Living Daily Life as a Ceremony.

About the Dynamics between Ritual Time and Everyday Life
in the Spiritual Path of Camino Rojo followers in Uruguay.

Master's Thesis: Els van Houtert

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One of the participants of the Vision Quest ritual once said to me about the Camino Rojo family: "Aquí te aman porque sí!" ("Here they love you [just] because!"). I understood exactly what he meant. Right from my first Camino Rojo encounter, I felt warmly welcomed as a member of the Camino Rojo family. As an equal. I want to thank you, the entire Camino Rojo family, for accepting me in your midst. If there is one thing I will never forget from my time in Uruguay, it is the heart-warming feeling of brotherhood.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Finally I arrived in Montevideo, the city from where I would start my first anthropological research. For some months already, I had been digitally following the *Camino Rojo* (Red Path), a spiritual movement in Uruguay: I became a member of their Facebook page, subscribed to their digital newsletters, and read the only book I was able to pursue of Alejandro Corchs, the most famous of Camino Rojo's leaders and best-selling author of an autobiographical series. Although I had researched as much as I could from a distance, I still had no idea what to expect from my fieldwork among this Uruguayan spiritual movement. Part of me was excited to be there, another part of me was scared of the intense and intimate physically, emotionally, and socially challenging rituals that were awaiting me.

As a rookie in the field of ethnographic research, the first thing I did was try to make myself feel comfortable with my new role as an anthropologist. I reasoned that first I needed to organize some sort of group-conversation with Camino Rojo followers, so they could explain me more about the Camino Rojo and its rituals (which would also enable me to mentally prepare myself for those rituals). To be frank, the true reason for looking for a focus-group was that I was afraid to just take the leap and participate in a ceremony unprepared. I feared the intensity of the ceremonies but most of all I feared that the other participants would see me as an intruder.

I contacted Luna Lunita, the moderator of the Facebook-group of Camino Rojo in Uruguay, and asked for her permission to post a request on their Facebook-page for a meet-up. Luna replied that she did not understand why I preferred to talk to people rather than just go to the ceremonies. She wrote:

> After all, it is just going to the place and living the experience. One does not need to know anything, just to be open for participation. [...] Why meeting with various persons to talk about the Camino, instead of *living* it?

Luna's remark was the first of many to follow in which *experience*, in contrast to talking or thinking about it, was emphasized as essential to the life of a

Camino Rojo follower. Because Luna was the expert not I, I decided that in order to successfully carry out my ethnographic research with the Camino Rojo, I should do as I was told.

The thesis that lies before you is the result of the anthropological fieldwork I conducted in Uruguay with the Camino Rojo and its followers from January 25th to April 21st, 2016. The Camino Rojo is a spiritual movement that aims to recover the ancestral memory of indigenous America. This ancestral memory is based on the, what is called, holistic idea that everything that exists in this world is a child of *Madre Tierra* (Mother Earth) and *Padre Sol* (Father Sun), and is therefore part of the same family. Furthermore, what connects all these beings to one-another, is that inside them they all bear a piece of *el Gran Espiritu* (the Great Spirit). The Great Spirit is an essential energy that is everywhere: it resides within us and without us. It is Love, the Universe, God. The Great Spirit is what makes us all one.

By performing rituals that are adopted from different indigenous practices from all over the American continent, the Camino Rojo practitioners aim to learn how to make a ceremony of their daily life and to be–what I call in this thesis–*tuned in with* or *connected* to the spiritual realm of the Great Spirit, to the Universe. However, in their modern lives, Camino Rojo practitioners encounter all kinds of distractions that keep them from being tuned in. Alejandro Spangenberg, the most established leader of Camino Rojo in Uruguay, points out that these distractions occur because in the modern world, the individual has placed himself at the centre of the universe. Instead of experiencing the world around him directly, he has separated himself from the world and the universe in order to understand, control, and categorize his experiences. What is more, he has created the *ego*, who tends to think in terms of *having* (i.e., separation, power, control) rather than in terms of *being* (i.e., unity, connectedness, equality). (I introduce the concept ego more elaborately in section 1.2.1 of this introduction.)

The principal intention of this thesis is to show the dynamic relation between the ceremonial activities and ritual performances of the Camino Rojo, and the way in which these practices are embedded in the daily lives of the individual participants.

1.1 *No-Tiempo* and *Tiempo*: The Dynamics between Daily Life and Ritual Experiences

I came to Uruguay with an open approach: I had decided not to formulate a concrete research question or hypothesis, because I wanted to see what the Camino Rojo practitioners had to show me themselves. This approach remained my fundamental attitude during both my fieldwork and the phase of writing up this thesis. I call it *radical induction*: emphasizing the central role

of not-knowing what exactly I to look for. This open approach gave me the opportunity to go with whatever crossed my path, without trying to keep too much control over the direction my research would take; instead of anticipating certain research themes (such as "ritual," "hierarchy," or "meaning-making"). I got a grasp of the way things were dynamically interrelated in Camino Rojo spirituality.

During my data analysis I continued with this radical induction. I did not choose a particular framework that determined my selection of data; instead, I chose to write out different stories. These stories, each in their own way, represented a part of how things *can* go at the Camino Rojo and how people *can* live their lives, walk their spiritual path, and relate to and participate in the Camino Rojo network. As I was organizing these stories in such a way that together they could lay the foundation for this thesis, I stumbled upon the following central feature: a complicated dynamic relation between ritual time and everyday life runs as a common thread through all these stories. The fundamental aim of Camino Rojo practitioners, is to be connected with the spiritual realm, the Great Spirit, in everyday life.

It may sound straightforward that ritual experiences are understood to be the most important mediums through which one can learn how to be connected. Nevertheless, it was only after I had returned from fieldwork and analysed my data, that I found out how these rituals, and this goal, had a place in the entirety of the everyday life of Camino Rojo practitioners. My analysis revealed how people struggle to keep all plates spinning: to act and think in accordance with their 'new' holistic worldview while they continue to live their modern lives and fulfil their modern obligations. This insight made me realize theimportance of paying attention to everyday life as it is lived its *entirety*; that is, including the most simple and (seemingly) "profane" day-to-day activities. (This stands in contrast to solely paying attention to rituals and other practices that are directly associated with "religion" or "the sacred", which is commonly the case in the fields of anthropology of religion and religious studies.) Hence, the aim of this research, namely to show how people try to be connected or tuned in in everyday life, is inspired by the main ambition of Camino Rojo practitioners to (learn how to) make a ceremony of their daily lives.

1.1.1 Camino Rojo's Aim: To Live Everyday Life as a Ceremony

> But after you leave a ceremony, where do you return to? Many times you return to your house to work, or to whatever it were. To the dailiness that separated you of everything original and which you have now seen. - [The video-image shows how Alejandro Spangenberg raises his arms, circles his head and spreads his eyes wide open: demonstrating a gaze of amazement. "Whoechhh!" he utters.] (Spangenberg 2016)

For the Camino Rojo spiritual experience is valued over the language and

ideas through which experiences can be narrated or explained; it is only via experience that the people of the Camino Rojo can get in contact with the Great Spirit, with Love, and with who they truly are. Because this connection is manifested in experience, it omits any form of interference from thought or the ego.

Ritual practices are seen as the provokers of experiences of connectedness, because at ritual practices, people can learn both from Camino Rojo leaders and important entities–i.e., "the guardians of our essence"–how to establish and recognize this direct connection. During rituals, people learn to be **tuned in** with the Great Spirit and to open up for Love.[1] This makes that ritual practices play a fundamental role in the Camino Rojo movement, in the words of Kim Knibbe and Anna Fedele, they are "experienced as something that works" (Fedele and Knibbe 2012, p.7).

In this thesis, the term *ritual* simply refers to what Camino Rojo practitioners understand as such: a spiritual practice through which people can get in touch with the Great Spirit (or with other important entities). This includes ceremonies that are organized and performed collectively (such as the rituals that will be described in Part I of this thesis), but it also includes smaller, individual and more "spontaneous" ritual performances that people do in their daily lives (e.g. meditating upon food before eating it, or praying in front of a fire to the Great Spirit–who's heart resides in all fires). As will become clear in this thesis, all rituals that are performed by Camino Rojo practitioners (both collectively and individually), are to some extend repetitive and determined by certain customs, but they are also continuously (re)invented by its participants according to the specific situation. In other words, participants in Camino Rojo rituals play an active role in co-creating the course and form of a ritual.[2]

The quote from Alejandro Spangenberg at the beginning of this section, illustrates the interdependent relationship between ritual practices and daily-life. It shows that the eventual goal of followers of the Camino is not (only) to experience connectedness during rituals; it is to take what was learned and experienced at ceremonies, back to their daily lives. This includes learning about one's personal spiritual path and learning how to be tuned in. Alejandro Corchs formulates this goal as follows:

[1] NB: In this thesis, bold fonts will be used only in introductory/concluding passages, as to emphasize the key terms and concepts in this thesis.

[2] Participants sometimes even challenge or question the authority of (a part of) the ritual itself or of the person(s) in charge of it. This illustrates how, at the Camino Rojo, a ritual is always *in the making*. This is similar to what Anna Fedele concludes from her study of the practitioners of Goddess spirituality in Southern Europe, namely that a ritual is "the product of a complex process of interpretation" (Fedele 2014, p.6). People do not *just* participate in rituals, they also actively evaluate and re-create them as they take part in them, Fedele argues. (According to Fedele, this complex and dynamic form of ritual is in general common for "contemporary rituals created in plural and increasingly secularized Western Contexts" (p.1).)

> The most important ceremony of all, is the ceremony of daily life. All that we search in the ancient ceremonies, is to strengthen our hearts in order to walk in the most loving and true way our daily lives with all our relations. (Corchs, n.d.[c])

Hence, the Camino Rojo's ultimate goal is to achieve this envisaged connectedness in **daily life**.

This goal can be divided into two stages: learn to *experience connectedness* in a ritual, and, subsequently, learn to walk your personal path on a *daily basis*. Octavio, one of the Camino Rojo participants, explained the distinction between these two stages by using the following two terms: the ***No-Tiempo*** (Non-Time), which he links to ritual or ceremonial time; and the ***Tiempo*** (Time), with which he refers to everyday life. During an interview I had with him, Octavio told me a story of how the Great Spirit suddenly started to talk to him while he was painting a fence during work:

> "If we say that every day is a ceremony, then there are no moments that are more sacred, nor less. Your life is like the wood: First it was a seed, later a tree, later a plank, later a board, later a door. Later started the hands of the protector, of the paint. One, two, and tree [layers]. Each one gave a matrix more beautiful. More beautiful, more beautiful. [...] By so simply passing hand after hand, you realize how simple today is and how laborious it was yesterday. You have been paying attention to the daily instruction, and of course to the ceremonial. Everything counts. Everything carries a medicine inside. [...] Where we move is like a very thin line. The more you trust in you, the better you will walk without interrupting the balance. And when you empower, you will walk eyes closed."[3]

In our conversation Octavio assured me that to remember the words of the Great Spirit was not the most important thing for him. What was really sticking to his memory, he told me, was the experience and the profound understanding it had brought him:

> "I feel that what I learned from this, is that in reality, being at the beach in the sun or at a spiritual retreat or being planted is not the only way to be connected. You can also [be connected] in the everyday...and from here...being in the uproar of the city and in everything."

Later, Octavio continues:

> "Ceremonies–[or] going to therapies–are all things that happen in the 'No-Tiempo'. You go to therapy [...] and in 45 minutes you travel and heal and touch upon things and become conscious of things you have not thought of before. [...] In the No-Tiempo it is easy to be with love [...] but later, in everyday life, there are many things that distract. And if you are not well awake..."

[3]NB: In this thesis, I will only use quotation-marks in block-quotations when it concerns a quote from a recorded interview I personally conducted.

Again, we see in Octavio's words an explicit distinction between ritual-time (i.e., No-Tiempo) and daily life (i.e., Tiempo). The No-Tiempo is crucial for learning how to be connected, whereas the Tiempo is the part of life in which this connectedness is eventually to be obtained.

In our contemporary society, Alejandro Spangenberg states, the above distinction has become important because our daily lives take place in a world in which the individual has become separated from the universe. For ancient cultures this division did not exist:

> [He sighs and looks upwards.] In the native cosmovision... The natives, in fact of...practically of all the cultures of this earth, the original is the community. But the communities did not have a spiritual path. They líved [it]! ["*Vivían!*"–he said this with emphasis.] It was a form of life. (Spangenberg 2016)

1.1.2 The Aim of this Research: The Dynamics between Daily Life (*Tiempo*) and Ritual Experiences (*No-Tiempo*)

In short, we have seen that the main aim for the Camino Rojo is to learn how to make a ceremony of daily life; that is, how to be tuned in. In other words, the No-Tiempo must obtain a natural place in the Tiempo. My aim in this thesis is to show, through thick description and by telling stories, how these goals are attempted for and what struggles people of the Camino Rojo encounter along the way. Here I will formulate a research question (presented in twofold) that will be the guiding thread throughout this thesis.

Question How is the goal of people of the Camino Rojo–to learn how to be tuned in to the spiritual realm in daily life through ritual experiences–manifested and expressed in the lives of individual Camino Rojo followers? In other words, how do these people integrate ritual time into their everyday lives?

Hence, this thesis strives to understand the *dynamics* between No-Tiempo and Tiempo. I want to stress that the above research question functions as a *guideline* for achieving this aim; I wish to *show* these dynamics and how they take shape in everyday life.

With respect to the aim of this research, I will particularly focus on the importance of the following central topics and sub-questions:

a) The role of (spiritual) experience with respect to connectedness. *What does experience mean for the people of Camino Rojo? How do they differentiate between one experience and the other? What kind of experiences do people strive for? What makes an experience* spiritual *or* tuned in*? (How) do people find the meanings of these experiences?*

b) The tension between a holistic worldview and modern life. *What is understood by a holistic worldview? How do people appropriate a holistic*

worldview in their everyday modern lives? How do they differentiate between a holistic and a modern worldview?

c) The role of authority and social relationships at the basis of the Camino's cosmology and ritual practices. *What are ritual practices? What are the conventional "rules" concerning ritual proceedings and social behaviour in rituals? How can authoritative persons influence the way people participate in rituals and who has these authorities?*

1.1.3 Research Approach

The aim of this research as it has been formulated in the above, was only determined after my return from Uruguay. Nevertheless, for my fieldwork I had planned to pay particular attention to Camino Rojo practitioners' *spiritual experiences*. Or, as religious studies professor Ann Taves prefers to call them, experiences "deemed special" (Taves 2009). With this term, Taves wants to emphasize that for an experience to be spiritual, it does not depend on certain universal or conceptual standards: that is, there is no use in understanding spiritual experience *sui generis* or through "second-order, scholarly discourses" (p.161). Instead, Taves argues, experiences are "deemed" spiritual or special by the experimenter. In other words, Taves argues that the kind of experiences that are called "spiritual" or "special," depends on the ascription of the person who has lived them. And in ascribing specialness, this person is influenced by all kinds of cultural and psychological factors.

But how does one study the (spiritual) experiences of people other than oneself?[4] And how should a researcher utilize himself or herself when doing ethnographic research about spiritual experiences? For a long time, the anthropologist was supposed to be "neutral" and "objective" in doing ethnographic research. Nowadays, this positivist attitude towards anthropological research turns out to be obsolete: research is never completely neutral, for a researcher always brings his/her own personality, cultural background and interests to the project.[5]

[4]These problems have been widely discussed by various prominent scholars in the study of religious experience (a.o. Robert Desjarlais and Ann Taves), in *Religious Experience: A Reader. Critical Categories in the Study of Religion*, by Craig Martin and Russel McCutcheon (2012).

[5]However, there is a substantial amout of discussion about the degree of personal involvement of the researcher that should be allowed into the field. For example, in the anthropology of religion, many academics still share the opinion that a researcher should not be a "spiritual" or "religious" practitioner him/herself, for this will lead to "non-neutral" research results. For those holding this opinion, a researcher writing about his or her own religious group, is even more out of the question. Instead, a researcher is preferably non-religious, or at least keeps his/her religion completely out of the research, dismissing all believes to the private sphere. A serious and refreshing attempt to counter this idea and in which the benefits of personal involvement (in the anthropology of religious experience) are fruitfully discussed, has been made by Alberto Groisman and Emily Pierini (2016).

In my aim to look at how spiritual experiences are lived and understood among Camino Rojo practitioners and how those experiences are attempted for and play a role in everyday life, I was particularly inspired by the fields of *phenomenology of religious experience* (in anthropology) and *existential anthropology*. In short the anthropological school that focuses on the phenomenology of religious experience, desires to approach the experiential dimension of religion from an "epistemologically humble" position by focusing on how things are experienced *as real* (Knibbe and van Houtert, forthcoming, p.3). In doing so, the anthropologists want to take the epistemology and ontology of the people they try to understand seriously, and let go of the notions of truth or existence that belong to their own cultural backgrounds; i.e., they want to refrain from theoretical analyses of cultures (whether structuralist, psychological, or functionalist) and the idea that academia is superior to any other worldview (see Knibbe and van Houtert, forthcoming; Knibbe and Versteeg 2008).

Existential anthropologists believe that a researcher who aims to understand the particular life of a particular individual in relation to its social context, should accept and take into account the continuous shifts (antitheses)–between consciousness and unconsciousness, certainty and uncertainty, belonging and otherness–a person goes through in his/her lifeworld. In other words, an existential anthropologist focuses on the dynamic relation between what people experience through the course of everyday *living* and how they *understand* or *reflect* upon these experiences and this living. Because, after all, as Mattijs van de Port puts it, "life-as-lived is always in excess of life-as-imagined" (Van de Port 2015, p.84).[6]

In terms of ethnographic fieldwork, I recognize four central academic values and methods under which my own approach might be subsumed.

- **Intersubjectivity**: with this term, existential anthropologists want to emphasize the importance to focus on the relation between subjects and the researcher (and between research-subjects themselves). In their view, there is no such thing as a separate subject, for we are all relating to others and to the world around us. Therefore, not *studying* the people from a distance (i.e., as a researcher) but actually *engaging* with them (i.e., as a person)–in other words, becoming an "apprentice"–is what should be aimed for (Knibbe and Versteeg 2008, p.52). This relational approach can sometimes lead to "self-estrangement", either for the ethnographer or for the informants (Desjarlais and Throop. 2011, p.88).

- **Radical Empiricism**: a term originally posed by William James, referring to the significance for a researcher to pay attention to things "as they appear to our consciousness" (Knibbe and van Houtert, forthcoming, p.3). NB: It should be emphasized that consciousness here is not merely mental, it is a physical too: consciousness is embodied (Stoller

[6]For an elaborate volume on existential anthropology, see Jackson and Piette (2015).

2009). Therefore, in radical empiricism, a focus on the senses and embodiment is used as a research-paradigm in order to study "the embodied process of perception from beginning to end" (Csordas 1990, 9).

- **Both/and-approach**: by taking a holistic perspective–i.e., focusing on "both/and" relations–space can be made for the acknowledgement of contradictions and paradoxes, which helps to clear the way for the complex and dynamic character of human life (Lambek 2015).[7]

- **Bracketing**: (also called *epoché*) an important term in anthropology of phenomenology that originates in the philosophical movement of phenomenology. It refers to the method of withholding from judgement–based on one's own cultural background–as to the nature or reality of an object and instead, paying attention to the way in which the reality (of an object) is *experienced* in an embodied way. (Knibbe and Versteeg 2008, p.49). NB: This form of understanding–from spiritual ideas to spiritual practices, and from the ceremonial to the daily–involves not only the mind, but also the experiencing body. The method of bracketing is similar to what is elsewhere referred to as "methodological ludism": by adopting playfulness as an approach, the researcher is supposed to "jump" from his/her own lifeworld into that of the subject (which requires an initial period of learning) (Droogers and Knibbe 2011). This approach creates an inter-subjective field based on the lifeworld of the subjects rather than "on a pre-set academic agenda" (p.292).[8]

During my fieldwork, I found myself somewhat in-between familiar with and estranged from the lives of the Camino Rojo practitioners. On the one hand, I was unfamiliar with their general cultural background (i.e., of Uruguay) and with the Camino Rojo, but on the other hand, I could identify with these people; the kind of world I grew up in did not differ much from the kind of world they grew up in: a modern Western, secular, post-Christian world in which a "neutral," or "scientific" worldview is valued over other, "non-neutral," or "religious" worldviews.[9] (Furthermore, in some way I could identify with the critical stance of my informants towards these prominent ways of understanding the world and which shape some of the most paramount values of modern Western society: that individuals are superior to the world they live in. Without a doubt, my personal interests and background must have influ-

[7] As Michael Lambek (2015) presents it, this "both/and" approach–which is arguably a form of radical empiricism–is an alternative to the reductionist "either/or" perspective in which all contradictions or paradoxes are attempted to be resolved in order to find a solid reductionist theory.

