social science could be to understand how these kinds of discursive spaces work together and what conceptual framework is adequate to describe these connections.

The recognition of visions and the agency of a plant(spirit) opens up a field where 'experts' are powerless: if by the word 'expert' we mean the Western construction of expert knowledge that rests on rationality and performative seriousness. What kind of expertise is needed for these images? How can images be analysed in their social embeddedness if they are not entirely social products?

---

<sup>10</sup> <https://blog.ted.com/the-debate-about-graham-hancocks-talk/> (Time of download: 06/08/2021)

Yet they still have social dimensions. To transmit a mental image to someone else, it has to be narrated (reduced to language) or depicted. A 2d image is inseparable from its technological medium, and mediating and imaging technology are always socially constructed and embedded - both embodying and perpetuating social norms and values. The experience itself may be primarily subjective and personal, but still social: people give people the potion (although some say spirits have taught them the recipe). Ceremonies are community occasions, visions influence lives, and the visions themselves are not entirely singular individual experiences, as the natives of the Amazon saw virtually the same from the herbal decoction as study participants did from the synthetic version in the communist era psychiatry in Budapest.

The basic conflict is that a phenomenon is either a social construction (and in this case by society we mean the total sum of human interactions) or it comes from a plant, a spirit, or a god of nature. The essential difference is that in the second case, images are not born of socially acquired and remixed signs detached from the signifier, therefore they are not postmodern images. Such visions are not born of socially acquired and remixed signs detached from the signifier, and it is questionable whether it makes sense to talk about representation and metaphors in this context.

If we interpret visions in a framework that is secular and individualistic, then everything comes from the knowledge of a given person, that is, it is not a manifestation through a set of symbols known to that particular person. Therefore, something becomes a social construction, which, in the other frame, is knowledge channelled from the spirit world/virtuality.

As visual language in general, depicted visions and visionary art do not have a uniform syntax and therefore always remain context-dependent, culture-dependent, and subjective in their interpretation. Such pictures can contain universally valid codes and symbols, sometimes of unknown meaning, but recognized as writing, show structuring logic (sacred geometry), or when directly denoting a concept or object, evoke sentiments and affects.

If we follow the conditions of visual methodology, which is a fundamentally cultural constructivist approach<sup>11</sup> (along Gillian Rose's 2001 volume of Visual methodologies), we take images seriously and avoid reductionism (2001:15). This means, in this case, that we also give agency for non-human actors as the originators of the images: the plant spirits provide an example of very active non-human actants. One of the essential thoughts of Rose's methodological volume is to follow where power, effect, and agency lie (2001: 3)<sup>12</sup>.

---

<sup>11</sup> As Lichtman (2002) interprets Rose: 'I think it important to understand Rose's position vis-à-vis the visual. She suggests that in the last several decades social scientists have come to understand social life by looking at how it is constructed through ideas that people have about it. She adopts the position that culture is not just a group of things but a process that represents the give and take of meaning shared between members of a given group. In particular, she suggests that "the visual" is key in the 'cultural construction of social life in contemporary Western societies.' (p.6)

<sup>12</sup> 'By `critical' I mean an approach that thinks about the visual in terms of the cultural significance, social practices and power relations in which it is embedded; and that means thinking about the power relations that produce, are articulated through, and can be challenged by, ways of seeing and imaging.'

We cannot really know if we do not recognize their agent. Here lies the limit of constructivism, and that is why the DMT phenomenon can be so incomprehensible that it becomes inspiring at the same time: it cannot be diverted back to social constructivism, because then it will become something fundamentally different. In this case, we can only take the (visionary) images seriously if we are not constructivists.

Therefore we need an analytical toolkit that allows for the recognition of both the origins of the images and what is special about these images- that they have the potential to fundamentally upset epistemic hierarchies. They are not the sole products of an individual's psyche and, therefore not psychoanalysable. Semiology was influenced by Marxism, therefore its focus is on dissecting the working of ideology (as the basis of class inequalities). It is a method to apply to advertisements and not visionary images. Regarding content analysis, tagging visual elements would likely not yield usable data, as such pictorial elements are often not separable from each other, or clearly recognizable. Discourse analysis (loosely based on Foucault) would not be adequate, as they do not show social difference, eg, race or gender.

