





3. To clarify:

\*I\* overprepared and brought a 5-gallon bucket, the first time

I was given a yogurt quart, a different time, and... that rug will never be the same



4. Potentially unpopular opinion: I loathe agua florida, soplating, and being soplated.

The only thing worse than being "cleansed" with a mix of cheap perfume and spit, is having to put that nasty stuff into your own mouth.

5. What is agua florida, you ask? It's... cologne, basically. It's mostly alcohol, along with water, fragrance, and coloring.

It was created in the US in 1808. I'm not sure how it made its way to Peru, or why it became so ubiquitous among shamans there.

<https://t.co/rXPwy0b5tr>



6. What is soplating?

The word comes from the Spanish "soplar" - "to blow."

It's a cleansing ritual where the shaman puts agua florida or mapacho tobacco smoke in their mouth and blows it forcefully on the patient, often with a sweeping motion.

7. Soplating is used for grounding.

If someone is freaking out, the shaman may try and snap them out of it by soplating (along with singing, and using a leaf rattle).

It's also used to open the ceremony, blowing onto the ayahuasca bottle, ritual implements, & the 4 directions

8. There are some cool parts about soplaying!

For liquid, you put just a tiny bit in your mouth, and make this tremendously forceful "TSSSEW!!!!!!!"

(it sounds kind of like a high pitched sneeze, but longer and more mysterious & professional)

9. The idea is to make a fine perfume mist, no spit drips. You might blow it down the person's back, or onto their head.

Similar technique for tobacco, but less risk of spit. You don't actually inhale it into your lungs, just into your cheeks and then blow it out forcefully.

10. There's a pragmatic component here. Strong scent can be a useful shock, like smelling salts, or an anchor for state-dependent cues (if you associate it with ritual, safety & calm).

There's also a spiritual component, because of course, this is shamanism!

11. Probably useful to bring in more context on Amazonian plant spirit shamanism.

Steve Beyer's whole site & book are excellent resources, from an academic & participatory perspective:

<https://t.co/QpOyWtEdIq>

12. I've also written about plant spirit shamanism on my Roam "public notebook," including various ways in which people might relate to the "contracts with plant spirits" aspect of it:

<https://t.co/NVEzHsHr5U>

13. Ok, back to the soplaying -- why use strong smells?

Apparently, "The plant spirits in the Amazon love strong, sharp, sweet smells":

<https://t.co/MWKxmqWngU>

This article describes "perfumero" as one particular shamanic specialization:

<https://t.co/cYv0AKaOI5>

The plant spirits in the Amazon love strong, sharp, sweet smells. Thus, one way to acquire protection against malevolent persons and their pathogenic projectiles is to acquire such a sweet smell oneself, as opposed to the ordinary human smell, including the smell of human sex, which the spirits dislike. Shamans achieve this state, and provide it for their patients, by putting substances with sharp sweet smells either on or inside the body.

14. Ok, but soplaying sounds cool! Why don't you like it?

- Agua florida burns the absolute hell out of mucous membranes! Chemical burns!

When I held it in my mouth for soplaying, everything tasted like poison for \*hours\* afterwards -- even water!!

15.

- Not all shamans do the "fine mist" technique!

One shaman spat all over my head, drenching me in saliva and cheap cologne, right after the most profound spiritual experience of my life.

It was really a pure land / charnel ground kind of night!

<https://t.co/fcuwr1X4Zf>

...so this morning...[@SarahAMcManus](#): I'm at the charnel ground

Malcolm: What?

S: I'm at the pure land

M: Naw...

S: I'm at the combination charnel ground & pure land!

We present to you the latest single from the [#BuddhistShitposting](#) label: <https://t.co/72HnvHIRNe>

— Malcolm is back by the \U0001f30ecean! ([@Malcolm\\_Ocean](#)) [January 14, 2020](#)

16.

- Soplaying with tobacco smoke hurts my mouth too.

It's a special kind called mapacho, and it's a different species from the usual cigarette tobacco, with a much higher nicotine content.

<https://t.co/e3QqYtMEeY>



17. When I was hired at an ayahuasca center in Peru, I tried so hard to work with the agua florida and mapacho tobacco.

I tried to make my own alcohol extract of fragrant flowers and plants, hoping it would taste less like death (it did!).

18. And I was hoping to mix the mapacho tobacco with a less-harsh smoking blend, primarily mullein and white sage.

The thing is, tobacco is considered a powerful plant spirit in and of itself, as well as a sort of go-between for other plant spirits. It's a whole deal.

19. There was one redeeming experience I had, with agua florida.

I was being splayed by my coworker, who I felt safe with, and was also... well, in love with.

(This was encouraged, which is its own whole story)

20. He sprayed a fine mist of agua florida on my head, and to me it smelled like lemon petit fours.

Same bottle, but a *very* different perceptual experience!

To me, petit fours mean:

- Childhood tea party
- Fancy occasions
- Peer awards ceremony where I felt loved & honored



21. The agua florida hasn't smelled the same to me since.

It's gone back to weird horrible chemical cologne.

22. I did not expect to write so much about splaying!

A few more "weird smells" things before moving on:

Some shamans also use strong-smelling items like mouthwash (Timolina) and camphor in their cleansing rituals

23. Where I worked, the Shipibo shamans would occasionally prescribe an extra-strength cleansing bath involving... gasoline, mothballs, onion, and garlicky plants (mucura)

Yes, those white chemical mothballs. No, I don't think I actually witnessed this.