[8] Methodological ludism differs from bracketing chiefly for it is aimed at the entire field of religious studies rather than mainly at anthropology of religion.

[9] The term "religious" often being associated with "backward" and "dogmatic" (see "spiritual, not religious" 1.2.2).

enced both my understanding of the people I studied and the results I have decided to bring to the foreground.

The close (intersubjective) relationship I had with the Camino Rojo practitioners, made that I was often regarded *one of them.* As will become clear throughout this thesis, people treated me as a searcher by asking about me the deeper, spiritual reason behind my being there. They were willing to teach me how to improve my understanding of the Camino Rojo, but also of who I am in relation to the world around me. Being part of the Camino Rojo family provided many insights for my research (and beyond), because we shared uncertainties and stories that concerned my own experiences *and* theirs.

I have tried to shift my position every now and then by assuming a more distant attitude both towards my own experiences and to (those of) others. This methodological ludism helped me to reflect upon my experiences and assumptions, and upon the relationship between myself and my informants. It also made me more aware of how this project was affected by the relationships I had built with my informants and the feelings, experiences, and assumptions I had throughout the course of the research, and which in turn were influenced by all kinds of modes of being that in sum make part of who I am. I think that reflecting upon my role as a scholar *and* as a person, and how this contributed to the formation of this research, is not only important, but also crucial with respect to giving an honest and full account of what living among the Camino Rojo is like.

1.2 Contextualizing the Camino Rojo

Before continuing to the ethnographic part of this thesis, it is important to give a more detailed contextual and historical description of the Camino Rojo.

1.2.1 The Camino Rojo Uruguay

Historical Background

In his dissertation "Neoshamanism in Latin America: A Cartography from the Uruguayan Perspective" (transl.) anthropologist Juan Scuro 2016 shows that the term *Camino Rojo* (Red Path) originated in Mexico and bears various meanings: As a general term, it refers to the aspired indigenous red path that unites all native traditions of the American continent. Here, Mexico is understood to be the centre of the continent where "the union between North and South," the "Condor and the Eagle," was manifested (Scuro 2016, p.170).[10] More specifically, the term Camino Rojo has been closely linked to a spiritual

[10]The eagle represents the most sacred bird in Lakota and other North American traditions. The condor is traditionally the sacred bird for indigenous land of the South; namely, the bird lives in the Andes, consisting of Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru.

movement that originated in the seventies in Mexico as a form of syncretism between North American Lakota spirituality and "neomexicanidad": a Mexican spiritual ("New Age") and political movement that aspires a return to life as it was understood holistically in the precolonial (autochtonous) past (De la Torre and Zúñiga 2011).

In addition to the above, the Camino Rojo is also the name of an organization that was founded in the 1980s in Mexico as *Fuego Sagrado de Itzachilatlan* (Sacred Fire of Itzachilatlan) by spiritual leader Aurelio Díaz Tekpankalli. The spiritual ideas of this organization can be characterized as based on a "pan-indigenous" syncretism: a spirituality in which ideas and practices from different indigenous traditions of the American continent are syncretized (Apud 2015, p.5; Scuro 2016, ch.4). Besides the Mesoamerican *Temazcal* and Andean use of *Ayahuasca* in medicine ceremonies, the Camino Rojo bases its ritual practices and ideas on North American (more specifically, Lakota) indigenous traditions such as the *Vision Quest* (I will explain these practices later).[11] Under Tekpankalli's leadership, the Camino Rojo organization spread southward, throughout the South American continent (Colombia, Argentina, Ecuador, Brazil, Peru and Mexico), as well as to Europe (Spain and to a lesser extent also England and Belgium).[12]

In May 1994, a group of Uruguayan people met Aurelio Díaz Tekpankalli in Bolivia and invited him to Uruguay to organize a *peyote* ceremony.[13] After this peyote ceremony, a small group of about thirty people–under the guidance of, among others, Alejandro Spangenberg and his wife Solange (which are now leading figures at the Camino Rojo in Uruguay)–became interested in starting a Camino Rojo in Uruguay.

In February 2002, Tekpankalli officially recognized the Uruguayan move-

[11]It is said that Aurelio Díaz Tekpankalli has personally been inspired by native American Lakota spirituality, and that he has been an apprentice of (populist) Lakota teacher Wallace Black Elk. Extensive discussions are held concerning the authenticity of both Tekpankalli and the Camino Rojo, and of Black Elk and the *Red Road* (a term used by Black Elk and other spiritualists as to refer to the "right" or "true" road (Pritchard 2005)). Both the Red Road and Camino Rojo movement are accused of being "fake" and "a commerce". Moreover, indigenous rights-claiming Native American groups have accused these two spiritual movements of *cultural appropriation* and even of *cultural imperialism*, and have formulated a "Declaration of War Against Exploiters of Lakota Spirituality". Furthermore, a quick search on Google for "Red Road," "Camino Rojo," "Wallace Black Elk," or "Aurelio Díaz Tekpankalli," leads to many hits for sources of these "sham" or "fraud"-accusations. Obviously, these are questions and debates about authenticity. However, in this thesis it is not my aim to engage in this debate, for the fact that people participate in and identify with the group's practices and ideas is what I am interested in.

[12]It is difficult to contact or even locate or trace these organizations, for they are informally organized and have neither websites nor official documentations and/or establishments.

[13]The peyote cactus is a *planta de poder* (power plant) of which a medicinal drink is brewed and consumed in a medicine ritual (the same goes for *Ayahuasca*). The scientific term for those power plant would be "hallucinogenics" (cf. Horvath, Szabo and Szummer 2014). I will address the theme of power plants and medicine ceremonies more elaborately at the end of this thesis in section 7.3.1.

ment as part of the international Camino Rojo organization. However, shortly after Aurelio left, leaders of the Camino Rojo Uruguay desired to make certain changes to Tekpankalli's original format, so they decided to split off from the international organization; they continued as an independent organization called *Camino de los Hijos de la Tierra* (Path of the Children of the Earth). The strongest motivation for this separation is related to the structure of the organization: the people in Uruguay wanted to "stop being organized in a hierarchical form and adopt a horizontal organization, based on shared responsibility in decision-making and the conduct of the destiny of our Family" (Camino de los Hijos de la Tierra, n.d. Tab: "El Camino Rojo").[14]

Although, at present, the name Camino de los Hijos de la Tierra is officially the name of the Uruguayan movement, it has long been–and still is–very common among the Uruguayan followers (and in society in general) to refer to the Uruguayan organization as Camino Rojo. What is more, internally, Camino Rojo is often abbreviated to a simple *el Camino* (the Path). In this thesis I will use the terms Camino and Camino Rojo to refer to the Camino de los Hijos de la Tierra.

Soon after the Uruguayan Camino Rojo commenced, it grew rapidly: especially after Alejandro Corchs, arguably the most famous representative of the Camino Rojo in Uruguay at present, started to publish his autobiographical book-series. These autobiographies soon became best-sellers, which had its consequences for the Camino Rojo: the number of followers grew exponentially.[15]

Philosophy

The ideal of the Camino is to recover the ancestral memory of indigenous America. On their website, the Camino describes itself as "a path of life". The source and keeper of all forms of life in the entire Universe and of all Creation is *el Gran Espiritu* (the Great Spirit); i.e., a uniform existence that makes us

[14] See also Scuro (2016).

[15] Corchs wrote a series of three autobiographical books. In the first book the reader gets to know Corchs as a troubled youngster in an identity-crisis who, as his very last hope, starts therapy. After several sessions, Corchs' therapist is convinced: "From all parts you scream to go with the shamans," he says to Corchs. This is when Corchs decides to join "the path [of ...] the Indians" (respectively Corchs, n.d.[a], pp. 111; 107). Following him in his new mystical world of "indigenous" customs and rites, in the second book the reader is taken along on Corchs' personal spiritual path and his quest to process his youth traumas as a child of *desaparecidos* (disappeared ones; a term used in Uruguay and Argentina to refer to the thousands of people that were arrested, tortured and murdered by the Uruguayan and Argentinian dictatorial governments in the seventies and eighties) (Corchs, n.d.[b]). In the third and last book, Corchs writes about the successes of his previous books and how this has lead to him becoming an important figure in the Uruguayan Camino Rojo organization (Corchs, n.d.[d]). After these books, Corchs wrote various thematic books about the meaning of *Love* (Corchs 2011) (see also section 4.5); about forgiveness (Corchs, n.d.[e]); and, together with his father-in-law Alejandro Spangenberg, about freedom (Corchs and Spangenberg, n.d.).

all one, for it resides within everything that exists (think of humans, stones, animals, fires, plants, and so forth). According to the Camino Rojo, everything that exists on this earth, all nature and all beings, are children of *Padre Sol* (Father Sun) and *Madre Tierra* (Mother Earth). Mother Earth is the mother of all living beings; she is the creator of all that is physical. She is the entity who gives us humans our bodies and every being its.[16] As children of the same mother and father, sharing and bearing part of the Great Spirit, every being that exists in this world is family.

When a soul–souls reside in the stars–descends from the sky to the earth, Mother Earth becomes pregnant.[17] Our souls belong to the emotional level of our existence: the place in which all our good and bad experiences lie; that is, including those of our previous incarnations (for example of our ancestors). Being our mother, the earth knows what form we should get and during her pregnancy we become a physical being (a.o. humans, stones, fire, etcetera). All her children are of the same value to her, human beings as much as all other beings.[18]

In one of his books, Alejandro Corchs describes that one time during a ceremony he had a conversation with Mother Earth. She explained to him the reason why he was given a body:

> When you want to honour me, honour your body–the Mother continued with a more soft tone–. When you want to protect me, protect your body. In the spiritual path, you will never go faster than your body. That is why I lend it to you, to teach you the rhythm in which you have to walk in relation to yourselves, and to teach you to walk in family. (Corchs 2011, p.90)

According to the Camino Rojo, the Great Spirit unites and connects everything; he is the essence of everything that exists and the moving force of the universe. He is also referred to as God, the Universe, Love and Nature. Following the Camino, in essence, *I* am *the Great Spirit.* We all are the Great Spirit.[19] According to the Camino Rojo, our main challenge in life is to be connected with our heart: the part of the Great Spirit within us and, thereby, with everything around us, since the Spirit resides both within us and without us.

[16] NB: I say "who" rather than "that," in order to emphasize that Mother Earth is understood to be alive. She is a real *living,* spiritual being, not a "thing". The same goes for all other (other-than-human) beings. Throughout this thesis, different anecdotes and ideas will be addressed that will further illustrate what this means.

[17] Although not stated, I conjecture that Father Sky could therefore be seen as *the keeper of souls.*

[18] Of all these beings, some bear a particular characteristic from which we humans have a lot to learn. Such beings are referred to as *Abuelos* (Grandparents; i.e., Ancestors) and are often integrated to prayers or rituals. Some of those Grandparents (e.g., Grandfather Fire, Grandparent Stones, Grandmother Moon, Grandmother Ayahuasca, Grandfather Tobacco) will be further discussed in the next chapters.

[19] A famous phrase among the Camino is "todos somos uno, uno somos todo" ((we) all are one, one are we all). This phrase is also used in a popular Camino hymn.

What distinguishes us human beings from our non-human brothers and sisters who also bear a piece of the Great Spirit within them, is that the human being has an *ego*. The ego is the part in us that thinks in distinctive characters and has a notion of an *I* that is separated from others. The ego tries to *understand* our experiences, to explain and categorize them rather than to *live* them. While the *real* essence of who we are is something we can only experience or live. Hence, for the Camino Rojo, the main aim it is to think in terms of unity rather than separation, and experience rather than rationality. The ego, who tends to think in terms of "to have" rather than in terms of "to be," can therefore be a distracting factor in achieving this aim (Spangenberg 2014).[20]

With its controlling character–i.e., separating self from others, trying to comprehend things, thinking in terms of *having*–the ego likes to define the self in clear categories. It creates different layers that cover-up our essential being; similar to the way an onion has different layers around its core. For this reason, although our essence is always and forever *present*, as human beings we can sometimes feel to have lost ourselves. In order to find back our essence, we should first peel off each of these complex layers that were once created by our ego. We should be open for *not knowing*; that is, for experiencing the simplicity of our existence. (Here, not knowing refers to "not-knowing" in a rational way; that is, not being able to reproduce or comprehend with language or thought.)[21]

In his book about his personal discoveries during his spiritual quest, Alejandro Spangenberg tries to explain the simplicity of the true self in relation to experience. The question, he says, should not be: "what am I experiencing?" but "who is experiencing?" With this distinction, Spangenberg tries to make clear that the deepest *Yo* (Me), is the Me who is connected to the Universe, to the Great Spirit, and to all other beings in this world.[22] This *Me* would not have to wonder what it is experiencing; it is *Me* and simultaneously it is Great Spirit who is experiencing when experiencing connectedness. As Spangenberg puts it: "I am the Being that is searching for itself because it thinks it has lost itself. He who is searching is the same as the one he is searching for. So, who could he have lost?" (p.15).

The spiritual challenge for us all, according to the Camino Rojo, is to find our place in life, our spiritual path. Through adapting what is called a

[20] NB: The ego must not be seen as something that would make a human being superior to other beings: the ego is not seen as something that is bad in itself, rather, by thinking in terms of separations, it can be a disturbing factor in the attempt of being tuned in.

[21] *Knowing*–as we will see throughout this thesis–can have a completely different connotation from the way it is usually associated with thought, logic and metal processes; e.g., knowing can be a form of knowing that omits all logic or thought and that is *directly experienced*. (The aspect of life that will always remain rationally unknown and, therefore, a mystery to us–and which we should accept and live with–is often referred to as the *Gran Misterio* (Great Mystery).)

[22] Note the capital "Y" that Spangenberg deliberately used.

"holistic" cosmology, we should be able to "transform our daily life into an experience of love and harmony" (Camino de los Hijos de la Tierra, n.d. Tab: "The Camino Rojo").[23] As we shall see, *daily life* plays a crucial role in walking one's spiritual path; it is in daily life where we should learn to be connected to our essence and where we should be able to distinguish this essence from the disturbances of our ego.

There are more things to say about the Camino's philosophy. However, talking about ideas and concepts is for the Camino Rojo not the same as experiencing them: Relativizing his own attempt to write a book about his knowledge of and experiences with the universe, Spangenberg states that: "I understood that it was not useful to try to understand with the mind or the memory that what has been given to me, like everything in the Camino, only experience would teach me the why of all things" (Spangenberg 2014, p.30).

Ritual Practices

What brings people of the Camino Rojo together, are the ritual practices that are performed. As indicated, these ceremonies are based on ancient indigenous ritual practices from all over the American continent: The Mesoamerican *Temazcal*–a kind of sweat lodge that is meant for people to be purified and to relive the moment of conception from Mother Earth.[24] The Native American *Búsqueda de Visión* (Vision Quest)–a multi-day individual retreat at the foot of a tree–and the *Danza de la Paz* (Peace Dance)–a four-day ceremony in which men dance non-stop in order to thank the sun.[25] The *Ceremonia de Medicina* (Medicine Ceremony), usually centred around the medicinal hallucinogenic brew *Ayahuasca*, which was originally among Amazonian indigenous people.[26] And lastly, used in multiple indigenous movements, the *Rezo de Tabaco* (Tobacco Prayer): a prayer that is mediated by smoking tobacco and meant to help people connect with their hearts. The Rezo de Tabaco, Temazcal and Búsqueda de Visión rituals will be extensively explained in the first part of this thesis (resp. chapter 2, 3, 4).[27]

Since we are given a body and since we have brothers and sisters around us who are made of pure love, according to Alejandro Corchs, we can ask for the "safeguarding power" of the elements of nature:

[23] Spangenberg also calls the cosmology of the Camino Rojo "holistic" (Spangenberg 2014, p.42).

[24] In Mesoamerican tradition, the Temazcal was and is mainly used for different types of healing. (For an overview of ancient and contemporary use of the "steambath" among the Maya in Chiapas, Mexico see Groark (2005).)

[25] Both inspired by Native American practices (a.o. Lakota, Dakota, Cheyenne).

[26] Other medicine that are used are *San Pedro*, *Peyote* (both originally from Mesoamerica), or mushrooms. For more information and references–in English–about Ayahuasca in Uruguay (a.o. in Camino Rojo Uruguay), see Apud (2015).

[27] I have never participated in a Danza de la Paz ceremony. What is more, for reasons of word limitations, balance, and priority, I have chosen to leave the Medicine Ceremony out of the picture. For more elaborate argumentation about this choice, see section 7.3.1.

> The guardians of our essence, the Stars, the Earth, the Water, the Air, and the Fire. For [the sake of these elements] ceremonies are held by all native cultures who recognize their vulnerability and who practise different rituals where they receive the safeguarding power of the guardians of our essence. (Corchs 2011, p.41)

Not only via rituals, but also by simply "[s]itting beneath a tree, on top of a mountain, walking through the jungle, bathing yourself in a waterfall or on the beach," this connection can be searched for and made (p.42).

Organization and Participation

Rituals that are organized by Camino Rojo practitioners are announced in the weekly Camino Rojo mailing list, on the web-page, and on their Facebook page. Any person who desires to participate is free to join, and can read the instructions (about payment, location and other preparations) in these announcements. Except for the longer rituals (Vision Quest and Peace Dance), there is no need to subscribe for a ritual. The Camino Rojo does not have a list of members, either. They say that, since everybody is a brother or sister, everybody is free to join and free to leave. Although there is no such thing as an official membership, there *is* the option to be baptised. This means that, under the guidance of his/her spiritual Godfather, Godmother and a Medicine Man, a person is given his/her *spirit name* (such as "Daughter of the Stars" or "Eagle of the North").[28] Next to talking with Grandfather Fire, the Medicine Man performs certain other actions that help him get in touch with the Great Spirit (e.g., waving with feathers and sprinkling water to the smoke of the fire). This way, a connection with the Great Spirit is facilitated, so that the spirit name can be transmitted to the Medicine Man.[29] The spirit name name represents the spiritual path that that person will have to walk and which he/she must discover; no further explanation is given with the name, for it is the task of the individual to find for him/herself out what his/her name means.

Although there is a lot of liberty as to who is allowed to participate in rituals, with respect to organizational decision-making, certain restrictions are established. For example, the people who finish the entire Vision Quest ritual–something which takes a lot of effort and time (i.e., four years at least)–are automatically member of the *consejo* (council). Members of the Council are allowed to actively participate in council-meetings and they have the right to vote. Furthermore, there are other roles that can only be accessed after certain stages have been passed: To become the leader of Tobacco-ceremonies, one does not only need sufficient experience, one also has to take an oath to Grandfather Tobacco in which one promises to serve him at all times. To

[28] These names are made up by me, but they are most probably also someone's real spirit-name.

[29] I could give a much more detailed description of a baptism ritual, as well as a comparison with other kinds of "baptism," however, this would require too much space and it is not of paramount relevance for this thesis.

become a *Temazcalero/-a* (a person running a Temazcal ceremony) one must be trained–as long as necessary–by an experienced Temazcalero/-a and will be officially given the title after a Temazcal ceremony with other Temazcaleros/-as. In order to become a *Hombre Medicina* (Medicine Man) one needs to finish all stages of the Vision Quest and a long and complex training with fellow Medicine Men.