Considering the above, I propose developing an analytical methodology, based on compositional interpretation (Rose 2001) and visual framing (Rodriguez and Dimitrova, 2011). Compositional interpretation offers a 'detailed vocabulary for expressing the appearance of an image' (Rose, 2001:33), detailed as content, colour, light, spatial organisation, expressive content. It focuses on the site of the image, instead of the audience or the producer. Visual framing entails a four-tiered model: (1) visuals as denotative systems, (2) visuals as stylistic-semiotic systems, (3) visuals as connotative systems and (4) visuals as ideological representations. It is based on the same idea as framing in general, ie schemata for organizing information.

Compositional interpretation is in line with a (hyper)spatial turn, as it provides a vocabulary for describing depictions of spaces and volumes. It provides analytical tools to distinguish between Euclidean and non-Euclidean geometry, and to (relying on orthodox representation of perspective) establish how many horizons, planes and axes section the field of the image. Whether the image has representations of networks, and what types. How many light sources does it have, what are the colours of light, how light modifies space? After describing such attributes, one could conclude what types of spaces the image features, how they connect, what activity they feature, and to what extent are they real spaces.

Such an analysis would loosely correspond to the first level of visual framing - the level of the pictorial elements. In the original methodology, this level is denotative, the level of the primary subject matter. In the case of visionary art, closed contours could count as one figure. In visual framing methodology, the second level is connotation, but in cases of fractals and visions, denotation would not be possible to separate from connotation, as things do not reference other concepts, but rather visually morph into chains of concepts, such as ornamental elements into plants, or geometry into architectural elements. Adapting to fractal aesthetics, synecdochic representation could be a useful tool, as synecdoche is a metaphor where a part means the whole. The next level is technological, as pictures bear the trace of their producing technologies, therefore this level is socially constructed. Visionary art often references digital and ai aesthetics and features depictions of hybrid biological-digital



networks. There is a meta-level, which, in the case of visionary images, is not ideological (as in the original methodology), but mythological, beyond constructivism and politics. Associations depend on the mythological background, as they make sense within a given narrative frame.

## Analysed examples

### 1, Hakan Hisim

The widespread illegality or dubious legality of the practice explains why many visionary artists won't explicitly mention DMT, but allude to it through such phrases as 'yage' or 'vine'. Therefore I chose an artwork whose author, Hakan Hisim explicitly talks about his use of DMT<sup>13</sup>, and lists works under the title 'Glimpses from the Hyperdimensional Tryptamine Realms'<sup>14</sup>.



Figure 1. Hakan Hisim, Lux Natura (2016), from the Glimpses from the Hyperdimensional Tryptamine Realms series

The composition of the image is very complex. The key components are:

1. **Bottom Plane:** Slightly sloping circular plane with a vortex in the middle.
2. **Middle:** tree-like structure growing straight upwards from the bottom plane vortex, dividing the image.
3. **Frames:**

<sup>13</sup>

<https://steemit.com/music/@soraya/my-indepth-interview-with-visionary-psychedelic-artist-hakan-hisim>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.hakanhisim.net/tryptamine-realms/>

- Frontal frame made of vertebrae-like structures and purple blocks layered on the corners
  - Fainter vertical frame made of fern-like fractals, connected to, and behind the tree structure. Smaller size creates the illusion of distance
4. **Horizon:**
    - Revealed through horizontal, flat clouds, framed by the fern-like fractals
    - Fainter, darker horizon above the circular bottom plane, with a faint star pattern
  5. **Volumes:**
    - Corners extending into darkness
    - Dome-like structure behind the tree and frame, composed of different volumetric meshes
  6. **Light Sources:**
    - Light source above and behind the tree, casting stray light downwards.
    - Glowing lights aligned with the tree, creating an upward motion illusion.
  7. **Connective Elements:** Tentacles connecting different planes and volumes, touching the hulls of the dome-space, leading to vortexes which are also sources of light

This image was clearly made digitally, combining pixel graphics ie real images of elements of nature, with probably computer-generated patterns such as the fractals. It has the typical, blended layer look of Photoshop, with some added effects such as glow and emboss. The HH signature at the bottom (clearly indicating authorship) was also done with graphics software.