Please don't do this.

24. Moving on: PURGATIVES!

So, ayahuasca itself can have a purgative effect. The word usually means "laxative," but in a ritual context "purgativo" can also mean something that induces vomiting.

(Other forms of purging: sweating, crying, laughing...)

25. The first purgative I took, during a 6-week shamanic initiation course in Peru in 2014, was sangre de grado.

It's the thick reddish-brown latex of the Croton lecheri tree. We drank it before dawn, mixed with water, like a shot.

It's bitter, soapy, and horrible-tasting.

26. Drinking it is bad. What comes next is worse.

See, you don't vomit just from the shot.

You have to force yourself to chug water until you puke, over and over, like a terrible frat hazing ritual.

27. It's not recommended, and probably not that safe, to let it all go through your system. Some people did and were sick all day.

Forcing myself to drink that water was one of the hardest things I've done. Much harder for me, than enduring discomfort that's just happening.

28. I will not drink sangre de grado again.

However, when I worked at the center, it was part of my job to give it to other people. (I would not do this now.)

I woke them up before dawn, in the dark... by playing kazoo ■

29. Ok, so -- the kazoo was optional! My own addition.

I figured: this experience is unavoidably terrible, and so I might as well make it more bearable by making it **\*\*absurdly terrible\*\***

Bring on the clown energy! ■

30. "What is an appropriate kazoo playlist, to accompany chugging water and vomiting up soapy plant resin, in the pre-dawn jungle?"



- Don't Stop Me Now - Queen
- I Will Survive - Gloria Gaynor
- Be a Man - Mulan
- Eye of the Tiger - Rocky III
- Gonna Fly Now - Rocky

31. "Should I do this at home?"

NO.

If you chug too much water -- especially if you don't succeed in vomiting -- you could throw off your electrolyte balance, and this can kill you:

<https://t.co/cRYbW9j35L>

(Playing kazoo is safe & recommended, though!)

32. Later, I went to another center in Peru, and they used a gentler purgative: lemongrass tea.

This also involved chugging water to vomit, but it was wayyy easier.

Mainly because lemongrass tea tastes fine, & it's safe to let it pass on through if you don't manage to vomit

33. "Why the hell do they do this, with the purgatives??"

The stock answer is: ■cleansing!■ It prepares you for the ceremony.

The anthropology answer might be more like: hella parasites in the Amazon, gotta purge regularly, practical thing became a ritual.

34. A bit more on safer vomiting:

So, in 2016 I went down to Peru for the 2nd time, preparing to work at an ayahuasca center, coordinating research & helping facilitate ceremony.

This job would involve a lot of vomiting. So, of course, I asked my dentist for advice.

35. Because, like -- vomiting is not great for your teeth! People with bulimia can get all kinds of teeth problems.

The dentist took my question surprisingly well. He suggested fluoride treatment before I leave, rinsing my mouth well after vomiting, and using fluoride mouthwash

36. I did NOT tell my boss or coworkers about the fluoride... because of course, fluoride "calcifies your pineal gland," and people who work with DMT are often all about the pineal gland.

Not saying it \*doesn't\*... I mean, "brain sand" is a real thing? <https://t.co/ESHoPzgsAG>

37. Hmm, what else... oh, SALT!

So, the ayahuasca diet is a whole thing. Multiple things, in fact.

Before & after ceremony, there's a list of restrictions on what you eat & drink.

(I may come back to that - \*much\* more to say!)

One of these is salt.

<https://t.co/2z8sgOwrPp>

[pic.twitter.com/zcB8llm9nZ](https://pic.twitter.com/zcB8llm9nZ)

— Sarah McManus (@SarahAMcManus) [October 24, 2020](#)

38. But eating entirely zero sodium for weeks on end is impossible, absurd, and dangerous.

You need sodium for your nerves to function.

I find myself mentioning potentially-deadly hyponatremia ("not enough salt") YET AGAIN:

<https://t.co/m1ySFLY6Ed>

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— Sarah McManus (@SarahAMcManus) [December 16, 2020](#)

39. So, how did we navigate this impasse -- a cultural & spiritual requirement of no salt, and a pragmatic safety necessity of some salt?

Oral rehydration salts ■

I mean, it tastes kinda bad, and doesn't season your food, so probably this fits the ascetic vibe?



40. Still, none of the food was salted, and we only gave rehydration salt drinks when needed (for headache, etc).

I was taking in so little salt, that my sweat was not salty.

A novel experience!

41. "On the retreats, did the facilitators have secret food stashes??"

Absolutely, yes.

We'd work 2 or 3 week retreats, and there's just not enough fat in the diet to keep your energy up, over the long term, when you're taking care of other people all the time.

42. Secret facilitator food included:

- Salt
- Coconut oil
- Cocoa powder
- Maca powder
- Emergency coffee

I think I might have also had peanut butter?

Yes, you're not supposed to have chocolate or peanuts, on the MAOI diet - and ayahuasca is a RIMA:

<https://t.co/nNzqw70AJc>

43. So far, this thread has probably not been what you expected! I haven't talked much at all about the psychedelic / entheogenic aspects of the ayahuasca experience.

May leave it here tonight, come back with more tomorrow.

Feel free to reply to this tweet w/ questions! ■