The open organizational structure of the Camino Rojo probably contributes to the extensive diversity among participants: Some people participate in other spiritual activities on the side–e.g. *Curso de Milagros* (Miracle Course); Tarot; Yoga; Meditation; Numerology; Family Constellations–while others only (sporadically) engage in (some) practices of the Camino Rojo. The people who feel affiliated to the Camino Rojo are usually middle-class, modern, urban, highly-educated, non-indigenous people. In their daily lives Camino Rojo practitioners do all kinds of different jobs (e.g., they work in a factory, in the municipality, as an artist or as a psychologist), however a number of people practise a form of alternative healing as a second job. Although some of the practitioners live in the countryside or in communitarian settings, the majority of the Camino Rojo followers lives in Montevideo, the capital of Uruguay.[30] All in all, followers of the Camino vary from people who organize ritual meetings or visit those meetings on a regular basis, to people who only sporadically visit particular rituals or even only "passively" participate as a member of the Facebook group.[31] (NB: To illustrate what this means, currently there are almost 8500 people who are members of the Camino Rojo Facebook-group, while at the Vision Quest I participated in (March, 2016) there were about 150 people.)

1.2.2 What Kind of Movement is the Camino Rojo?

In order to give a full picture of the Camino Rojo in Uruguay, I want to briefly contextualize the Camino Rojo in comparison with other academic literature about similar groups or movements. In doing so, I will first and foremost pay attention to how the Camino Rojo understands itself in terms of self-labelled key concepts, and to it discursively legitimises its own existence.[32]

[30] In terms of communitarian life there is one suburb in Montevideo, called Remanso, in which a "cluster" of people lives. Many of these people were part of the first group of Camino Rojo followers and have gradually moved to the same suburb as to live close to one-another. Furthermore, there are several communities, some nearby and others distanced from Montevideo, where many "brothers and sisters" live a communitarian life. (For the sake of privacy and anonymity I will not name these communities here.)

[31] For the above reasons, I believe it is appropriate to call the people associated with the Camino Rojo *practitioners*, *participants* or *followers* (instead of members): In short, i) because there is no question of (official) membership for participants; ii) because the term membership is linked to a more specific relationship of being a member of the council and iii) because 'membership' insinuates a determined way of engagement, while the ways in which people are involved within the Camino have endless variations.

[32] Of course it would be interesting to study these concepts in the light of the Camino's cultural background. A historical reconstruction could, for example, bring to light the his-

"Spiritual, Not Religious"

During my fieldwork, people often told me that at the Camino Rojo people are "spiritual, not religious" and that the Camino is not a religion but *un camino espiritual* (a spiritual path).[33] Multiple arguments were given to me with respect to this "spiritual, but not religious" distinction: I was told that religion is institutionalized and the Camino Rojo is not; religion is dogmatic and the Camino is not; religion has an authoritative figure who decides what you have to do, what is good, what is bad, while at the Camino it is all about the personal path of the individual. Furthermore, the same distinction was made with respect to the role of texts: religion depends on authoritative texts while the Camino focuses on direct experiences.

These kinds of discursive distinctions between religion and (self-acclaimed) spirituality are very similar to what Kim Knibbe and Anna Fedele have found in their edited volume on (gender and) power in spiritual movements (Fedele and Knibbe 2012). This distinction contains normative language: as Fedele and Knibbe show, the differences between religion and spirituality often reflect an opposition against anything that seems 'patriarchal', "hierarchical," "traditional," "dualist" (Fedele and Knibbe 2012).[34]

"Modern Shamanism?"

Tensions between Modern Life and Holism

Although the affiliates of the Camino Rojo are (generally) not indigenous themselves (almost all Uruguayans stem from European immigrants), their self-image is still strongly historically embedded. The fact that Uruguay is presently seen as a secular country and a "país sin Indios" (country without indigenous people), plays a crucial role in the self-legitimization of the Camino Rojo movement (Scuro 2016, n.2-p.16).[35]

Referring to the difficult path that was walked by the original inhabitants of the soil upon which the nation *Uruguay* is now manifested, Corchs states, on behalf of the Camino, that there is a need for "sanación" (healing) and that it is Camino Rojo's task to "repair the memory of pain" (of the ancestors)

torical background of their current thought-structures, including possible influences from Christianity and the enlightenment. However, such an endeavour would surpass the present aim of this work.

[33]The sentence "spiritual, not religious" is a paramount statement among spiritual practitioners; scholars have addressed the discursive tactics used by people to self-ascribe spirituality and explicitly position themselves within their modern society (and in contrast to what they understand as "religion") (cf. Fedele and Knibbe 2012; Bender 2010).

[34]This shows, Fedele and Knibbe argue, that spirituality cannot be studied without reference to religion. This relates to the focus on interdependent relations between concepts–such as "religion" and "secular"– as famously initiated by Talal Asad.

[35]Uruguay is a self-proclaimed secular country in which the church is not allowed to intervene in state-decisions. Scuro describes Uruguay as a country that is "like the modern white-European-laicist-positivist [countries]" (Scuro 2016, p.130).

(Spangenberg 2014, Corchs in Preface). Hence, Camino Rojo emphasizes the importance of re-engaging with and healing the pain of precolonial time: a time that was not modern, Christian or secular; a time in which humans were not individualistic and did not separate themselves from nature; rather, a time in which they were *part* of nature. It is Camino Rojo's aim to restore the ancestral memory of indigenous America.

Regarding this ancestral memory, Spangenberg points out the following:

> To no native, the idea has ever occurred to posses the earth. In fact, their understanding is "we belong to the earth, the earth does not belong to us," you understand? And one does not go around screwing up his own family, taking more than necessary. Because if everyone takes what he/she needs, there is enough for us all. (Spangenberg 2016)

Our modern times, according to Spangenberg, are characterized by culture based on fear, power and control, which leads to the appropriation of the earth and formations of hierarchical social structures. What Spangenberg aspires is a society of love, sincerity, and trust, with a horizontal and balanced social structure (Spangenberg 2014, p.43).

The aspiration to recover precolonial or pre-modern ideas and (social) structures, the form of self-legitimization on the basis of history, and the aim of the Camino Rojo to let go of the radical distinction between the individual and the universe (and thereby to regain an ancestral, holistic memory that once was reality but that got lost because of modernity), is similar to what religious studies professor Kocku von Stuckrad describes as the "reenchantment" with nature and holistic thinking, which he detects in movements of "modern western shamanism" (Von Stuckrad 2002). Von Stuckrad points out that, by countering the modern tendency to exclude the "sacred" from the material world–arguably a result of the process of *disenchantment*, as Max Weber called it–modern western shamanism tries to "regain a 'sacramental view of reality' and to retrieve sacred dimensions of nature" (p.792). The same thing happens at the Camino Rojo, where people are *reenchanted* with the ancient holistic way of engaging with the world. The Camino Rojo attempts to adopt this new (old) "sacramental view of reality". That is, of the world, nature, the universe, and all other beings with which people are connected and share their spiritual reality.

This brings us to another characteristic of modern western shamanism and the reenchantment with nature, namely *animism*. In the Camino's worldview, like in modern western shamanism as described by Von Stuckrad, we can detect a form of animism in which "everything is alive and animated–even stones, rivers, and other allegedly 'dead objects' " (p.779).[36]

Furthermore, historian Andrei Znamenski characterizes modern western shamanism–that is, the commonalities among "shamanic practitioners"–as fol-

[36] Animism and its ontological implications on the Camino's worldview will be treated in chapter 5 and section 7.3.2.

lows: it recognizes a "nonordinary reality", is "earth-based", and has a negative opinion about Western civilization (Znamenski 2007, p.255). As we have seen, this is similar to the ideas of the Camino Rojo. Von Stuckrad's characterization that "modern western shamanism belongs to a movement against the mechanization and disenchantment of nature, cosmos, and the human self," also aligns with the last point of Znamenski (Von Stuckrad 2002, p.791). Moreover, this critical movement against the characteristics of Western civilization is also recognized by Juan Scuro (2016), who characterizes "neoshamanism" as a movement against a disenchanted, scientific or "technical" approach to the world.

What is more, Scuro recognizes the "democratic component of neoshamanism" in its open, non-inheritable, accessibility; Scuro points out that neoshamanic movements, like the Camino Rojo, maintain "a mechanism of initiation in which every individual is a potential "shaman". In fact, this is exactly one of the more relevant discursive aspects of these narratives[:] the possibility to discover the individual potential" (p.184). As Scuro emphasizes, this recognition of the individual potential is crucial for a movement like the Camino Rojo–with its desire to recover ancestral memory–in order to legitimize its own existence.

All in all, by i) advocating and maintaining a holistic, animated worldview; ii) having a negative opinion about Western civilization; and iii) legitimizing itself on the basis of historical background and the idea that "every individual is a potential 'shaman'," the Camino Rojo strongly resembles the descriptions of a modern western shamanic movement. Note, however, that the reason why I make this comparison is not to label the Camino Rojo as *neo-* or *modern western shamanism*. In fact, although the word *chamán* (shaman) is regularly used and (self-)appropriated by some Camino Rojo affiliates, it has also more than once been explicitly denied as a term that should be applied to Camino Rojo's spiritual leaders (during ceremonies, as we will see in the case of Gabriel, see Ch. 3, footnote 1). Some leaders, like Alejandro Spangenberg, prefer the term *hombre medicina* (medicine man), or *lider espiritual* (spiritual leader). Because, Spangenberg argues, "chamán" comes from Siberia and was brought to the continent by colonists (Corchs, n.d.[a], 118)). The reason I do use Von Stuckrad's, Znamenski's, and Scuro's ideas on neo- and modern western shamanism in this passage, is because I believe that these authors characterize these terms in a way that corresponds to how the Camino Rojo identifies itself. In other words, I use these theories to illustrate and illuminate the Camino's self-image.[37]

[37]Furthermore, I would like to stress that I am aware of the highly normative connotation underlying the term neoshamanism, as it aims to differentiate between "true" shamans and "fake" (western) shamans (see: Voss 2011, p.176)). An association that I wish to distance myself from.

1.3 Methods, Formalities and Ethical Concerns

My field-activities consisted of various anthropological methods. First of all, I did participant observation by joining the ceremonies that were organized in and around Montevideo. The ceremonies in which I participated consisted of five Temazcales, two Rezo's de Tabaco, three Ceremonias de Medicina (one of which was held in Belgium, guided by a Medicine Man of the Camino Rojo in Uruguay), and the annual two-week retreat-ceremony called Búsqueda de Vision. Furthermore, I conducted five formal in-depth interviews that each took approximately two-and-a-half hours. Besides these formally organized ceremonies and interviews, I had many informal meetings with one or more followers to talk about the Camino Rojo. Lastly, for seven weeks I lived in the house of a Camino Rojo family.

Besides fieldwork that was directed to the microcosm of the Camino, I also tried to understand life in Uruguay at a more macroscopic level. I have spent a lot of time with Uruguayans in and around Montevideo. I made friends who told me about their lives, about Uruguay, and about their knowledge of the Camino Rojo. In Uruguay, the Camino is a widely known and publicly discussed (and sometimes criticized) movement.[38] Getting to know the lives of all kinds of people - whether or not interested in spirituality - helped me to better understand what life in Uruguay is about.[39]

There are several formalities I wish to put out before continuing this thesis. In terms of language and translations, I want to make clear for all quotations to come, that translations from Spanish to English have all been made by me. This holds true both for the interviews that have been conducted and for the literature that has been consulted. Because a large part of my readers does not speak Spanish (fluently), I decided not to include the original quotes in the content. However, adequate references have been given to the original literary sources for those who are interested. The original transcriptions of the interviews are in my possession and can be requested.

There are various ethical questions that one needs to take into account that, in particular, concern anthropological research. In writing this thesis, I have striven to handle all the information that was presented to me delicately: thinking ahead and trying to place myself in the position of the people that are

[38] E.g., see "Vidas," a YouTube-series of five parts in which Alejandro Corchs' life story is documented (Vidas 2009). Furthermore, see the following newspaper-articles: `http://www.elpais.com.uy/domingo/vida-alternativa.html`; `https://www.elobservador.com.uy/alejandro-spangenberg-el-Camino-espiritual-puede-ser-una-fuga-la-realidad-n675800`; `http://www.lr21.com.uy/cultura/388637-libros-37`. Also, on the website *newagefrauds.com*, various spiritual leaders of Camino Rojo are criticized: `http://www.newagefraud.org/smf/index.php?topic=4842.0`; `http://www.newagefraud.org/smf/index.php?topic=4843.0`.

[39] These conversations were about political and social debates concerning diversity, Mujica's presidency, the legalization of marijuana, colonial history, revolutionary figures like Artigas and activism related to *desaparecidos*.

involved in this thesis. In doing so, I espoused the seven instructions on ethical inferences from the American Anthropological Association (AAA) as a guiding thread (American Anthropological Association 2012). Here I will elaborate on only two of them, referring the reader to the AAA for further reading. The first concerns *obtaining informed consent and necessary permissions*: at all times I have emphasized the voluntarism and anonymity of my informants and their liberty to withdraw. Although situations were not appropriate to arrange a written informed consent, I have honestly and clearly presented my plans, and at interviews consent has been included with the recordings. With respect to anonymity, all informants have been given an alias and sensitive, personal information has been left out (job specifications, address indications, or other identifiable details). However, I have made an exception with respect to public figures within the Camino Rojo (based on published records and public appearances, such as television appearances).

Lastly, in this thesis I have maintained the Chicago-style annotation. Furthermore, in order to facilitate the reader, I have implemented cross-references to-and-fro for concepts and ethnographic vignettes. For example, when the reader comes across the term *Tipi de la Luna* in chapter 4, but wants to double-check the meaning of this term as it was introduced previously: if included, the reader can click on the reference which will induce a jump towards the passage in which this concept has been explained. A click on the [Go Back] arrow on the upper-left side of the view-window (not the page) will enable the reader to resume his/her reading. What is more, I will be interchanging between, on the one hand, writing ethnographic narratives in form of vignettes and, on the other hand, a descriptive writing style. For this reason, I have chosen to indicate the beginning of a vignette with a reference to the location, time and central person related to the story. The symbol that indicates the start of a vignette varies in form, depending on the time of the day in which the event took place (and the climate at that time).

☽ 15/02/2016 Solimar, Tobacco Ceremony at Octavio's... [Text of vignette...]

This example indicates the beginning of a narrative that took place in Solimar on January 15th, 2016 with Octavio as the leader of the ceremony. The moon symbol indicates that this event took place in the evening.

1.4 Thesis Outline

This thesis will be divided into two corresponding parts: Part I represents the No-Tiempo or *ritual-time*: where it is "easy to be with Love". Part II represents the Tiempo or *daily life*: where "there are many things that distract" you from being "well awake".

More precisely, **Part I** consists of three chapters, each addressing a different Camino ceremony, these are: Rezo de Tabaco (Chapter 2); Temazcal (Chapter 3); and Búsqueda de Visión (Chapter 4). In these chapters, I aim to give the reader an impression of what it is like to experience these ceremonies. By exchanging between vignettes with a *live reporting*-style and general descriptions about the philosophy, functions and structure of each ceremony, the goal of Part I is to enable the reader to picture i) each ceremony in all its aspects and regulations, ii) the kind of experiences that are had (e.g., bodily experiences, experience of space, time and the material), and iii) the way people interact with one another as well as with their environment during these ceremonies. At the end of each chapter, I will conclude with an analytical reflection upon what we have seen, as related to the main goal of this thesis.

Part II, contains two chapters in which my focal point will be on people's daily lives. In chapter 5 I will emphasize the role of animals in the daily life of Camino Rojo followers in general and in the life of Octavio in particular. Thereafter, in chapter 6, I will address–in detail–the daily life of one the Camino's practitioners: Martín. A participant who I followed closely for a long period of time. In this part of the thesis, rather than presenting a general idea of the lives of the Camino Rojo followers, I zoom-in on the lives of two Camino participants in particular. This way, attention will be drawn to the dynamic aspects of daily life; including its paradoxes, uncertainties, challenges. As in the first part, I will use descriptive as well as eye-witness writing-styles interchangeably. I will also finish each chapter with a short analytical reflection.

Eventually, I will conclude this thesis with a reflection on the above. The focus on Tiempo and No-Tiempo, together with the experience of being connected, will bring to light (1) the main challenges people encounter as they attempt to achieve connectedness (both in terms of thinking and practice) and (2) other structures that underlie Camino Rojo's ontological perception.

Part I

No-Tiempo

Chapter 2

Rezo de Tabaco. Finding the Voice of the Heart

In this first chapter, I will focus on *Rezo de Tabaco* (Tobacco Prayer) ceremonies. A Tobacco Prayer is a form of prayer by which tobacco is used as a kind of vehicle or overpass that (re)connects what is in the hearts of people with the Great Spirit.[1] By achieving this direct connection, people are *tuned in* with Love–with what truly matters–and they are able to overcome the distractions that may be caused by their ego. But how does one connect with one's heart? What role can a Tobacco Prayer play in this objective? When does one know if one is following one's heart? And, just as importantly, when not?

2.1 Praying with Tobacco

After Luna suggested me to go and live the experience of Camino Rojo ceremonies, I followed her advise and searched on the Camino Rojo web-page. I looked for a ceremony that would be suitable for a the first time and reasoned that this would either be a Tobacco ceremony or a Temazcal. Thinking of all the "hallucinogenic" substances, such as Ayahuasca, I was not very attracted to go headfirst by joining a Medicine Ceremony. (As will soon become clear, however, unexpectedly my first Tobacco ceremony was also rather challenging and "hallucinating" in that respect.) On the Facebook-page of Camino Rojo, I read about a Rezo de Tabaco-ceremony in the suburbs of Montevideo. I decided to go.

- 15/02/2015 Solimar, Tobacco Ceremony at Octavio's... It was around 7pm in the evening when I rang the bell of the porch. The woman who had followed me all the way on the bus and towards the house, stopped next to me. We smiled at each other and greeted with a hug, as it is

[1] Since Tobacco Prayer is the default form of prayer, usually it is abbreviated to just *rezo* (prayer in general).

usually done in the Camino Rojo family.[2] Her name was Levina. After a while, a short and muscular man approached us from the other side of the porch. Frizzy, curly hair covered his entire body, except his shiny round-shaped bald head. Two green eyes looked at us amusedly and we were given a firm hug and a smile as a welcome. He introduced himself to me as Octavio.

In the gravel-field in his garden, Octavio had marked out a circle with big stones. A fire was burning in the circle, surrounded by seven small "seats" constructed of a wooden plank resting on each side on a horizontally placed beam. We, four women and Octavio, all sat on a stool and crossed our legs in lotus-position. Levina asked me what I was doing in Uruguay and I explained to her the purpose of my visit. While he was arranging the fire, Octavio listened to my story. After I finished, he initiated the start of the ceremony and told me to feel free to say it when things were unclear. "Father Tobacco will help us to see clearly and to speak from the heart," he said, "but before we start the Tobacco-prayer, I will apply some *rapé* to all of you. This will help you to focus." Shivers ran through my spine: I had heard of the use of rapé before, and what I had heard had scared me.[3]

(...)

Now Octavio has applied the rapé to two others–including Levina, who started to cough, snort and gag heavily, something which has scared me even more–it is my turn. Octavio fills a bamboo-pipe with the rapé powder by scraping the powder from palm of his hand into the opening of the pipe. I tell him that I am very anxious and that I have no idea what to expect. Octavio says that I should not worry. Since it seems that he will neither try to calm me down any further nor explain any more, I decide that there is not much more I can do than to trust him. I try to sit as still as I can as he brings the pipe to my nose. He tells me to open my airways. Directly after he blows the stuff into my nose, my breath feels blocked. A terrible stinging sensation takes over my whole nose. I try to cough and breathe through my mouth, but I feel like I can't. It feels like a handful of pepper is blown into my nose and throat. My eyes are tearing heavily and although I am trying to breathe through my mouth, my windpipe seems to be tapped. As I try to catch some breath,

[2] I believe that since Camino Rojo sees all participants as family, a hug is given as a sign of family-bonding. This fits with general Uruguayan customs where a kiss is a usual (first) greeting, but among close friends and family a hug is more common.