The imagery fuses representations of electrical and neural networks with sacred geometry and organic motifs. Mechanical and natural would be a false distinction, as electricity is also natural. The most 'cultural' element is the rune writing (associated with ancient and indigenous cultures).

The central motif is the world tree—a conduit between realms and different levels of existence found in animistic lore. The main narrative of the image is connection, yet the world tree does not really connect separated worlds, as even without the tree, the spaces of the image would not be strictly separated, but bleed into each other, and merge into each other. Such space transcends traditional Euclidean geometry, space itself being indistinguishable from representations of networks, volumes, and patterns ( sacred geometry, mandala, organic- and non-organic components, fractals of fern leaf, the triple spiral).

This image re-tells a mythological narrative, which is a metaphor of a cosmology. It shows a very contemporary cosmology, with layered skies, diffuse connections, and extended spaces. Instead of a hierarchical, compartmentalized structure, it offers a vision of interconnectedness and expansiveness.

## 2. DMTking by Salvia Droid

The focal point of the image is a serpent coiling inward upon itself, forming a central volume. This serpent, resembling a dome, spirals upwards, with another snake-themed composition

nested within its middle. From the mind of this snake emerges a human figure ascending towards a crown. Structurally, the snake-composition adopts a triptych format: two identical, two-winged beings flank the upper part, while a central figure with six wings and eyes on its body (therefore probably a seraphim, with additional sphinx-like characteristics). Within this composition, there is a DNA-spiral-like cosmic serpent, with eyes all over its body. At the bottom, two smaller winged beings uplift the human figure from the mind of a glowing red-eyed snake, one of them pointing upwards. The human figure ascends towards a crown, which is between cobras (heads of the DNA-spiral cosmic serpent), and underneath the crown is a faint reptilian or insectoid head.



Figure 2. DMT King, by Salvia Droid, no publication date provided by the artist

This image is digitally reproduced on fashion designs<sup>15</sup>. Stickers, dresses, and boots, (accessible from the artist's website) expand the space of the image into tangible objects. This mirrors the composition's figure enclosed by layers of serpents.

The main motif (the narrative happening to the human figure) is probably the path to power (being a king), which, as the composition of the image reveals, happens in the domain of the serpent. The serpent is a very loaded symbol, which can be either positive or negative. The serpent at the bottom, from which the human figure arises, is a red, fanged one with slit eyes, connoting demons and malevolence. The crown is also surrounded by cobras, which could either be positive or negative symbols. The term 'seraph' itself, according to certain biblical interpretations, means venomous snake (like the cobras surrounding the crown), further alluding to affiliation with serpents.

The figures depicted in the artwork are reminiscent of seraphim with their many eyes surrounding the throne of glory. The serpent-like bodies adorned with numerous eyes could be another form of angel, possibly the 'ophanim' or 'many-eyed ones' mentioned in the Old Testament, or they could be part of the main seraph, who also has eyes on the hands and the body.

While the artwork draws inspiration from the Old Testament, it does not strictly adhere to biblical narratives. Instead, it serves as a visionary depiction of events unfolding in hyperspace.

There can be an interpretation based on ancient religious symbolism, and one on a contemporary Christian critique, that DMT is demonic<sup>16</sup>. The interpretation depends on our relation to the image. If one follows the psychologizing discourse (vision originating in the individual psyche) it can adhere to the demonic interpretation: the path of ascension is the domain of the serpent, or rather the drive, desire for such ascension. If we think of it as a glimpse beyond the human realm, and therefore morality, It might reveal how one becomes a king (a DMTking) but does not say that one should strive to be one. So it neither advocates nor condemns the pursuit of power.

## Conclusion

In the analyzed cases, images portray relations, rather than centering individual experiences.