[3] Rapé is a powder made from roasted tobacco leaves (and sometimes other medicinal plants). It is used as a medicine to "refresh the memory" and for "cleaning of the airways". Application is done by blowing the powder (approximately half a teaspoon) into each of the airways of the receiver via a small bamboo pipe placed against the nostrils.

> I start to feel feverish and my heart is beating fast. I feel overwhelmed and a bit claustrophobic by all these intense sensations. My entire body starts tickling and my head feels woozy–as if in a cloud.
>
> Somewhere, which seems to be in a different world, I hear the rhythmic breathing of my neighbour–in through her nose, and out through her mouth. I decide to copy her and slowly I feel like I am coming back. Although the dizziness and the sensation of not being able to breathe, do not disappear. I am simultaneously relieved by the slow decrease of the intensity of these sensations, and scared for the second dose. The second blow is not even half as terrible as the first one. I breathe in through my nose and out through my mouth while Octavio goes on to the next person.

In the Camino Rojo movement, *rezo* (prayer) plays an important role: it has the purpose of expressing one's deepest hopes, gratitudes, fears, and goals, or one's most valuable experiences, thoughts, or questions. A rezo can be practised in many different settings and in many different forms; directed to different entities (e.g. Grandfather Tobacco, Grandfather Fire, Sacred Water, the Grandparent Stones, Grandmother Moon), and/or supported by different elements (water, tobacco, herbs, etc.). The most important companion for any kind of prayer is *Abuelo Tabaco* (Grandfather Tobacco), the entity that is manifested in tobacco. Emphasis is often put on Abuelo Tabaco being a strict entity, suitable to make pacts with because he makes you keep your word. The role tobacco can play within prayer can take many different forms. From individual to collective, organized to spontaneous, Tiempo to No-Tiempo activities: the use of tobacco is unlimited in the Camino Rojo.[4]

Tobacco Prayer is one of the most important rituals for the Camino Rojo. As mentioned before (section 1.2.1 "Historical Background"), Camino Rojo is a pan-Indian movement, which means that many of the ideas and rituals the Camino Rojo carries out and identifies with, are inspired by Amerindian thoughts and practices from all over the American continent. The use of tobacco in ceremonies and rituals can be found in all kinds of indigenous groups in the Americas, but particularly in North American indigenous traditions from which the Camino has its main roots (Dávila 2005).

That being said, the most fundamental reason for ascribing tobacco such a central role within the Camino Rojo, is the following: Recall, according to the Camino, we are all connected because we all–that is, all beings that exist–bear

[4]For example, Alejandro Spangenberg and Alejandro Corchs often use tobacco before they give a speech in public; e.g., like Spangenberg does in an on-line lecture on YouTube (see Spangenberg 2016), or when having a consult with a client. About his first meeting with Alejandro Spangenberg for a therapeutic consult, Alejandro Corchs–not yet familiar with the Camino–writes: "The only window of the consulting room was closed. The room had filled with smoke and that made me uneasy. He was calm. He looked at me only at certain moments, then he observed the cigarette" (Corchs, n.d.[a], p.118).

a piece of the Great Spirit within our hearts. Therefore, to get in touch with our most fundamental ideas and feelings, it is crucial to be connected to our hearts. Tobacco is seen as *the* medicine that helps people connect with the voice of their hearts as well as with the Great Spirit. Not only because the heart of the Great Spirit resides in our own hearts, it also resides in all fires: from a campfire to a candle, from a stove to a barbecue, and from the burning tip of a match to that of a cigarette–and thus in a Rezo de Tabaco.

Besides paving the way to the voice of the heart, tobacco has other characteristics: it is a medical plant that can be used to cure or clean. Furthermore, it holds the knowledge of all the ancestors and spirits of creation. The latter makes tobacco a perfect "vehicle" to make pacts with; once a prayer or wish that came from the heart is expressed, a pact is concluded. Therefore it is often emphasized to be careful when praying to Grandfather Tobacco, because it is a powerful entity one can not fool around with. Hence, tobacco is the perfect company for prayer.

Praying with tobacco works as follows: by inhaling the smoke, the mouth of a person becomes impregnated by the voice of the heart; when exhaled, this smoke will travel through the air directly to the Great Spirit. The idea behind inhaling and exhaling tobacco smoke is that it is a way of reproducing Truth. Which, in turn, corresponds with the idea that the heart is seen as being part of the Great Spirit.

2.2 Tobacco Prayer Ceremony

Many rezos are practised collectively. To make a strong connection between the brothers and sisters who participate in the Tobacco Prayer ceremony, the prayer is centred around one collective "cigarette" in which a collective prayer is put (see fig. 2.1).[5] The leader of the ceremony is the one who commences the first stage of the prayer ceremony: the ritual of making of the cigarette. He/she does this by holding a tuft of tobacco in his/her hand while praying. In the other hand, he/she holds a *chala*: a rolling paper made of dried maize-leaf.[6] After he/she finishes praying, he/she puts the tobacco on top of the chala and passes the chala on to the next participant. This person also prays, fills the chala, and passes it to the next person in the circle, etcetera. In this first round of prayers, thanks and hopes are usually expressed regarding the coming ceremony. When the circle is made and the cigarette comes back to the ceremonial leader, he/she rolls the chala into a cigarette. After ripping of a string from the chala, the cigarette is tied up.

[5]By the description (and the photo) below, it should become clear that "cigarette" is not the right word for a rolled tobacco. Though through lack of alternative, I will use this term.

[6]The person who is leading the ceremony is usually the person who provides the tobacco and the chalas. Tobacco is always organic and generally purchased at one of the two organic tobacco-shops in Montevideo.

Figure 2.1: A rezo cigarette is made of tobacco wrapped in dried corn-leaf and tied with a string that is ripped off this leaf. The tobacco that is used is organic and can be bought in a special tobacco-shop in Montevideo. Special (sacred) objects can be stalled out or used in order to help people be tuned in. Furthermore, Abuelo Fuego is present in the centre of the ceremony (whether in the form of a big fire, or of a small candle). [Photo by author]

- 22/02/16, Montevideo, Tobacco Ceremony at Elsa's... With her right hand she holds a lighter to one end of the thick, clumsily tied-up tobacco-roll that she holds to her mouth with her left hand. As she turns on the lighter, she sucks at the other end of the cigarette. A couple of times Elsa silently inhales from the cigarette. Her cheeks expand as they are filled with smoke. Without removing the thing from her mouth, she blows out the smoke from the right-corner of her mouth. Her eyes are fixated on the candles that she has placed in the centre of the circle. The candles are placed there as Abuelo Fuego's presence. After a few puffs, Elsa starts to transport the smoke: Making a kind of bowl of her right hand, at the exhalation she moves the smoke that comes from her mouth over her head as if she is spreading a 5cm thick layer of air on top of her skull. At the next exhalation, she brings the smoke towards her heart, and thirdly, she brings the smoke towards her abdomen. With this gesture of *bendición* (blessing), she means to let the tobacco clean and clear her body. Then she hands the cigarette to the woman to her left.

Once the cigarette is lighted and before starting to pray, people clean themselves with the smoke of the tobacco. They suck smoke into their mouths, blow it out, and with their hands they carry this smoke first over their head, then towards their chest and eventually to their abdomen. This way, they receive

the *bendiciones* (blessings) of the Grandfather.[7] After they receive the blessings, people often close their eyes in an attempt to listen to what the heart has to tell. Sometimes, a few minutes pass until words are spoken.

- 15/02/2015 Solimar, Tobacco Ceremony at Octavio's... Noises of dogs barking in the neighbourhood, the crackling fire, cars passing by; I can't always hear what people are saying when they are speaking in a low voice. Is this what speaking from the heart sounds like? (I am thinking: considering the idea that prayer is an "instant act" right from the heart, it makes sense that articulation and volume are not something people are paying attention to.) My neighbour also seems to have difficulties in hearing what is said. She repeatedly asks people to speak up. After a few times, Octavio replies to her that it is okay that she cannot hear the words. He says that she should focus on hearing with her heart instead of with her mind.

There are a few other explicit rules for doing a Tobacco prayer. First of all, when praying with Tobacco, one should always have a clear purpose, question, or reason in mind: Tobacco is a powerful entity so one has to be careful with what one wishes for.

- 22/02/16, Montevideo, Tobacco Ceremony at Elsa's... It is my turn to pray. The personal purpose with which I came to this ceremony, is to feel more connected with my own body. I have been feeling very weak physically the weeks before and I am a bit sad not to feel physically in balance. I breath the smoke in and out of my mouth a couple of times. Then I do the gesture of blessing towards my head, heart and belly. For a moment, I sit still with my eyes closed. Then, as I open my eyes again, I explain that I want to feel and understand my body better. I explain how I feel like things happen in my body which I do not understand, and I feel like I should take better care of my body, but I don't know how. Therefore, I conclude, I pray for a better understanding of my body. I take another puff from the tobacco, but I feel that in some way, the smoke came in wrongly and this causes a terrible itch in my lungs. I cough excessively. Everybody suddenly starts to chuckle, but I do not understand why. Still coughing, I look from one person to the other, interrogatively but unable to say something. They all start to laugh even louder. "What is so funny?" I ask as soon as my throat allows me to speak. Elsa smiles. "You see, I told you: they take your wish very seriously. As I said, watch out what you ask for because it can come to you in a powerful way." Apparently, Grandfather Tobacco has approved my demand and I have listened to my heart.

[7] A bendición can be done with other elements as well, such as medicine, food, water or even an instrument. It is a way of thanking and asking permission to a substance before it is consumed or used.

Furthermore, in the case of doing a collective prayer, the person who is holding the cigarette is also the person who *tiene la palabra* (has the word): meaning that those who are not holding the tobacco are supposed to remain silent and listen to the person who is praying. After all, when praying, a person is opening his/her heart, making him/her very vulnerable.

> ☽ 22/02/16, Montevideo, Tobacco Ceremony at Elsa's... Juanita, the girl to my left, prays for her mother, who has a malignant type of cancer. She wishes her mother to find more spiritual openness in her life because, being a pious Christian, harsh on herself and her surroundings, her mother does not really know how to show her grief or her pain. Juanita regrets that her mother is not open for a more spiritual way of dealing with her emotions and her pain. She prays that her mother would change a bit.
>
> When Juanita finishes, Elsa picks up on Juanita's prayer. She asserts to all of us that we should never pray for somebody else to change: "Everybody has his/her own path and this path is perfect for this person at this moment." She continues to explain Juanita that she should have used a different form of prayer. Instead of a negative focus on things that should stop or change, she should adopt a form of prayer that is more positive and that focuses on *additional* wishes. Furthermore, Elsa points out, Juanita was not talking from her heart but from her ego; hers was a prayer that came from her role as a daughter rather than from her spiritual essence.[8]

According to the Camino Rojo, the left side of the body is in direct relation with the Great Spirit (because the heart is in the left side of the body). Therefore, by holding the tobacco in the left hand, the heart can be accessed more easily and strongly. Furthermore, in order to improve the connection

[8] At another occasion time, at a women's prayer during the Búsqueda de Visión, something similar happened: We were talking about the *Tipi de la Luna* (Tipi of the Moon); a tipi for female *buscadoras* (searchers: participants of the Vision Quest retreat, see Ch. 4) in which women can find shelter when they are having their *luna* (moon: that is, their period). Irene, one of the Medicine Women, had just left the women's prayer. For some time already she had felt the urge to check upon a particular buscadora who was seen going in to the Tipi de la Luna, and she had decided to act accordingly to this need and visit the buscadora (such visits occur rarely because the searchers are supposed to be left alone during their entire retreat). Another participant at the women's prayer had interpreted this event as a sign for herself to also go check upon a buscadora: namely, her daughter. Referring to the departure of Irene, she said that this was a sign from the Great Spirit; her instincts telling her that her daughter needed help, had been confirmed by Him. As she got up from her seat in order hurry into the woods to see her daughter, various women protested and called the woman back. They disagreed with her interpreting Irene's departure as a sign: this desire to check upon her daughter did not come from her heart, but from her ego. They argued that the woman had confused the motherly worries of her ego with a sincere feeling that came from her heart. She had been acting out of her role as a mother, her ego, rather than from her heart.

with the heart, the burning end of the cigarette should always point towards one's heart when one is praying. After a Tobacco Prayer, the leftover stub of the cigarette is thrown into the fire as an offer to Grandfather Fire. Although tobacco is usually smoked, one can also pray with tobacco by holding a lighted cigarette or even a pick of tobacco in one's hand (e.g., this can be done in case someone prefers not to smoke). In case a lighted cigarette is held, the prayers are carried away with the wind. In the latter case, the pluck of tobacco can be offered directly into Father Fire.

2.3 Reflection - Sincerity, Mediated Immediacy and Authority

In the above chapter I have explained and illustrated what tobacco ceremonies are like and how tobacco can function as a medium to effectuate a connection with the heart. However, sincere praying from the heart is difficult, because the ego can easily interfere. The distinction between the ego and the heart is an important one, and in Tobacco prayer (and elsewhere), any action is evaluated in light of this distinction.

Sincerity and Immediacy (and Material)

How does prayer from the heart differ from prayer from the ego? And how can one make sure that one is praying from the heart? What is made clear through this chapter is that there is a certain notion of contrast between sincere prayer and insincere prayer. A sincere prayer comes from the heart and thus from a direct contact with the Great Spirit: it is a form of letting the Great Spirit speak from within. This implies that prayer should be independent of both thought and the ego (two terms that are often mentioned in one breath), and thus it should not be linked to the "materialist world" in which our ego acts (e.g. as a mother, a daughter, or even a listener trying to comprehend a prayer mentally rather than through the heart). As we saw in the introduction (recall, 1.2.1), Alejandro Spangenberg presents the difference between the domains of the ego–i.e., "to have" (a child, a mother)–and the spiritual self–i.e., "to be" (connected to the heart).[9]

This emphasis on sincerity is very similar to anthropologist Webb Keane's description of sincerity as it is understood among Protestants and the Sumbanese people of Indonesia (Keane 2007, 2002). In his research, Webb Keane

[9]In theory, even the person who is praying might intellectually not be able to follow or explain his/her own prayer. For prayer from the heart is inexplicable, it is not based upon a logical system that other people can understand with their ego. Not only in prayer but when speaking in general, the connection with the heart is aimed for. In a conversation I had with Gustavo about something he had said to his brother (see 4.2), Gustavo told me that he did not remember anything he had said: "That what I said about his life, just came to me. Since I gave myself permission to live life from the heart,.. when I talk.. I say what I feel."

presents a thorough analysis on the roles of (in)sincere and (im)mediate speech in prayer among these people (2002).[10] Like for Sumbanese Protestants in the study of Webb Keane, for the Camino Rojo too, "prayers should come from the heart, spontaneous and truly felt; that is, they should be sincere" (Keane 2002, p.77). A prayer is sincere when no material benefit is involved.

Keane points out that sincerity as it is understood by the Sumbanese Protestants, is therefore "..a matter not just of imputed alignment between expression and interior state but also a product of one's desire to make one's expressions aligned in this way" (p.75). In comparing the meaning of sincerity for the Sumbanese Protestants with the case of the Camino Rojo, it should be emphasized, however, that for the Camino Rojo this interior state is not expressed through words that reflect *thoughts*–which is the case for the Sumbanese Protestants (p.74)–but through words that are *experienced*. Hence, at the Camino Rojo, in sincere prayer words are not reflective but experienced spontaneously.

The above emphasis on the directness of experience is similar to what phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty described as *preobjective* experience. With the term preobjective, Merleau-Ponty wants to emphasize that when we perceive things (i.e., when we experience) at first, things appear to our senses *without being recognized and conceptualized*. Citing Merleau-Ponty, in his seminal article "Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology" anthropologist Thomas Csordas (1990), explains that our perception does not start in objects, but rather it "ends in objects" (Merleau-Ponty (1962) in Csordas 1990, p.9).[11] If we look at the Camino Rojo, we could say that the interference of the mind during prayer makes that a prayer is based reason and thought, and is, thus, no longer preobjective: i.e., interference with the mind makes a prayer insincere or unpure. Only preobjective prayer–prayer from the heart that is directly experienced and spoken–is the right form of prayer.[12]

The examples presented in this chapter insinuate that prayer from the heart is based on an *immediate* relation between the Great Spirit and the heart, it is a direct feeling, an intuition (like in the case of Irene, footnote 8).[13] Here,

[10]For an extended version of this research, see Keane (2007).

[11]As an example, Csordas paraphrases Merleay-Ponty's explanation of how a triangle is experienced preobjectively: as "three lines related by certain geometric properties" (Csordas 1990, p.8-9).

[12]NB: The critical reader could ask whether calling prayer "from the heart" or "from the ego" is itself a way of objectifying. However, for the people of Camino Rojo the directness of the prayer is immanent in the prayer rather than objectified by people.

[13]Note, however, that–in contrast to, e.g., glossolalia (speaking in tongues)–at the Camino Rojo "directly experienced" speech is still expressed in *day-to-day* language. This language is subject to linguistic rules that are socially agreed upon (in order to be able to communicate). This inevitably leads to the question whether words or language can in fact be preobjective. Nevertheless, I believe that the fact that a notion of preobjectivity is *experienced* and acted upon by Camino Rojo followers is sufficient for the descriptive purpose of this thesis. For thorough discussions about the preobjective experience of glossolalia, see (Csordas 1990).

immediacy implies thus neither interference nor mediation by reflection and thought. Note, however, that in the case of the Camino Rojo, the term *immediate* is a context-dependent term (depending on the meaning of sincerity) and does not imply that mediation itself is denied. For although the mediation of thought or reasoning might be undesired, there is another form of mediation that is not only accepted, it is even encouraged: the mediation of Grandfather Tobacco. This distinguishes Camino Rojo's form of prayer from the ideal protestant prayer as described by Keane, where immediacy is seen as an *immaterial* connection between the heart and God.

In this chapter, we saw that for Tobacco Prayers, the body and certain objects (e.g., tobacco, rapé) play a crucial mediating role in praying from the heart. That is, besides smoking tobacco in general, there are many other ritual strategies to clear the way for the heart which involve the body or an object as a medium with which one can "numb" the ego (e.g., using the left hand in tobacco prayer, rapé, or–as will be shown in the next chapter–singing). In other words, immediacy in the context of the Camino seems to go hand in hand with mediation: Tobacco Prayer espouses *both* the immediate *and* mediate.[14]

Authority

How can one differentiate between prayer from the heart and from the ego? Who decides that you are on the right track? It can be very difficult to differentiate between a *true* prayer from the heart and one that appears to be coming from the heart but instead comes from the ego. Especially if one is still inexperienced. For people who are not capable of making this distinction themselves, evaluation of the sincerity of a prayer can depend on two authorities: people (e.g., the person organizing the ritual), or an authoritative entity (in this case, Abuelo Tabaco).[15] In the latter case, the final judgement is indicated through a sign as a response to a prayer (e.g., think of the incident

[14]This contributes to current debates in the field of in religious studies about *material religion*, a theme that was inspired by scholars like Webb Keane and further developed by, among others, Birgit Meyer and Dick Houtman (2012). These scholars advocate the emphasis on material aspects in the study of religion, and criticize the dominant scholarly emphasis on religion as something *immaterial*. This emphasis, so they say, that shaped by the *protestant bias* associating religion with concepts like "belief," "immediacy," "transcendence". (A bias that originated in the aftermath of colonialism and protestantism and the radical differentiation between "the West and the Rest," and later between "secularism VS religion".) Religion, proponents of the emphasis on material religion argue, is never completely immaterial. This chapter has proven that materiality and mediation are crucial aspects in Camino Rojo spirituality. In fact, it has become clear how it may even be important to differentiate between various *kinds* of mediation (e.g., unwanted mediation through thoughts and appreciated mediation through tobacco). More generally, this chapter challenges us to open up for the idea that, what in abstraction seem to be mutually exclusive concepts (in this case mediate and immediate), may in practice be context-dependent and can become mutually *inclusive*.

[15]In other ceremonies this could for example be Abuela Ayahuasca, Abuelo Fuego or even the Great Spirit himself.

of the coughing).[16] When an authoritative person judges the sincerity of a prayer, this is expressed verbally (e.g., Octavio who urges to listen with the heart, Elsa's feedback on Juanita's prayer, and the woman who wanted to check upon her daughter). The authority of a person is determined by his/her social position within and/or experience with the Camino. This shows us that a certain distinction is made between the less and the more experienced in the Camino Rojo; a distinction between those who *instruct* and *correct* and those who are still learning.[17]

What we can conclude from these findings, is that although it may be the individual who expresses the prayer, there are external factors that can "decide" whether a prayer is insincere. This contrasts with what Keane detects in the Protestant context, for the Camino Rojo sincerity does not "seek to locate the authority for words in the speaker as a distinct and self-possessed self as the responsible party" (Keane 2002, p.75). Instead, at the Camino Rojo, responsibility for sincere prayer is shared intersubjectively. What is more, for the Camino, people are always in a learning process and can therefore not be criticized or held accountable for their mistakes. This implies that praying correctly–like all other ritual practices of the Camino–is a matter of trial-and-error. What keeps people going is their trust in the Great Spirit to guide them.

All in all, throughout this chapter it became clear that during Tobacco Prayers, Camino Rojo participants continuously find themselves in-between two worlds or, better said, in two worlds at once; while they may find themselves in immediate connection with the Great Spirit and their hearts, they also remain connected to the physical world: People are influenced by their relationships with others, they are drawing from linguistic systems, and they are confronted with bodily sensations. This interrelatedness with the physical world can support them in their attempt to be connected, but it can also be distracting, for it encompasses the default modern world that is dominated by ego's. Sometimes, the demands of their ego can pull people away from being connected and therefore, people are always in a dynamic process of going in and out of being connected with the spiritual realm.

[16] "Sign," here, is meant to oppose "symbol". In the next chapters and in the eventual conclusion I will illustrate how this differentiation has important implications for understanding Camino Rojo's perception of the world and "beings".

[17] As will gradually become clear throughout this thesis, the act of correction and instruction has everything to do with the fact that being tuned in is a very challenging practice of trial-and-error. This is exactly what makes the Camino a *path*.

Chapter 3

Temazcal. Rebirth from Mother Earth

☼ 14/02/2016, Lagomar, Temazcal Ceremony at Gabriel's... It is my first Temazcal Ceremony at the Camino Rojo. As I arrive at the site, some men are carrying chunks of wood from somewhere in the bush. They place the wood in the centre of a half circle made of rocks (approx. 30cm high). We greet with a hug. As if we already know each other. As I propose to help, I am told that there is not much to do, so I decide to sit down in the grass and watch how they work: silently and in full concentration. After a while, one of the men stands still next to the fire. He glances around as if he is inspecting the site. As our eyes meet he waves me over.

His name is Gabriel. First we talk about ourselves and what I am doing in Uruguay, but soon his expression becomes more serious. Gabriel explains to me that all everything in the cosmos, including all the people, have the same origin. This makes all people equal, age-old bearers of the cosmological knowledge. However, at the same time, in *this* particular life we are all different. We all have our particular paths to walk and things to learn. This has important consequences for how one should see the Temazcal ceremony, Gabriel emphasizes. It means that there is no oral law about what one should or should not do or find in a Temazcal; only by *living* the ceremony and by listening to our hearts can we gain the specific wisdom that each of us needs to learn. Therefore, Gabriel concludes, we should not see him, the *Temazcalero* (the person who leads a Temazcal-ceremony), as a shaman, but as a *guide*: he cannot tell us what to do or how to understand our experiences, he can only guide us along the way and help us listen to our hearts.[1]

[1]For Gabriel, the term "shaman" insinuates a hierarchical relationship between parti-

Figure 3.1: L.: A Temazcal in the making. In this photo we see the Temazcal in the preparation phase: a big fire embraced by a half-moon circle of stones, is burning in front of the frame of the *Inipi* (name of the iglo). Lava stones are placed in the centre of the fire to heat-up. R: A Temazcal finished. Grandfather Fire burning in front of it, heating up the stones that will be used during the ceremony. Between the fire and the Temazcal, different ritual-objects are stalled. [Photo's by Josue, Temazcalero]

What do we do when we feel lost? If we worry about something? If we carry a burden that we want to get rid of? According to the Camino Rojo we should be purified from the blockades and burdens that we pick up along the and that lay heavily on our shoulders. We should go back to where it all began and get in touch with the origin of life. In other words, we have to get back to the *Fuerza Creadora* (Creation Power) of our Madre Tierra to receive "the information about how we are made" and to become "reborn" (Fuego Sagrado de Itzachilatlan del Mayab, n.d.). All this purification and rebirth can be achieved through a Temazcal ceremony. In this chapter I want to elaborate on the course of the Temazcal-ritual by describing the ideas and practices that belong to the Temazcal ceremony and that contribute to the purifying function of this ceremony.

3.1 What is a Temazcal Ceremony?

A *Temazcal* is an ancient ceremony that stems from the Nahua (Aztecs) in Mesoamerica (currently Mexico). The word Temazcal derives from the Nahuatl

cipant and specialist; something which he refutes. NB: Although there are certain fixed rules and regulations at the Camino Rojo, the way ceremonial leaders interpret their own roles can still differ a lot per case. It is important to note this subjective aspect of those different "priestly" roles, for they strongly influence the course and sphere of a ritual.

term "temāzcalli," where "tema" means *bath* and "calli" *house*.[2] The Temazcal is a ceremony of rebirth. This rebirth takes place in the uterus of Mother Earth: A small wooden framework made of wooden sticks in the form of an iglo and covered with blankets in all sorts and sizes in order to create a pitch-darkness inside (see fig. 3.1).[3] Various times I experienced at the commencement of the ceremony, that the Temazcalero asserted the importance to not see the Temazcal as something that *represents* the uterus of mother earth, but rather to know and feel that it *is* Mother Earth in whose uterus this ceremony takes place.

On the eastern side, some ten steps away from the entrance of the iglo, burns the sacred *Abuelo Fuego* (Grandfather Fire): the heart of the Great Spirit (see 2.1, p.28). In this fire, lava-stones called *Abuelos Piedras* (Grandparent Stones) are heated by the *Hombre/Mujer del Fuego* (Fire Man / Woman): the person who is responsible for the fire during a ceremony (see the man kneeling down in fig. 3.1).[4] Lava-stones are age-old stones that can resist the extreme temperatures of the fire. Because of their indestructible character, these Abuelos Piedras are understood to contain all the memory of the Universe. They are the "hard-drive of the planet" (Corchs, n.d.[a], p.124).

At the beginning of a Temazcal ceremony, when everybody is inside, the heated stones are placed in the centre of a sacred space and water is poured over them.[5] This water evaporates directly and becomes impregnated by the knowledge of the stones (see fig. 3.2):

> [We] deposit water on the stones to receive the blessing of this water[. I]t is there that we realize how the Power moves because this water which falls on the stones, is immediately returned to us in a much lighter form[; the] water walks through the air in the form of vapour. There[, that is, in the vapour,] is where the medicine, knowledge, wisdom [are captured and which] one can breathe in. We call this the memory of the first breath; the memory of the moment when we were conceived. (Fuego Sagrado de Itzachilatlan del Mayab, n.d.)

Besides being bearers of all knowledge of creation that is to be transmitted to the participants via evaporated water, their indestructibility makes the lava-stones suitable to take over the "troublesome loads" or "rucksacks" of the par-

[2]For more information about how the Temazcal has transformed into what it is today in Mexico and in (movements similar to) the Camino Rojo, see De la Torre and Zúñiga (2016).

[3]The ceremonial space of a Temazcal is called "tinipi" in Nahuatl, but in the Camino Rojo people often refer to it as *el Temazcal*, *el útero* (the uterus), or *la vientre (de la Madre)* (the belly (of the Mother)).

[4]A person becomes a Fire (Wo)Man because, for example, he/she feels a close connection with Abuelo Fuego or he/she feels a calling. To become Fire (Wo)Man does not require a formal initiation, it only requires practice with other Fire (Wo)Men and a dedication to Grandfather Fire.

[5]Besides water, other medicines–like medicinal plants and herbs–are burned upon the stones.

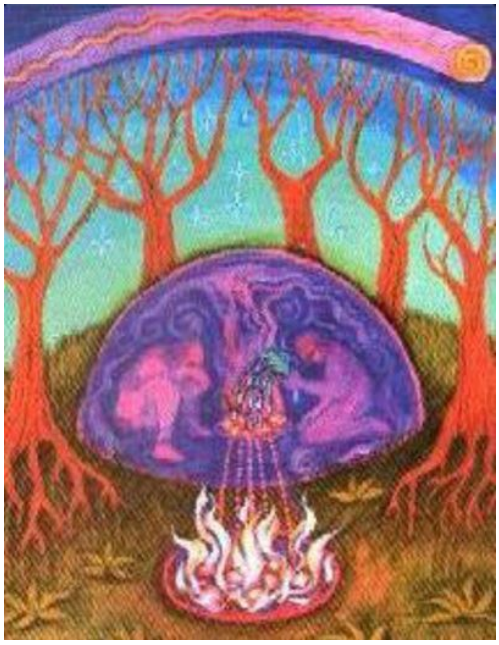

Figure 3.2: A drawing of the procedure of a Temazcal including operative entities (a.o. the vaporized water coming from the stones that are, in turn, connected to the fire). [Photo from Camino Rojo website]

ticipants: they function as a kind of lightning rods that attract participants' sorrows and hereby they contribute to people's purification process.

3.2 The First Phase: Preparing the Ceremony and the Self

Usually when organizing a Temazcal ceremony, the Temazcalero decides upon a shared *propósito* (goal/purpose/intention) the ceremony will be concentrated on. Besides this general ceremonial purpose, it is common for people to also think of a personal healing-purpose for in the ceremony.

☼ 14/02/2016, Lagomar, Temazcal Ceremony at Gabriel's... I am sitting next to a woman and man of my own age. They tell me it is their first time too. As we are talking about life in Montevideo, I watch how people divide their time between catching up, laughing, and drinking *mate*[6] with their companions on the one hand, and seriously preparing themselves for the ceremony on the other hand (they do a rezo de tabaco and get dressed according to the prescriptions, that is, women in a dress or a skirt, men in shorts).

[6]Mate is a typical Uruguayan, and very popular, herb tea. It is drunk from a dried calabash. Among company it is usually shared with every person in the group.

As preparations continue, I notice some sort of improvised shrine or altar situated between the entrance of the Temazcal and the fire. Many objects are spread out on a cloth: I see the antlers of a deer, a bucket of water, a plume made of hawk-like feathers, cotton bags filled with different kinds of herbs (I recognize salvia, jasmine, and sandalwood), and musical instruments like rattles, flutes and drums.

After some time, the Hombre del Fuego and another assistant pick up the drums that were put next to the fire to heat up. As they start drumming a slow rhythm, they look into the fire. Their eyes remain fixated upon the fire and they start to mumble sounds. It looks as if they are in some sort of conversation with the fire. The sounds I hear make me think of what one would hear in films about Native Americans. "HEYAheyaheyaheya HEYAheyaheyaheya HEYAheyahe....." While some people continue with their conversations and share their mate, others dissociate themselves from the conversation they were in to look for a spot somewhere in the grass where they can quietly prepare for a personal meditative rezo de tabaco.

As a last preparation before we all enter the ceremonial space, the Temazcalero, his assistant and the Hombre del Fuego, go into the Temazcal to do an opening ritual. They sing a song or do a prayer, and then a line of water is drawn from the centre of the Temazcal all the way to the fire. Hereby, the connection is made between Abuelo Fuego–the Heart of the Great Spirit–and the centre of the Temazcal where the Grandparent Stones will later be placed. This centre could be seen as the belly-button of Mother Earth. From now on, nobody is allowed to cross this line, for that would interrupt the connection. When the organizers are ready with their ritual, it is time for the participants to enter the uterus of Mother Earth.

3.3 Phase Two: In the Uterus of Mother Earth

☽ 21/03/26, Rocha, Women Temazcal at Búsqueda de Visión... "There are still so many people outside! I am sure that we will never all fit in this small hut," I thought to myself as I entered the Temazcal. But–as if she had read my thoughts–Sandra disagreed. "First, we let everybody enter and we all sit in an impossible pose," she said, "but soon we will find our ways, fill-up holes, and create new free space. Eventually we will see that there is space for everybody." Sandra explained that there should never be a shortage of space, because if people feel that they should participate in a ceremony they feel this for a reason, they are meant to have a space in the uterus.

Depending on the style of the Temazcalero, people can either be called to enter the Temazcal in a certain sequence, or just randomly. The Fire Man/Woman

usually stands next to the entrance, holding a shovel filled with glowing coal from the fire right in front of the entrance about 50cm above the ground. Before entering, people are supposed to bend towards the shovel and wave the smoke towards their head and again towards their belly. Then the shovel is lowered so people can pass their feet through the smoke that is released from the coals. With this extra protection of Father Fire, one is ready to enter the Temazcal. People thank the assistant, who usually replies with a friendly nod saying "Aho" to conclude that they are ready. After they enter, people are supposed to pass through the Temazcal clockwise in the form of a spiral, taking the furthest seat that is free. The more experienced people delegate the participants where (not) to sit, because they know which places are reserved for particular people (musicians, herbalists, the Temazcalero, or his assistant) and should be left empty.

☼ 21/02/2015, El Pinar, Temazcal Ceremony at Josue's... We are approximately 18 people (which is relatively little in my experience) on a surface of 8/9m2. I am sitting in the "second row" at the west end: opposite of the entrance. Right in front of me on the first row sits a woman of my own age, and to my front-right sits a big man with the pony-tail and the deep voice.[7] To my left sits a man I don't know, but who is clearly experienced for he knows many people here and has helped the Temazcalero to prepare the ceremony. We form two circles: one inner-circle and one outer-circle. I see the Temazcalero at the left of the entrance and his helper on the other side.

Once we are all inside, the Temazcalero asks the Hombre del Fuego to bring in six *Abuelitos* (grandparents; the stones). The Hombre del Fuego comes with a rake and one by one he places four stones in the opening of the entrance. The stones have turned white-grey in the fire. The Temazcalero uses two deer antlers as grippers to pick up the stones and puts them in the pit at the centre of the Temazcal. As the stones are transferred inwards into the darkness of the hut, their whiteness makes place for a glowing scarlet. The assistant throws some herbs on the stones while the Fire Man closes the entrance of the hut saying "Ahó Metakiase". We all reply in unison "Metáááákiáse!!!"[8]

[7] Later on, this man, Gustavo, and I would become very close (see 4.2).

[8] *Mitakuye(/Metakuye) Uyasin*; "All my relations" or "We are all related/one" - This is an important ritual-term among the Lakota Indians–upon whom the Camino Rojo is primarily inspired. The term illustrates how the Lakota see the world as "a single interrelated network of social relations that include other-than-human persons" (Delgado Shorter (2009) in Garner 2016, p.17). With these words, the intention to heal in community is being expressed. For more information, see Sandra L. Garner's (2016) on how the complexity of the term Mitakuye Oyasin was discussed during Medicine Men and Clergy Meetings (MMCM's) in the 70's: "they argued that to achieve a true understanding of *mitakuye uyasin* required experience, in particular experience gained through ritual practice" (p.17). The Camino Rojo

Except from the glowing of the stones, it is now completely dark in the hut. It smells like burnt herbs. Suddenly a loud "TSSSSsshh..." followed by a hot cloud of steam, fills the room. The glowing of the stones stops. Almost instantly I feel like I am melting. I wonder whether the liquid on my arms comes from the vaporized water or from my own pores. As more water is thrown on the stones, the heat in the hut increases. The warmth becomes almost unbearable and people around me start to sigh and wheeze. Occasionally, the Temazcalero uses a bush to splash fresh water around. Cries of delight interrupt the exclamations of unbearableness as the cold drips of water touch people's skins.

As I said previously, the stones in the centre, the belly button of the uterus, bear fundamental knowledge that will travel to the participants. They also have the capacity to take over the heavy burdens these participants want to surrender to them. Eventually, after receiving those burdens, the stones will send these sorrows along the waterline, the navel cord, that was drawn from the centre of the Temazcal to Grandfather Fire; this is where these sorrows will dissolve. Different kinds of herbs–each with its own particular potential–are crumbled upon the stones. This is understood to improve the activation of certain memories or certain mental, physical or emotional states of being that are supposed to help people go through their rebirth.[9]

☼ 12/03/2016, Lagomar, Temazcal Ceremony (no.2) at Gabriel's... The woman who has been appointed by the Temazcalero to be in charge of the herbs, tells us that if we are having a hard time, we should send everything we want to get rid of directly to the stones. By breathing out, our sorrows and struggles are released into the air. Also, we should try not to breath into the necks of the people in front of us, for then our sorrows will be transferred to them. (Interestingly, I remember that this remark felt as a confirmation of my feelings of annoyance with people breathing in my neck. At the same time, it made me even more aware and irritated when it happened.)

The woman instructs us to take a tuft of dried salvia in our hands and to contemplate what we need in our lives. While everybody is concentrated on their personal prayer, out of nowhere the silence is interrupted by a loud voice from the back of the hut: "I thought I'd never say this, but I feel inclined to wish to be in the shopping-mall nearby right now. At least they have air-conditioning and cold water there!" It is Martín.[10]

pronounces the term as "(Ahó) Metakiase" or just "Aho," with which they mean to express their affirmation to their own or someone else's prayer or to a certain ritual performance.

[9]Herbs that are often used are: jasmin, for facilitating connection with the emotions; salvia, for strengthening the true wishes from the heart; and pulverized sandalwood and copal wood.

[10]Much more about Martín will follow in Chapter 6.

His laugh fades away into nothing. It is clear that this kind of behaviour is not very much appreciated in this setting, for Lydia, the woman of the herbs, snaps at Martín. She says that he is interrupting the unity between the people inside the Temazcal. A unity that, at hard times like these, is so important to maintain.Martín, nott offended, says she has a good point. "I apologize," he giggles.

Music plays a prominent role in Temazcal -ceremonies. Accompanied by the sounds of *tambores* (drums) and a *sonaja* (rattle), traditional indigenous medicine-songs–called *icaros*–as well as other songs, are sung.[11] Inside the hut, everybody is supposed to sing or hum along. Even for newcomers this is usually not very difficult, since the songs are repetitive and often consist of only a few strophes. The person who leads the song, uses the sonaja to indicate the beginning and end of the song. Others accompany this person by drumming on the. Anyone who "feels a song coming up" is allowed to ask for the sonaja and initiate a song.

☼ 21/02/2017, El Pinar, Temazcal, at Josue... While most people are singing or humming along, the guy to my left seems to be more into making beastly noises. The sound reminds me of a cross between a frog's and an owl's sound. As the song finishes, the Temazcalero demands our attention. "If somebody is singing," he says, "this person is opening his heart. This makes him vulnerable, for he is in his purest state of being." He explains that people are always encouraged to sing along and support their brothers, but never should the singing of a person who leads the song drown in the loud singing of the others. This is inappropriate and can be hurtful for the person who is singing the song.