The boundless space of visions is *one* hyperspace, and different images reveal different events and constellations within it. If they come from beyond the human realm, they are amoral; they don't dictate behavioural norms, or distinguish right from wrong. Similar to oracles of classical antiquity, they leave the interpretation open-ended, subject to the viewer's relationship with the image. Visions depict a mechanism, whose interpretation could be aided by religious or mythological texts the iconography refers to.

---

<sup>15</sup> [https://www.salviadroid.com/uploads/4/3/6/8/4368255/the-crowed-traveler2\\_orig.jpg](https://www.salviadroid.com/uploads/4/3/6/8/4368255/the-crowed-traveler2_orig.jpg)

<sup>16</sup> see for example: <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/temptation-of-the-psychnauts/>

As their effect on epistemic is not coded directly in the images, a methodology, in this case, is perhaps a distinct perspective of looking, one that focuses on spatiality while recognizing agency beyond the human realm. This methodology refrains from anthropomorphizing nonhuman intelligence and thus acknowledges the inherent mystery surrounding agency.

Besides the resurgence of entheogens and visionary art, we live in the age of the emergence of other non-human intelligence, notably AIs and AI image generators. Much like the visionary qualities attributed to plants, AI remains somewhat enigmatic, operating as a black box whose inner workings elude complete understanding. There is no scientific method to determine whether another human being is sentient, let alone an AI. Furthermore, silicone electrodes have self-organizing properties. There's a compelling argument that AI contributes more than just technical prowess to artworks, it transcends mere technological input. In his Instagram bio, Hakan Hisim speaks of a 'divine consciousness manifested into the digital domain,' suggesting an intersection between spirituality and technology where human agency isn't explicitly present. Despite this, Hisim still signs his works with 'HH,' marking his authorship—a gesture reminiscent of the formula that acknowledges both human authors and AI image generators, such as crediting 'Human Author x Midjourney.'

Setting aside the question of consciousness, technological images are also non-human images, but they don't have such formidable transcendental dimensions. They are mechanical (therefore socially constructed), and not emergent. Images of logistics, for example Toscano (2018) talking about the work of Alan Secula, or Google images (Lapenta 2011) have regulatory functions. Visionary art does not work in a direct cause-and-effect way, similar to how a product of machine vision is read by a drone, or Google Earth offers a new organizational system.

New analytical methodologies are needed to analyze such visual media, given the prevalence of non-human agency and uncertainty. Centering the deconstruction of representations or investigating institutional practices would derail such an analysis. As I said in the introduction, the 20th century's horizon used to be teleological, with human civilization progressing towards an idealized type of secular, liberal social order. Now the horizon of progress (political, technological) is (hyper)spatial, focusing on the inside of the body and new dimensions. Instead of controlling a fundamentally failing regime of representations, it would be time to explore such hyperspaces whilst acknowledging their fundamentally alien character, and visionary art could be a site for that.

## **Bibliography**

Bajusz, O. (2023). *Vizionáriusok vs. szakértők*. *Kultúra És Közösség*.  
<https://doi.org/10.35402/kek.2023.3.11>

Böszörményi, Z. (1968) *Adatok a kísérleti pszichózisok és az alkotási vágy összefüggésének kérdéséhez*

Elam M. *Contemporary science communication as a world of political invention*. *Sci Cult* (Lond). 2004 Jun;13(2):229-58. doi: 10.1080/0950543042000226620. PMID: 15988848

EMBO Reports 21: e51278 <https://doi.org/10.15252/embr.202051278>

Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51–58.

Feldman, NG (2016), Chapter 5: Evolving Communities: Aspects Of Shipibo And Andean Art, Textiles, And Practice In Contemporary Peru In *Fieldiana. Anthropology New Series*, No. 45, *The Shipibo-Conibo: Culture and Collections in Context* (November 11, 2016), pp. 51-59 (9 pages)

Freckska, Ede Interview

<https://magyarnarancs.hu/tudomany/nem-arra-van-hogy-meghulyuljunk-99466>

Főzy, V. (2014). Egy amazóniai narkotikum világkarrierje: ayahuasca. *Ethnographia*.