Besides singing, prayer also plays an important role in Temazcal Ceremonies. The prayers are sometimes formed around a certain theme–for example, the shared propósito–of the ceremony, or they might reflect the particular stage or *puerta* of the Temazcal at that moment (I will get to this hereafter). Sometimes people are asked to just share their feelings or thoughts with each other. Ideally, a wish or prayer is personal and thus expressed in the first person singular (e.g., "I wish I could see more clearly"). Though, often people have the tendency to express a wish for all the people in the room (e.g., "I wish we could all see more clearly"). When this happens, people are sometimes corrected by the Temazcalero/-a:

[11] *Icaros* are traditional indigenous medicine-songs/chants (Apud 2015, p.9). They usually consist of "HEYAheyaheya"-like sounds as I described above. Of songs that are sung in Spanish, a chorus line could for example be: *"Todos somos uno, uno somos todo"* ("We all are one, and one we are all"); *"Tamborcito, tamborcito, ayúdame a cantar"* ("Little drum, little drum, help me to sing"); *"Abuelitos Piedras, las gracias les doy, las gracias les doy"* ("Grandparent Stones, I give you my thanks, I give you my thanks").

◗ 06/03/2017, Sauce, Temazcal Ceremony at Sandra's... Suddenly Sandra interrupts someone's prayer: "On behalf and for whom are you praying? Yourself! Then speak for yourself." Sandra explains us that if someone recognizes him- or herself in the prayer of someone else, the prayer will automatically count for that person as well. But, she stresses, this can only work if the person who is praying speaks from his or her heart. Only then a wish goes "PFFEEUWW!! like an arrow," she points with her index finger straight upwards to the sky, simulating an arrow shot into the air, "directly to the Great Spirit."

A Temazcal ceremony always consists of four stages or rounds. These stages are also called *puertas* (doors), because at the end of every stage the door of the Temazcal is opened (to let in some fresh air).[12] Aurelio Díaz Tekpankalli explains that these four puertas are in correspondence with the sequence of *birth*: The first puerta refers to the head; to the memory of when we were born, or conceived.[13] The second puerta is the stage of the heart; here we find ourselves in relation to everything around us, initiating the realization that 'everything is one and one is everything'. Thirdly comes the puerta of the stomach; this represents the here and now, where people embody both who they are at the moment and their spiritual origin.The fourth and last, is the puerta of the feet, of power. Here people regain their power in order to be reborn.[14] This is about the realization of who we are and who we are not, what we are independent of and what we truly are in our essence. It is *(re)birth.*[15]

◗ 22/03/2016, My diary notes after Women's Temazcal, at Búsqueda de Visión (21-03)

It can feel denigrating and offending when a person indifferently decides to throw his or her body onto Mother Earth and to take the space you

[12]Each time the door is opened, a term or expression is agreed upon by the entire group inside as the keyword for opening the door. The Hombre del Fuego, who is outside and is not informed about the word, still easily recognizes the signal, for everybody inside the Temazcal everybody shouts the keyword in unison. Often the keyword is Ahó Metakiase, but at other times the Temazcalero chooses a word reflecting a certain theme central to the ceremony.

[13]NB. Aurelio does not differentiate between the concept of birth and of conception (Fuego Sagrado de Itzachilatlan del Mayab, n.d.).

[14]In-between these four stages, a break is often inserted. At these breaks, people can leave the hut for a couple of minutes to take some fresh and do some stretching.

[15]I have heard explanations of (the function of) each of these stages that were different than the one introduced here on the basis of Aurelio Díaz Tekpankalli's definitions. Other explanations refer to the four cardinal directions (resp. north, west, south, east); the four stages in which a person grows up (resp. baby, childhood, adulthood and 'the here and now', the latter sometimes referred to as death); or to time (resp. the past, the present, the future, death). Furthermore, at several occasions, I heard people differentiating between the stages corresponding with different key-values such as of spiritual growth (resp. power, knowledge, humility, compassion), or animals (resp. Owl, Buffalo, Eagle, Rat).

thought was yours. Or when someone decides to use your body as a pillar to lean against. It feels like one big competition for space. Not only space in a physical sense, but also the space to say something, or to sing. For opinions and for critique. Space to cry or even scream.

Your body feels simultaneously resistant and numb, and so does time. Space and time are such relative things in a Temazcal! You live a lifetime, it seems to go on endlessly. You feel like you *have* to get out because you have reached your personal limits and you will die there and then. And yet you don't. You live. And you do not scream or run away.

3.4 Being Reborn

☽ 06/03/2016, Sauce, Temazcal Ceremony at Sandra's... I am cold. A sense of sadness takes over my entire body and mind. I cry ceaselessly while my mind makes full speed. Why do I have to sit precisely *here*, in this drought? For some kind of transcendental reason? Is this cold symbolizing some kind of psychological or spiritual lesson I have to learn? Or is there no drought at all and am I just inventing this? The funny thing is that whether or not the cold is real, it is certainly there in the struggle it provokes. I reflect upon my life and the psychological struggles that are playing a role in it. How I want to be tough, independent, and how I have difficulties to accept my sense of loneliness. I place my hand on my cold lower back, disappointed that nobody else does this

It is the third round. Sandra indicates that this is a good moment to express what we have on our hearts. Many people express their feelings. I remain quiet until I cannot hold it any longer and burst it all out. In a continuous stream of words in a language that is relatively foreign to me, I tell how my back had been harassed by a cold drought and how this distracted me during the whole ceremony. Sobbing, I explain how lonely I feel and how hard I find it to express this.

Sandra requests all women to take care of me. Before I realize it, I am grabbed by my shoulders and pulled backwards. My head is laid on the breasts of a woman who folds her arms around my back and head. She soothes me by striking my hair. Another woman, Nadia, lifts my legs and lower body in her lap. As a baby in the cradle I am held by these two women. Nadia bends forward and lays her head on my stomach while she strokes my legs. She cries and utters sighs and groans. (Out of "fullness," I think.)

When I have calmed down and the last part of the ceremony is about to start, Nadia tells me to sit in front of her so she can have my back.

As I sit right in front of the centre in which the new stones have been placed and with Nadia's hands on my lower back, I feel warmth not only covering my body but also filling my heart. People nod or smile at me. Various people strike my shoulder. "Thank you," they say.

Being in a Temazcal means going through a roller-coaster: participants have no choice but to give in with what they must experience to become reborn. Being reborn means letting go of all the things one does not need, shedding the old skin, in order to make space for the *real*; that is, the connection with who we really are. This "letting go" is not only a spiritual, emotional and psychological process, it is also a physical happening. This is called *aliviar* (to alleviate); physical expressions like burping, crying, sweating, laughing, are understood as ways of letting go. The moment one leaves the Temazcal, is the moment of rebirth.

It is customary that people leave the Temazcal in the opposite way as they entered. Each person that goes out, hugs the others who are welcoming him/her and eventually joins the queue to welcome the others who are exiting the Temazcal. Participants thank one-another for the ceremony. After everybody is reborn, people lay down in the grass to cool down, drink water, or spray themselves with a garden-hose.

☼ 12/03/2015, Lagomar, Temazcal Ceremony at Gabriel's... Stumbling out of the Temazcal , I feel like entering a world I don't recognize. I see the familiar face of Gabriel, who is first in line to welcome me. As I give Gabriel a hug, I realize how strong he is and I have no choice other than letting go of all the attempts to keep myself together. My legs turn into pudding. It is as if my body and mind do not want to take take care of me any more. I cry and cry while I am in Gabriel's arms. A woman tells me to lie on the ground and to surrender myself to Mother Earth. "Let Mother Earth caress you."

(...)

And so I am lying here, on my stomach and cheek. I am sinking into the earth, the earth is melting around me. To be honest, I cannot even feel where my body ends and the earth begins. Here I am, not able to move a muscle while in the corner of my eye I see steam coming from my body. Eventually Martín quietly drapes a blanked over me and Lydia, the herb-woman, sits down next to me. I still cannot move, but I recognize the strong smell of Agua Florida that is held under my nose.[16] She puts some more on my hair and forehead. My body and head are whizzing.

[16]Agua Florida is a strong alcohol-smelling liquid and an important medicine for the people of the Camino Rojo. During any ceremony, when a person is feeling bad (dizzy, nauseous, weak) Agua Florida is meant to bring people "back to earth".

> Lydia tells me to fix my eyes on the fire while I am lying here. Strangely, I do not feel fear. I am calm.
>
> (...)
>
> Eventually, after everyone has dressed, eaten, talked, laughed, or swum, people slowly start to leave: back to their daily lives. Martín and I stay for a bit to help Gabriel re-organizing the site and packing his stuff. Calmly we start to undress what until just now has been the only reality there was: the uterus of Mother Earth that had been experienced as an intense, hot, demanding, transforming universe. Peeling off blanket after blanket, the ritual space is undone from its membrane until, eventually, there is nothing left but a dome-shaped skeleton of bamboo sticks.

3.5 Reflection - Regulation and the Metonymic Experience of Rebirth

We have learned that Temazcaleros often explicitly emphasize that a Temazcal should not be seen as a *representation* of the uterus of Mother Earth, rather, one should realize that it *is* the uterus. For participants, it is important to take this reality serious, for it implies that going into a Temazcal–letting go of all their rucksacks and opening their hearts for the process of rebirth–makes them vulnerable (*for real*). But how is this vulnerability protected? And how is this reality of the uterus materialized in the first place? In other words, *where does the magic happen*? I will address these questions below.

Having and Regulating Experiences

In terms of experience, the Temazcal seems to be a place in which people are overwhelmed by certain *direct bodily experiences*. With a *bodily experience* I refer to all physical, emotional or sensory manifestations that people experience in their bodies.[17] With *direct* I mean that these manifestations are expressed to be first perceived and only then objectified. In other words, again (like we saw in the previous chapter), they are experienced as *preobjective*. This direct or preobjective nature of the experiences (or so they are perceived) that people have, becomes clear from the ways in which people express them (verbally or otherwise).

Their experiences seem to be beyond people's control or understanding. Take for example the "alleviations": exclamations of exhaustion, the utterance of animal-sounds, spontaneous crying, or the sensation of coldness on my back. It becomes clear that these direct experiences, although they are beyond people's understanding, are nevertheless important. They *make sense* and are

[17] I wish to emphasize these various kinds of bodily manifestations not because I want to differentiate between them, but to show the wide variety of experiences (e.g. making sounds, feeling pain, feeling sad, hearing water evaporate).

accepted as true without people feeling the urge to find out what they mean. In other words, these experiences are important *in themselves*, rather than for an external or explicable reason.

This manifests and substantiates itself in the step that is taken in consequence of such an experience; e.g. like being caressed by mother earth or by fellow participants. The examples from this chapter demonstrate that people take their experiences i) as a *starting point*–phenomenologically, since they are preobjective and direct–and at the same time ii) as an *end-point*–since they are accepted and not questioned. Hence, experience is made a goal in itself.[18]

However, although a certain *laissez faire* is desired when it comes to people having their own experiences (e.g. see Gabriel's remark, footnote 1), there are certain limits as to what kinds of expressions or actions are allowed. People who feel they have the authority to do so, can call for attention or intervene in order to express certain rules, regulations and to give advice. These regulations vary from general remarks to reactions on particular events, as well as from advice and instructions to restrictions: for example, consider the instruction to breathe directly into the stones, to pray in first person singular, and not to overshadow the singing of others.

In an attempt to find the fulcrum between letting things happen and interfering, one could say that a pattern can be detected in the motivations of people who correct others: It seems that interruptions occur when a certain *vulnerability* is detected and endangered, either for an individual or for the group. But also when the *endurance* of one or more people is in danger and when the dynamics in the ceremony or the unity of the group is being challenged. These are all important values that need to be protected in order to let the collective process of purification succeed. Note, thus, that although the Camino Rojo says to refrain from hierarchical structures, we still see that authority plays an important role.

Rite de Passage: Being Reborn from what Becomes a Uterus

One crucial aspect I want to pay special attention to, is that the experiences people have in a Temazcal are part of an overall experience of rebirth. I say *is* instead of *represents*, to emphasize that this ritual has concrete experimental, physical effects of rebirth. Victor Turner's elaborations on *rite de passage* will help to illustrate, and subsequently understand, what I mean with this (Turner 1982).[19]

[18] Cf. "it is all about the experience" (Bender 2010). One could conjecture that this might be the reason why Temazcal-ceremonies have such importance for the Camino Rojo in the first place. This ritual is so demanding and exhausting that it is close to impossible *not* to have all kinds of interesting, preobjective experiences.

[19] Note, I want to emphasize the distinction between, on the one hand, metaphorical language that refers to symbolism, representation, imagination and so forth; and on the other hand, the language that concerns *being*–i.e., ontology–that implies a logical system of truth, reality, presence, interaction and so forth.

The three phases of a Temazcal-ceremony I have distinguished in this chapter–preparation, ritual experience, rebirth–resemble the three phases of a rite de passage as it is described by Turner: The first phase is the *preparatory phase* in which people slowly make the shift from Tiempo to No-Tiempo. Although people shift back and forth between everyday life and ritual, their attempt is to *tune in* to the ritual.[20] It seems that in this phase, people try to disengage themselves from the distractions of modern everyday life and try to enter the *ritual mode* (see preparation phase described in section 3.2). Turner refers to this phase of "separation," which "demarcates sacred space and time from profane or secular space and time" (p.24). Although Turner seems to suggest that this demarcation happens at a particular clear-cut moment, in the Temazcal this demarcation is to some extent a matter of *process*; (e.g., think of how people start to meditate on their propósito, or of the ritual in preparation of the drums). Nevertheless, following and adding up to Turner:

> [I]t is more than just a matter of entering a temple – there must be in addition a rite which changes the quality of time [and space] also, or constructs a cultural realm which is defined as "out of time [and space]." (p.24)

The ultimate act that establishes the distinction between sacred time and space and profane time and space is the moment of drawing the line of water that connects the Temazcal with the fire. From this point in the ritual, what previously might have been regarded as a simple framework covered with blankets has now become a sacred space: the uterus of Mother Earth.

Secondly, from the moment that people are inside the uterus, they are in, what Turner calls, the *liminal* phase. This phase refers to a "threshold" or a "separation of the ritual subjects from society" (pp.24,26). Turner also refers to this phase as the "transition" phase. For Turner, the term transition refers to the transition in identity that people are undergoing during the ritual. Turner refers to rites de passage as a "[cohort of] individual's change in social status" (p.24). This is a different kind of transition than what occurs in a Temazcal, the latter being a change in a personal state of being; which is repeatable and reversible, through the passing of time instead of through another ritual.

Lastly, the phase of "incorporation" commences; this is the phase of rebirth (leaving the Temazcal). I want to divide Turners description of this phase into two parts which I will discuss in reversed order. The phase of incorporation is characterized by "[1] symbolic phenomena and actions which [2] represent the return of the subjects to their new, relatively stable, well-defined position in

[20] In her study of angel practices in Sweden, anthropologist Terhi Utrianen shows how people can be very skilled in this "tuning in and out" and how this skill is important for people living in complex and individualist modern and who "want to keep their lives and futures in their own hands but who also desire and welcome support, companionship and sometimes also at least minor 'miraculous' interventions within their complex and demanding everyday realities" (Utriainen, forthcoming, p.11).

the total society" (p.24). The second part of this definition corresponds with my experience with the Camino: people come back into the world as relatively stable and well-defined; namely, clean and purified. This return is manifested in leaving the Temazcal and hugging one-another as a "thank-you"–closing the liminal phase–and a "welcome back"–initiating the return. People also express that they felt light and carefree, which resembles the idea of a "new," "stable," and "well-defined" position.[21]

However, I want to stress that the first part of the quote, "symbolic phenomena and actions," must not be associated with a Temazcal ceremony: in this ritual the notion of *symbolization* does not reside. In her research about Charismatic Christians in Africa and America, Karla Poewe detects a difference between "symbolic-rich" and "sign-rich" religions. The latter group, under which Poewe classifies the charismatic Christians she researches, adopts what Poewe calls a "metonymic mode of thought": for charismatic Christians, "signs are metonymic. That is, signs are current manifestations of the creative activity of the Creator" (Poewe 1989, p.367). Comparing this to the Camino Rojo, a similar metonymic mode of thought can be detected, in which the presence and activities of the Great Spirit, but also of other entities and even the physical manifestation of the uterus of Mother Earth, are real. They are regarded as facts, as signifiers, not as representations.

As was stated by Temazcalero's and what became visible through the concrete practical ways people engage with both their environment and their own experiences: during a Temazcal ceremony, people *are* in the uterus of Mother Earth. Focusing on the environment, we saw that people relate to the space of the Temazcal and with the presence of the stones and the herbs and other important entities: they all become subjects with which people *interact* and *relate* (e.g. breathing with the stones, being caressed by mother earth). In terms of experience, the notion of *symbolization* also seems to be absent. Rather than questioning the *meaning* of experiences, people act upon them. Arguably, by acting upon them, they confirm that these experiences are perceived as *real*; i.e., experiences are not explained, meanings are not sought. Hence, from the analysis of this ceremony, we can conclude that people aim to surrender to the ceremonial time (endurance) and space (interaction with environment).

Note, that the difference between Turners concept of "symbolic" and the non-symbolic reality as it is understood and practised among the Camino Rojo, is manifested in a difference in approach: Turner is using analytical (metaphorical) language to describe a general cultural phenomenon, while the Camino Rojo people are "being in the world" they talk about. I do not expect that Turner would disagree with the statement that what he calls symbolic, is for

[21] That "stable" and "well-defined" can be associated with a light atmosphere, can best be understood in relation to the first phase of the Temazcal: in the preparation phase people were serious and concentrated. The atmosphere after the return was much lighter: people chitchatted and no regulations of ritual had to be undertaken, that is, people were not preoccupied with how they should behave or prepare themselves.

some people perceived and experienced as really real. However, speaking in analytical terms such as "symbol" or "metaphor," one may at best misinterpret the people one is studying, or at worst presume an implicit hierarchical structure in which the researched is placed subordinate to the researcher. Because I see no point in talking in metaphoric language about a people who themselves refute this kind of perspective, I stick to an *as is* rather than *as if* narrative (see introduction, section 1.1.3).

Lastly, I believe that letting go of symbolic thinking is not only a challenge for those who try to understand other cultures (from anthropologists, to journalists); it is also a challenge for people like the Camino Rojo followers, who try to make a shift in their way of perceiving reality. To call a ritual "symbolic" or "metaphoric" but a therapeutic session with a psychologist "pragmatic" or "functional," depends on a culture's endorsed ontological notions of what is and can be called reality, and what is usually dismissed as "mere imagination". In the case of the Camino Rojo, these differentiations are formed by the modern worldview they so eagerly try to move away from. It is this challenge that people try to face in the No-Tiempo, all with the purpose to take what they have learned back to the Tiempo. I will come back to this by analysing the sources of these complications in the general conclusion of this thesis.

Chapter 4

Búsqueda de Visión. "They Love You, [Just] Because!"

The *Búsqueda de Visión* (Vision Quest) is a biennial one or two week retreat in the desolate hills of the rural Uruguayan province Rocha and can be seen as *the* ceremony for the Camino Rojo. In a general sense, people come to the Vision Quest in order to live close to their family: nature, animals, their ancestors, and their human brothers and sisters.[1] However, the core reason behind this retreat is a specific one: it is meant for *buscadores/-as* (searchers) to spend a certain amount of days in isolation beneath a tree, in order to encounter their personal path in relation to the universe; i.e. to encounter the meaning behind their creation. During my stay in Uruguay I was fortunate to participate in a Búsqueda de Visión which lasted from 19/03 to 27/03.

4.1 Arriving... "What Brings you Here?"

In a car filled with four men, myself, and a lot of luggage, we drove for four hours to get from Montevideo to the mountains of Rocha, the province where the Búsqueda de Visión would take place. The last 45 minutes, we drove along the country roads. Uphill, downhill, big hills appeared one after another. Cows were grazing, wild horses were running, and above us, birds of prey were floating. The landscape looked rough: small mysterious track-ways with even bumpier lanes snaked away from the main provincial road. One of these paths, marked as *El Pozo* (the well), led us to our camp-base. I experienced a strong contrast between the boisterous conversations in the car and this unfamiliar, overwhelming landscape surrounding us. This made me so restless that I decided to jump out of the car to proceed the last part of the trip by foot.

I was walking uphill, meadows stretched out on each side. To my left I

[1] Recall that for the Camino Rojo, all living beings ever existing are family.

Explanation of Figure 1			
(1)	*Baños* - restrooms	(2)	*Campamento* - Campsite
(3)	*Comedor* - diner	(4)	*Buscadora* - Searcher
(5)	*Árbol de la Vida* - Tree of life	(6)	*Cantos* - Songs
(7)	*Típi con Abuelo Fuego* - Tipi with Grandfather Fire		
(8)	*Típi de la Luna* - Tipi of the Moon (see Ch. 2 n8)		

looked over an immense valley of mainly meadows and a few trees and bushes. In the distance I saw three tiny self-made mud-houses. (Later I learned that these houses belong to the Corchs-family and the Spangenberg-family and that this land is theirs.) About a kilometre ahead of me, I saw a big wooden construction connected to a pop-up tent. People were walking in and out, carrying crates and boxes. As I continued, I overtook the forest that had been blocking my view to the right, the remainder of the valley became visible. In an open field in the centre of a meadow, stood a majestic white Tipi.

What is a 'Búsqueda de Visión'?

The *Búsqueda de Visión* (Vision Quest) is a ritual for people who are ready to go into a private retreat beneath a tree for a certain amount of days in order to learn about who they truly are (in relation to the universe). These persons are called *buscadores/-as (de visión)* ((vision) searchers).[2] The spiritual purpose of the buscador(a) is described by the Camino Rojo as follows (later I will get back to this more extensively):

> A vision searcher is he/she who opens a space within him-/herself, letting go of the things that he/she already knows well and that are not worth the effort, and putting up better things that are worth the effort. [Doing] The Vision Quest means entering into the mystery and allow that the mystery enters oneself. (Camino de los Hijos de la Tierra, n.d. Tab: Búsqueda de Visión)

However, the entire Búsqueda de Visión ritual is much more encompassing than these individual retreats: a group of people about three times as big as the group of searchers, stays in a collective camp to spiritually support the searchers during their vision quest. These people are called the *apoyo* (supporters). There are two types of apoyo. In general, all people at the Búsqueda camp are there to support the searchers. However, some people have a particular searcher they support (not only mentally but also practically in terms of preparations for the planting).

[2] *Vision Quest* is the official English term for this internationally performed ritual. Though literally translated, *búsqueda* means "search".

Figure 4.1: Map of the Buscueda de Visión

The first day of the Búsqueda de Visión was a day of preparations. Throughout the whole day people were trickling in, putting up tents, welcoming others and helping to prepare food. During lunch, a small commotion rose in the back of the *comedor* (diner, see fig. 4.1). I saw some people approaching a person who had just entered the communitarian area. As I got a glimpse of this person, I recognized Alejandro Corchs, the most "famous" of all people of the Camino Rojo. Strange sensations in my stomach and chest made me realize that I felt nervous and excited to finally see Corchs in real life. I think I was not the only one. People approached him and greeted him warmly and respectfully: they thanked and welcomed him with a kiss and a hug. Corchs excused his admirers and walked towards the front of the counter, asking for everybody's attention. He welcomed us all and announced the propósito he had set for this Búsqueda: to leave the land behind in a better state than in which we have found it. Subsequently he introduced the regulations that would contribute to this goal.[3]

* * *

From the way people talked to each other I could tell that both planters and apoyo were driven to participate in the retreat because they search for something. (This point will repeatedly return throughout this chapter.) For example, I found out that every time I met a new person or overheard a conversation between two people who did not know each other, the question "*Cómo llegaste aqui?*" ("How did you get here?") was asked. The first time this question was asked to me, I answered that I came by car. But soon I found out what was meant with this question: it referred to the particular drive or motivation that made people decide to come to the Búsqueda. In my experience, this "drive" that people had was often based on an abstract feeling, a necessity or urge or an intuition rather than something substantial/pragmatic.

* * *

The next day I bumped into Gustavo, who I knew from a previous Temazcal ceremony, and his brother Lucas, who was going to be planted for the first time. I asked Lucas the "what brings you here" question, he replied that it all went very naturally and that he could not logically explain his motivations. He knew the Camino from his brother and a good friend, and just felt a match. To be planted was an intuitive decision: it was something he felt he had to do. When we talked, every now and then, it seemed as if his thoughts drifted off. At those moments, an expression of sadness and desolation landed on his face. In some way or another, he reminded me of my father.

[3]For example, use the organic soap and dental paste that was self-made by the organization; be frugal with shower-water; no use of electricity; no allowance in the kitchen (except when scheduled by the kitchen team); no smoking or alcohol (only organic tobacco for purpose of rezos); etc.

Lucas asked me a lot of questions about my research and my interests in the Camino, but seemed particularly interested in my childhood and my relation with my parents. As I asked him about his personal life, Lucas told me how his world had recently turned upside down. Only a few months ago he had left his wife and family because he had fallen in love with a youth-friend.[4] Although he was feeling very sad and guilty towards his children and ex-wife, not once had he regretted his decision. His nineteen year-old daughter was supposed to be his apoyo this year, but she was angry and had distanced herself from him. His brother Gustavo had now adopted the task of apoyo.

I don't know where it came from–perhaps because he reminded me of my father or maybe out of pity–but I suddenly heard myself asking Lucas whether he would like me to be his apoyo as well. Lucas looked at me with tears in his eyes. "Yes," he said, "I would very much like that." He explained that earlier in our conversation the same question had crossed his mind too, and that he had not asked me because he was not sure where this idea came from. As I watched Lucas walking towards his tent, I suddenly realized that the outlook of the upcoming week had changed radically: "Wow, I am going to be an apoyo!"

Some minutes later, I met Gustavo again and told him what had happened. I did not preclude the possibility that he might not like his brother's decision of having a second apoyo. But Gustavo reacted enthusiastically. In fact, after this moment he took me under his care as if I was his apprentice: he told me many things about rules and regulations and his own experiences with the Camino.

4.2 The Planting and the Harvest

The Vision Quest consists of four different stages of being *plantado/-a* (planted0 beneath a tree. To be planted means to spend a determined amount of days and nights meditating/praying at the foot of a tree (4, 7, 9 or 13 days consecutively).[5] A searcher can only do the retreat once a year and he/she can only continue to the next stage after having fully completed the previous one. During the quest people are fasting: they do not eat or drink anything for the first four days, and after that they receive small amounts of fruit, water and diluted medicine–mostly San Pedro–on predetermined days. A searcher is not allowed to talk or leave his/her spot. During the quest it is just the searcher, the tree, and the animals (or visions) that may pay him or her a visit. Completely alone,

[4]Without me knowing she was his new lover, I had met this woman at the Búsqueda and we had spend a lot of time together. She took care of me when I got ill and was very patient in explaining me about the Camino and her experiences with it. Later, when Lucas was back from his retreat, the two were inseparable and very much in love.

[5]For the Camino Rojo, the tree is the "temple of our ancestors" where one can remember who he/she essentially is: a child of Mother Earth and Father Sun. "[H]e who knows the tree, really knows the spirit of life" (Camino de los Hijos de la Tierra, n.d. Tab: Búsqueda de Visión).

enduring cold, wet, stormy days or the burning summer sun. Surrounded by pitch-black skies, millions of stars, or a luminous full-moon throwing spooky shadows.

While planted, a searcher spends most of the time praying and meditating in order to get closer to his/her self. In order to assist (and direct) a person's search, each of the four stages of the Vision Quest corresponds with an essential virtue/objective upon which one is supposed to meditate. Furthermore, each stage is linked to one of the four cardinal directions and its corresponding colour and (essential) entity or element. In practice, this means that during the four day retreat, people focus upon the East, the sunrise, which is represented by the colour red. The particular purpose of this retreat is *humildad* (humility). (This direction played a central role in Lucas' Vision Quest.) The subsequent seven-day retreat stands for *integridad* (integrity) and corresponds to the colour yellow of the South. The searcher who plants for nine days, dedicates his search to the *Gran Misterio* (great mystery) from the West (where the sun sets), corresponding to the colour black. Finally, the thirteen-day retreat is represented by the colour white, (the light) from the North. In this last phase the search is dedicated to *la voluntad* (the will).

The Planting...

The day of the planting, I went to Gustavo and Lucas' camp-spot to help them prepare Lucas' equipment. As I arrived at their spot, a white blanket was laid out in the empty space between two tents facing one-another. A moment later, the yellow tent on the right was zipped open and all kinds of things were flung out of the tent onto the blanket. A bunch of big wooden sticks tied together, something that seemed to be a bundle of red cotton, a few balls of thick string, some tape, scissors, a tiny bundle of feathers, a piece of sheep-skin and a plastic bag filled with clothes. Eventually Lucas and Gustavo jumped out of the tent. For a few moments, the three of us were silently gazing at the blanket filled with objects.

Gustavo started untying the sticks and told me that these are called the *bastones*. Each bastón had a bundle of coloured cotton tied to it's top, filled with what I later learned to be tobacco. Gustavo continued: each bastón with its own colour represents one of the seven directions. Four of these sticks represent the four directions north-east-south-west, corresponding with the four stages of the Búsqueda. These four bastones, each placed around the tree at the direction it corresponds, mark the *cuadrado* (square) in which the searcher is supposed to remain during the entire vision quest. The square in which a searcher is supposed to spend his/her days, is approximately 10m2 and is delimited with a tall red string to which 365 tiny red rezos are connected; in this case, rezos are squared pieces of cloth (10cm2) filled with a pluck of tobacco, containing the prayers of the searcher for the coming year–i.e., they

different from rolled tobacco cigarettes, but also "containers" of prayers.[6] The remaining three sticks represent the three dimensions of above, below and the centre; respectively, Father Sky (blue), Mother Earth (green) and our Heart (purple); i.e., where the Great Spirit resides. These three sticks are placed in a triangle inside the square, and are placed together with the bastón that corresponds to the particular direction central to the buscador(a)'s quest. Together, the three bastones form a kind of praying altar, Gustavo explains; if a searcher prays or needs support in difficult times, this triangle works as a focus-point.

Lucas and I were listening attentively when Gustavo suddenly interrupted his own story: "Lucas what are you doing?! Don't just stand there, prepare your stuff!" Lucas said nothing, bent down, and slowly started to scramble around his stuff. I could tell by the glance on his face that he was annoyed. Trying to cut the tension, I asked how I could help. Lucas pointed to the feathers and asked me to tie them to the stick. While he was struggling to untie and reattach the cloths to the bastones, I asked him how he wanted the feathers to be tied. "Whatever, it doesn't matter," he mumbled.

Gustavo was standing on the other side of the blanket looking at us while he was explaining some rules and regulations, telling stories about his own Búsqueda experiences, and commenting every now and then on Lucas' work. At one point Lucas looked up irritated: "In stead of just standing there, you can also DO something, you know!" To my surprise, Gustavo replied calmly: "See, that is how I always see you. I always see you angry and annoyed, blaming others for your own problems. I am not the one going on a Vision Quest, you are. You have to take your own responsibilities in this. You don't need my help." Lucas did not say a thing and continued what he was doing. No glance of anger or irritation could be seen in Gustavo's face. As if nothing had happened, he started telling a story about the first time he dreamed about having a conversation with the Great Spirit.

After we were ready we went to the Temazcal ceremony where Abuelo Tabaco would *sacar la palabra* (take the words) of the searchers, meaning that from that moment onward they were not allowed to speak any more. "Ahooooo Metakiase!!" What is usually shouted *en masse* at the end of a Temazcal, now only came from a few voices. The Temazcal opened and one by one the searchers left the iglo. Outside, a sweating Lucas with a red head came walking towards us. He looked much more serious than I had seen him before. Almost angry. I handed him his towel and with rough movements–as if he was in a hurry–he wiped the sweat off his body. He grabbed his t-shirt, and pulled his pants and sweater out the hands of Gustavo. Quickly he put it all on. Then

[6]These rezos are made at home by the searcher him/herself. The idea is that each rezo bears a particular message or wish, though this does not necessarily mean that searchers formulate these individual prayers concretely: it is also possible to make the rezos in a certain state of trance or meditation. For example, Gustavo never formulates concrete prayers for each rezo; rather, he sings icaros while he concentrates on making his rezos.

he sat down, pulled on his shoes, and tightened his shoelaces with fierce. Not once did he squeeze out a smile.

After dressing, we–the searchers, the apoyo and the leading medicine man–gathered beneath the *Arbol de la Vida* (Tree of Life, see fig. 4.2 and 4.1).[7] From here, four groups of approximately thirty people departed in four directions towards the planting-areas. We followed medicine man Alfonso westwards in order to plant seven searchers (see fig. 4.1). All searchers were told to look for a tree they felt comfortable with to spend their vision quest.

Figure 4.2: The Tipi, Tree of Life and two Temazcal huts appearing behind a hill. [Photo by author]

As we arrived at Lucas' tree to help him set up his ritual space, his face still looked like thunder. Starting with the red West-pole, Alfonso marked where the bastones should be placed. Together with another woman, Gustavo and I started to connect the bastones with the string of Rezos. We had to be careful, because the string was very fragile and got entangled easily with the rezos and the branches. One of the rezos untied and fell on the ground. I wondered how Lucas would take this.[8] Gustavo made a joke asking Lucas whether he

[7]This tree plays a central role in another ceremony of the Camino Rojo Uruguay; the *Danza de la Paz* (Peace Dance)–where initiates dance around the Arbol de la Vida for four days ceaselessly on sacred songs. The dancers are accompanied by a team of drummers and musicians to support their dancing. Furthermore, like the Búsqueda de Visión, by apoyo there is a group of apoyo. All participants and apoyos are fasting during these four days. The purpose of this ceremony is to thank Mother Earth and connect with her, the ancestors, and the future generations and to pray for harmony and peace. Unfortunately, I did not experience this ritual. The Danza de la Paz is a derivation of the *Danza de la Vida* (Life Dance) internationally practised by the Camino Rojo organizations. Camino Uruguay wanted to change the form of their dancing ritual, because they disagreed with the blood-sacrifice that played a role in the classic version of Díaz Tekpankalli.

[8]I remembered from Corchs' autobiography that this could be taken as a bad sign (Corchs, n.d.[b]).

remembered the prayer he had put in rezo number 243. “An obstacle is bothering this one,” Gustavo said, “luckily you have four entire days to clean up the trouble.” Then, more serious, he said that everything that happens in the process of the planting, reflects the seeker. With a frown on his forehead, Lucas diligently reattached the rezo.

Gustavo and I went to help Alfonso with the preparations and planting of the others. When we came back to Lucas to fulfill his planting ritual, he was sitting in lotus-position with a smile on his face. “Se cambió!” (“He changed!”) Gustavo said to me. Accompanied by a rezo de tobacco, Alfonso said some encouraging words to Lucas to wish him a pleasant Vision Quest. Then he passed the tobacco to Gustavo, who had replaced his clownish attitude for a sense of unconditional brotherly support. He sang a song and told Lucas how much he loved him and how proud he was of him. Both Lucas' and Gustavo's cried. Lastly it was my turn. I wished Lucas a lot of fun, hoping he could free himself from the seriousness and tension that until now had determined his emotional state. I added that I hoped to stand in for his daughter's apoyo too. Lucas cried again.

As we left, Lucas looked happy. Gustavo laid his hand on my shoulder and said that by supporting Lucas, I was simultaneously supporting my father. I suddenly felt exhausted: it had been a long and intensive day and I had been cold to the bone. Walking back to the camp I cried ceaselessly.

The Harvest...

Only searchers of seven days or more are checked upon during their quest: this happens every second day after the fourth, when they are brought their fruit. If a searcher can not sit out his entire search, he or she can decide to *bajar* (litt: get down, meaning to leave a place). This means the quest is not completed and the searcher must start at the same level the next time when he or she decides to be planted.

After the searchers have accomplished their entire Vision Quest, it is time for *la cosecha* (the harvest). The same group of supporters that has planted the searcher goes to the searcher to harvest him/her. Again, the supporters express their wishes and pray to the searcher. After this, all searchers are brought to the Temazcal-ceremony, where in the company of Abuelo Tobacco they are given back their words. In the Temazcal, the searchers can say some words about what they have experienced and learned during their time beneath the tree and express their thanks and wishes for the future. Afterwards, in the common area, the searchers are given a small amount of nutrients (vegetable soup, fruit, and some water). Due to a change in regulations, at the Búsqueda I was present, the harvest of the seven day-planters was without the Temazcal. Instead, the buscadoras (coincidently only women) were brought to the comedor where the rest of the camp was awaiting them in silence. There they received food and water and were given back their words.

* * *

The fifth day after the planting, Lucas was harvested without my presence.[9] When I came back to the camp, I met Lucas in a state I had not yet seen him in before. He was all ecstatic, he could only smile, and he seemed calm. I reasoned that something important must have happened during his search for Lucas to have changed so drastically. When we talked about those days, Lucas' response was brief and clear: he had had a wonderful time. Except a bit of thirst every now and then, there was nothing noteworthy that had bothered him or made it too difficult for him. He did not elaborate much further than saying that he had seen very clearly who he truly was and what was the right thing for him to do. Referring to my wish for him to be able to have fun, he confirmed that indeed he had really enjoyed himself.

4.3 The Daily Ceremonies of Camp life

In the mean-time, while the searchers were fulfilling their personal quests underneath their trees, the rest of us, the apoyo, lived together in the camp (see fig. 4.3). One evening we were eagerly warming ourselves up with a richly filled vegetable soup. The cosiness of being in a room heated by human bodies and food, more than compensated the hard endeavours of each of us individually to endure the cold and rainy days. At moments like these, warm feelings of companionship and familiarity predominated the atmosphere in the comedor: there we were, all in the same place, in the same boat. I was having a conversation with the people at my table about what brought us here. One man (my age, 25) came to the Búsqueda for some years in a row now. "At home in Montevideo, I always feel like I have to put up a certain mask, like I have to live up to the expectations of the people around me. As if they do not accept me for who I really am. My friends and family do not understand why I come here, but to me coming here is hardly a choice: here I can be my true self. Here people love you, [just] because!" ("*Aqui te aman porque sí!*")

At the camp everybody is assigned to a team responsible for a particular domestic task.[10] For example preparing breakfast, lunch and dinner, cleaning

[9] I was away for a couple of days to welcome my boyfriend who had just arrived for a visit. I had hesitated whether I should go and welcome him or be at the harvest of Lucas, and had discussed this with Gustavo. For Gustavo, the answer to the question was clear: if I truly loved my boyfriend, no doubt that I should go to see him. After all, only by following my heart could I give my best support to Lucas, not via physical presence, Gustavo said. Choosing for love directly meant choosing for Lucas as well, he added. After my return we never talked about my decision to leave; it seemed just natural that this had happened.

[10] Beside these particular tasks, people would spend their time going for a walk, taking a nap, going for a swim in the nearby spring, making music, participating in small rituals (Temazcal, woman's prayer, baptism), and (discussion) meetings about various topics; some of the latter were "council only".

Figure 4.3: The comedor. In the afternoon, people often get together in the comedor to play music together and sing songs. [Photo by author]

the toilets, doing the dishes, babysitting the children, or guarding the ever-burning Grandfather Fire in the tipi.[11] I was assigned to the breakfast-team. Every morning at quarter to six I got up to join my team. We started with a group-ritual: We would stand in a circle holding hands, and take some minutes to speak our wishes or express our sorrows. After this, Alfonso, who was in charge of breakfast, prayed that we would serve a breakfast for everybody at the camp that was nutritious and prepared with love. Breakfast was prepared with full devotion and each time we finished our shift by giving each other a hug. The people at the camp would come for their breakfast only a couple of hours later. They thanked us and we all started the new day together.