Furedi, F. (2004) *Therapy Culture: Cultivating Vulnerability in an Uncertain Age*. London: Routledge

George, J. R., Michaels, T. I., Sevelius, J., & Williams, M. T. (2020). The psychedelic renaissance and the limitations of a White-dominant medical framework: A call for indigenous and ethnic minority inclusion, *Journal of Psychedelic Studies*, 4(1), 4-15. Retrieved Sep 10, 2021, from <https://akjournals.com/view/journals/2054/4/1/article-p4.xml>

Havasréti, J. (2021)

<https://www.jelenkor.net/interju/2005/a-kadar-korszak-irodalmi-pszichonautai>

Illouz, E. (2008) *Saving the Modern Soul Therapy, Emotions, and the Culture of Self-Help*, University of California Press

Juhász, F. (1967), *Mit tehet a költő*, Szépirodalmi Kiadó

Lapenta, F. (2011). Locative media and the digital visualisation of space, place and information. *Visual Studies*, 26(1), 1–3. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1472586X.2011.548483>

Latour, B. (2013) 'Biography of an Inquiry: On a Book about Modes of Existence.' *Social Studies of Science*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2013, pp. 287–301., doi:10.1177/0306312712470751.

Layoff, G. (2007) *Simple Framing - An introduction to framing and its uses in politics*. <https://archives.evergreen.edu/webpages/curricular/2006-2007/languageofpolitics/files/languageofpolitics/Simple%20Framing%20Rockridge%20Institute.pdf>

Lichtman, Marilyn (2002). Review: Gillian Rose (2001). *Visual Methodologies. An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials* [16 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 3(4), Art. 30, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs0204301>.

Nisbet MC, Scheufele DA. What's next for science communication? Promising directions and lingering distractions. *Am J Bot*. 2009 Oct;96(10):1767-78. doi: 10.3732/ajb.0900041. Epub 2009 Sep 3. PMID: 21622297.

Rabinow, Paul & Rose, Nikolas. (2003). *Thoughts on a Concept of Biopower Today*.

Reincke, M. et al (2020) *From deficit to dialogue in science communication*

- Rácz, J. (2006) Biopolitika Megjelent: Rácz J (2006): Biopolitika. in: Bíró J (szerk.): Biopolitika. Drogprevenció. Tanulmányok a kábítószer-fogyasztás megelőzéséről.
- Roberts, P. (2017) Earth-Beings, Plant Spirits, Ayahuasca and Equivocations. Prepared for delivery at the 2017 Congress of the Latin American Studies Association, Lima, Peru, April 29-May 1, 2017
- Rodriguez, Lulu & Dimitrova, Daniela. (2011). The levels of visual framing. *Journal of Visual Literacy*. 30. 10.1080/23796529.2011.11674684.
- Rose, G. *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials*. London: Sage, 2001. Print
- Shanon, B. (2002). *The antipodes of the mind: Charting the phenomenology of the Ayahuasca experience*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sirokai, Mátyás' interview with Havasréti, József, 2021  
<http://www.jelenkor.net/interju/2005/a-kadar-korszak-irodalmi-pszichonautai>
- Sloterdijk, p. (1999), *Világra jönni- szót kapni*. Jelenkor, Pécs
- Strassman, R. (2001) *DMT: the spirit molecule : a doctor's revolutionary research into the biology of near-death and mystical experiences*.
- Szabó, Elvira's interview with Nicole Zillo Roitberg  
<https://elviraszabo.com/hu/vargabetu/a-noveny-azert-van-itt-hogy-szolgaljon-vagy-a-fenyt-vagy-az-arnyekot>
- Szára, István and Böszörményi, Zoltán: various publications
- Trabocchi, D. (2006) *Vapours and visions: Religious dimensions of DMT use*. A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at The University of Queensland in June 2006
- Tupper, Kenneth & Labate, Beatriz. (2015). Ayahuasca, *Psychedelic Studies and Health Sciences: The Politics of Knowledge and Inquiry into an Amazonian Plant Brew*. *Current Drug Abuse Reviews*. 7. 71-80. 10.2174/1874473708666150107155042.