Three times a day we all gathered in the field next to the Tipi and the Tree of Life–around 80 people each time–to sing the *cantos* (songs) for the buscadores: in the mornings around sunrise (while we were still preparing breakfast), in the afternoons before lunch, and in the evenings around twilight (before dinner). Seven songs were sung and played, one to each direction. When singing for the four cardinal directions, people all faced the direction that song concerned. The three other directions (the sky, the centre and the earth), we sang in a big circle. The songs were led by people with instruments (a drum, the sonaja, and a big shell), who would stand in front of the group and take the

[11]The most sacred place of the Búsqueda the home-base of Grandfather Fire is the Tipi. People visit the old Grandfather to feel protected or at ease. Tobacco prayers are usually done in the company of Grandfather Fire. Furthermore, once every Vision Quest a baptism is organized in the Tipi (see introduction 1.2.1 'Organization and Participation'). Grandfather Fire is supposed to burn without cease during the entire retreat: if the fire goes out, the retreat must be brought to an end. This implies that someone has to be guarding the fire 24/7. In chapter 6, I will talk about my experience of the time when I spend the night guarding the fire in the Tipi.

lead. After singing, we collectively shouted: "Buenos días/buenas noches buscadores! Buenos días/buenas noches buscadoras!" ("Good day/night searchers (male), Good day/night searchers (female)!") to each of the four directions. At their spots far away beneath their trees, the searchers would hear us sing and yell for them as a sign of support and to wish them a good day or night.

Apart from singing, there are other ways in which people supported the searchers. For example, they would do tobacco prayers in the Tipi. Furthermore, before eating or even drinking, people prayed for the nutrients to reach the buscadores by making the blessing gesture with their hand over their drink or food. Lastly, during the ceremonies that were organized, people prayed for the searchers.

In the Búsqueda de Visión, "spiritual" and "secular" activities alternated and turned into one another; all activities being equally important. For example, during the harvest of the seven-day buscadoras, as soon as the five women entered the comedor, a silence settled among the approximately 100 people in the room. Another example of an important, sacred, moment, is the joy that was felt–apparently by all of us–when on one of the last evenings, the kitchen-team had prepared us pizza and a huge beamer was installed on which that night's national football-match was streamed. Pizza and football. Exhausted by rain and cold, people showed an immense relief. Suddenly, everybody seemed to be in an energetic, festive mode.

4.4 The End... "I am not afraid anymore."

Because of the rain and the cold, the board decided to cancel the closing medicine ceremony. We would not properly fit in the tent and it was too cold and wet to do the ceremony outside. Besides, so said Alejandro Corchs at his speech on the last day, the overall goal of this Búsqueda de Visión was to "leave the place better off than how we encountered it." Therefore, so Corchs argued, it was our duty to use our last bit of energy for cleaning and tidying up the territory. Although many people were at first slightly disappointed by this decision, it seemed that everybody was too tired to actually object.

After the harvest ritual of the five women who had finished their seven-day Vision Quest, we had a collective prayer and then celebrated the end of the Vision Quest: we all danced around in the Comedor, laughing and singing, hugging and thanking each other, and eating pie because it was also Corchs' birthday.[12]

Everybody seemed extinguished and longing to go home. But Lucas' permanent smile had not left his face even for a second. At least not in my sight. He had promised me to bring me to my friends a couple of kilometres further on the road. The fact that he would have to make a detour did not

[12]I was told that the next day Corchs would celebrate his birthday for a group of intimates at his house on the terrain of *el Poso*.

concern him.[13] As we left–Lucas behind the wheel, Gustavo next to him and Alexandra and I on the back-seat–Lucas played the CD with songs made by Alfredo Changala, one of the Camino Rojo participants.

[Ya no tengo miedo	[*I am not afraid anymore*
Ya no tengo miedo] 2x	*I am not afraid anymore*] *2x*
De decir lo que siento	*To say what I feel*
Lo que no quiero	*What I do not want*
Y pedir lo que quiero	*And ask what I want*
Compartir lo que siento	*Share what I feel*
Lo que no quiero	*What I do not want*
Y pedir lo que quiero	*And ask what I want*
[Quiero estar en este lugar	[*I want to be in this place*
Permanecer en este lugar] 2x	*Stay in this place*] *2x*
Quiero estar en este lugar	*I want to be in this place*
Donde el miedo cede	*Where fear gives in*
Al escuchar este canto	*When hearing this song*
Que me abre el camino	*Which opens for me the path*
A sentir lo que quiero	*Of feeling what I want*
Escuchando este canto	*Hearing this song*
Que me abre el camino	*Which opens for me the path*
A sentir lo que quiero	*Of feeling what I want*
Quiero estar entero	*I want to be whole*
Quiero vivir entero	*I want to live whole*
Quiero verme entero	*I want to see myself whole*
Quiero sentirme entero	*I want to feel whole*
[Uniendo las estrofas	[*Joining the verses*
De mi ser	*Of my being*
Mi canto	*My song*
Y mi cuerpo] 2x	*And my body*] *2x*

Outside it was pitch-dark. We were all being tossed and shaken by the bumpy

[13]Though it did bother Alexandra, who was suddenly worried about all kinds of things: That the back-seat of the car and her stuff being completely wet (by the rain - long story) and that I would have to sit on a wet back-seat, that we would have problems to fit in the car, and that with our weight we would not be able to climb the hills that had become muddy and slippery. I was surprised by her sudden worried appearance. Her reaction was in stark contrast with the quiet relaxed attitude I had seen before. Was it because we were going home, back to the usual? Or was she just tired? I realized that from most of the people I had met at this retreat, I had no idea whether they were the same people in their daily lives.

road. Then suddenly the music was drowned by a loud noise, "vrrrrrmmmmm!!" Our tires were spinning through the mud. Lucas rolled backwards to try again via a different angle. As we got a little bit further, we got stuck again. Again Lucas let us roll backwards, then he stepped on the gas pedal for all it was worth, and we rushed forward. First upwards, sideways onto a grass-hill on the left side of the road–we all had to hold ourselves to fight against gravitation pulling us to our right–then, with a brutal jerk on the steering wheel, Lucas cut the muddy road towards the right berm. We abruptly came to a standstill within an inch from a steep hill downwards. Alexandra and Gustavo were both irritated: meddling with Lucas' driving skills and with the directions, and disputing with each other. It was clear that by then, both were tired and only wanted one thing: to go home. Lucas drove undisturbed, happily singing along with the music: "ya no tengo miedo, ya no tengo miedo..."

4.5 Reflection - The Things we do for–and with!– Love and how the Daily becomes Spiritual

What has become clear in this chapter, is that everything–from daily activities to special occasions and from solitary quests to social interaction–is attempted to bear a certain "spiritual signature;" a signature of Love. In this conclusion I will go deeper into the implications of this attitude for our understanding of (the interplay between) Tiempo and No-Tiempo.

"Here they love you, [just] because!" With his statement, the man emphasized the unconditional character of love between people at the Búsqueda. It is different than at home, he explains; there, in daily life, one has to play a certain role (i.e., there the ego runs the show). Whereas Love, as Corchs describes in his book *Trece Preguntas al Amor* (Thirteen Questions to Love), "is the power that unites us" to each other and to everything that exists (Corchs 2011, p.36). Love is the same as the Truth, Corchs continues, it is something we cannot explain, but only feel in our hearts. "Either way, when we succeed to feel it, we realize that we are confronted with the presence of something so big, that it no longer interests us to control it" (p.35). For the Camino Rojo, Love corresponds with the Great Spirit. Since the Great Spirit is within all our hearts, love is its power; its vibration. Since we are all brothers and sisters, we are all connected to one-another through Love.[14] Acting out of Love, plays thus an important, fundamental, role in the Búsqueda de Visión (an in the Camino Rojo in general).

Recall, the purpose of the Camino Rojo is to learn how to be connected

[14]Compare with anthropologist Michael Jackson's description of how he experienced love when he felt when he first met his wife: it is "not so much as a meeting of two separate human beings but of a mutual recognition, [...] that our relationship had a life quite independent of us, a life of its own, and that we were part of It, expressions of It, and that It had existed before us, and would in all likelihood outlive us both" (Jackson 2009, p.178).

with the Universe within you and without you, and to switch off the ego. The Búsqueda differs from other ceremonies in its spiritual purpose of living in harmony among family and nature, and finding (a part of) one's spiritual path. (Albeit there is a difference between planters and searchers, these motivations for participation apply to both groups.) However, what really makes the Búsqueda different from other rituals, is its endurance. Concentrating upon being tuned in may be doable for a couple of hours, but how does one do this for multiple days in a row? In a retreat that takes a week (or two), new routines, relationships, and activities have to be invented, with people that are new, in a place that is new. Yet, everything one does, is supposed to be spiritual and impregnated with devotion and love.

I want to emphasize the following: what we see at the Búsqueda, is that there is a shift in notion of ritual practices and the "profane" or daily practices: people carry out the most daily (domestic) tasks with full devotion, with a spiritual signature (preparing breakfast for the family with love, expressing gratitude for nutrients, tidying-up out of love for the earth, even washing the dishes is supposed to be a task of love and devotion). Furthermore, daily interaction with nature has a spiritual signature (regulations for using natural products and, again, leaving the space better off than how it was encountered), and so does interaction between people: connectedness and brotherliness are accentuated (e.g., "they love you, [just] because!" or think of how a simple question like "what brings you here" suddenly has a spiritual significance, how food is consumed for the sake of nourishing the searchers, how social relationships are evaluated through Love, as we saw in the case of my "absent presence" at Lucas' harvest). Furthermore, as Tiempo and No-Tiempo' interweave and become one, so does the relation between buscadores and apoyo become more intertwined and interdependent: practical tasks of the apoyo become spiritual as they are meant to support the searcher.

Nevertheless, despite the attempt to spiritually undertake all activities, it is not always possible to achieve this envisioned connection: namely, the ego can still interrupt. (See, for example, the irritation between Lucas and Gustavo, or the disappointment when the closing ceremony was cancelled). However, from looking at the Búsqueda de Visión, we have learned that it is incorrect to conclude that *daily* equals *profane* or Tiempo, and *ceremonial* equals *sacred* or No-Tiempo; i.e., that the difference the between daily and the ceremonial depends on the *kind* of activity that is done. Rather, it is depends on the *way* in which the activity is done (i.e. with a spiritual signature; with love). The examples of daily activities performed with full devotion, illustrates perfectly how the distinction between the what is daily and what is profane, simply *vanishes* in the haze of the Búsqueda retreat.

During a Búsqueda de Visión, the Camino Rojo followers seem to succeed in their aim to make a ceremony out of their everyday life. What is *everyday* is no longer profane but is made or "deemed special", and vice versa (see 1.1.3).

Just like the ancestors–on whom the Camino is inspired–*lived* rather than *ritualized* their spirituality (recall, Spangenberg's remark at the very end of section 1.1.1). In short, looking at the Búsqueda de Visión, it comes to the fore that the categories Tiempo and No-Tiempo are not only interwoven rather than opposed to one another, but they are also context-dependent rather than fixed. Lastly, it is noteworthy that, this fluidity of the margins of Tiempo and No-Tiempo, is not only visible in this chapter on the Búsqueda de Visión, but also in in other parts of this thesis (and chapters to come).[15]

[15]In the conclusion of this thesis, I will go deeper into the implications this fluidity has for the way experiences can be deemed special (see 7.1.5).

Part II

Tiempo

Chapter 5

Octavio. Reading Animal Messages of the Great Spirit

☼ 14/03/2016, in the bus from Montevideo to Punta Ballena... It is one of the last days of summer and although autumn has been among us for weeks already, suddenly it is unusually hot. I'm in a bus to visit my friend in Punta Ballena, a small village in the dunes two hours east of Montevideo. The perfect place to spend one of the last days of the summer-season. I'm on the phone with home, discussing political debates on the European refugee-crisis. As I look out of the window, I see three birds of prey floating in the air. "This may be the fifth time that I see some of those gigantic eagles circling in the air!" I wonder aloud what this phenomenon could mean for a person following the Camino Rojo. Would the appearance of these birds be seen as a message from above? Just for me or for everybody in this bus?

I step out of the bus. The sky is perfectly blue. With the hot sun in my back and in the footsteps of my own shadow stretched out in front of me, I walk towards the house of my friend. Suddenly I get the feeling I am being watched. I notice a darkness, as if a small cloud is blocking the sun. Then, I see how a horizontal shadow cuts through my own, making a silhouette of a cross. I look up. Some five meters above me, a raptor with a wingspan of about 1,5 meters is floating. I can see it's feathers, their white tips marking a line at the edge of its wings. While I watch how it slowly turns and disappears behind the forest, I cannot help but wonder: can this still be a coincidence? Directly followed up by the more down-to-earth part of me I think: "This is probably just an area where a lot of these birds live." Later, chatting with my friend, I hear myself asking whether eagles are common in this area.

With this chapter we arrived at the daily life of Camino Rojo practitioners: the Tiempo. Central to this chapter will be my conversations with Octavio

about his personal experiences with animal messages and other kinds of messages. Octavio is a middle aged man who I had met at my first (Tobacco) ceremony (see section 2.1). He lives in the suburbs of Montevideo, works as a carpenter, and has done his four and seven days of planting at the Búsqueda de Visión.[1] Although I had already heard and read much about the importance of animal messages in the Camino Rojo, my conversation with Octavio gave me the opportunity to understand it more profoundly.

5.1 Heed the Heart, not the Ego! Be Aware

It might sound simple the way Octavio explains how we can "know" the correct meaning of a message: heed your heart! But this is perhaps the most challenging thing to do, for it can be very difficult to distinguish the voice of our heart from that of our ego (as we have already seen in a.o. section 1.1.1 and chapter 2). Our ego, according to Octavio, is neither "bad" nor "wrong". In fact, it is part of being human: it is meant to protect our souls.[2] Nevertheless in modern society, the ego is ascribed a much too central role and, thereby, has become too powerful. This is how people became *egocentric*: their ego's think that they are the centre of everything, that the individual is the centre of everything. Octavio thinks that the interdependence of egocentrism and thought (something he associates with rationality), makes that we are distracted from following our hearts; that is, the part of us in which our connection with the whole, the truth, is manifested.[3]

* * *

We were sitting in his garden, on the pavement next to the cobblestones where I had my first Tobacco Prayer ceremony some months ago. From our garden chairs we faced one another. Between us was a small table with Octavio's tobacco materials and my audio-recorder. Octavio's three month-old kitten was laying on my lap, playing with my sweater. Octavio was rolling his tobacco. I asked him about his relation to the tobacco. He replied that it helps him to speak from his heart:

> "The idea is that when we come to pray, like in a ceremony, or...like at this moment... In fact, the idea is that the path I walk is that everything at every moment should come from the heart. Sometimes...there are a number of things, interactions, that take us from...take us from...this natural state that *should* be, right? Always living from the heart.. but, well! Sometimes our mind wins...!"

[1] Octavio made several attempts to fulfil his nine-day retreat, but has not yet succeeded.

[2] Octavio also explicitly emphasized that the ego should not be equated with thought, rather, it *uses* thought as a way of perceiving the world.

[3] Through egocentrism, Octavio adds, the notion of future and past distract us from being in the moment. He, and many other Camino followers, finds the works of Eckhart Tolle a true inspiration (e.g., *El Poder de Ahora* (original: The Power of Now (1997)).

Octavio's ideas about the possible ways in which the ego can distract us from seeing the truth became clear to me when I told him about my encounter with the eagle. "It is...well, the ego also plays a bit, right?" He continued, "our ego can trick us in some situations." He started to explain that, despite how beautiful and powerful it may be to see a real eagle, our ego can distract us from seeing the truth because it *wants* to see things in a certain way. "Eagles are rare in Uruguay," Octavio said. What he insinuated was that I probably did not see an eagle; that my ego had tricked me because it *wanted* the birds I had seen to be eagles, because they are so beautiful and powerful.

He gave an example from his own experiences, to illustrate how the illusions of the ego can prevent us from seeing the truth. He told me a story about when he was baptised and received his spirit-name, his "animal of essence" (see also: section 1.2.1):

> "I wanted to be a wolf. Like those you see in films, you know? The wolves of the snow, coloured and with blue eyes. One that howls in the night. When my godfather said '*lobo del agua*' [wolf of the water] , I was impressed. But then everybody was like: 'ah, *lobo marino* [sea lion], wolf of this, wolf of that.' And I felt like I was not sure I liked that. It [the meaning] was not closed, you know. So I started looking on the internet and found that there was this small animal called *lobito del rio* [river otter]. When I saw the photo of this animal on the internet...: 'this cannot be true!' Also a typical case of ego: my ego wanted that it was the other wolf.
>
> Years later when in another ceremony my godfather called me river otter, I had to laugh: 'I had to walk so much in order to understand that it was a river otter and you just say it' – I thought, no? – 'you just simply say it now!' Hahaha! But well, it is all a process with the ego, a process of identifying oneself with the animal. My attempts to get to know my animal of essence brought me many beautiful things."

He needed time to process the idea that the *lobo* (wolf) he was named after was "but" an otter. Octavio explains that, some months later, he went into the province for three days to do personal retreat: not knowing particularly why, guided by his heart, so he said. "I went with the purpose to...recognize...get to know the animal of my essence." One day he went to a small branch of the Olimar river where there was a little beach in order to pray towards the river for his animal:

> "There is a tree-trunk that started at the beach–in the sand–and entered in the (lake)... A fallen tree. So I decided... The water was cold [...] I took advantage of the trunk being dry and I walked upon the trunk, and because the trunk entered the water, I could be a bit connected to the water, right? With my...with my... My essence has much to do with the water because it is a water-animal, no?"
>
> [Octavio takes a couple of puffs of his tobacco cigarette, and continues:]

> "So I rolled a tobacco upon the tree-trunk, and when I started to pray over the tobacco...[mumbles]... The shore in front of me: I saw a head in the water, and it looks at me, and at first sight...[mumbles]...it scared me. I thought it was a snake. When I saw that it lifted its head, it looked at me and came towards me–like, toward my direction. I got up, just...without thinking much, and I was about to run away...and...something told me: "Wait! Pay attention!" So I look again, and see, and I see a little head of an animal with hair all wet, right? A little head in...of a river otter, and well, to this I went praying. And from then, well... Tá!! Like, from that moment on...very clear that was the animal that without a doubt was of my essence. And this was the little animal."

Octavio told me that through this encounter he got his confirmation. Though, he also agreed with me that perhaps not everybody would experience such an obvious confirmation. It all depends on the person, clarifies Octavio: how much a person pays attention to his/her heart. How distracted he/she is.

However, it is not only the wish of the ego that can distract us from seeing things: when it comes to interpreting or appropriating messages, completely opposed to what would be called egocentric, lies the reaction of disbelief (thoughts such as "this cannot be true," "this is not meant for me"):

> "The thing is, everything always depends on the person and how much we heed our heart. We want to walk and pray from our hearts, but as I told you, many times we are given advice and things, but we don't do it. That is distraction, right? We ask for something to happen, and when it happens, we do not accept it."

It is important to mention that the appropriation as well as the rejection of a potential message can be desirable. Eventually, this all depends on whether there *was* message for you or not. In relation to my reaction of disbelief at seeing five raptors, Octavio adds:

> "It is all the same, I think: If I take this message as if it were for me, that they are doing this for me, that they are giving me a signal; well, than that is what it is. If I am wrong, the spirit will correct me. It will give me another opportunity. If not, then this is how it is."

We were in the middle of a conversation when suddenly a cricket landed on a wall close to us. We had both already spotted the animal at the other side of the garden on a wall, where it had been sitting for quite some time. Before I could even put this incident in context, Octavio interrupted his story about his nine-days of planting at the Búsqueda: "If we would have had doubts about whether that [pointing to the cricket] was for us...!" he declared, insinuating that now it was confirmed that we had just received a message.[4]

[4]Besides animals, numbers can also bear messages. Octavio emphasizes for example that we should pay attention to the appearance of numbers in our daily lives as well: "There is a

If you are not sure about a message, Octavio continues, you should ask whether the Great Spirit can give you a *confirmation*. At the same time, if you are appropriating (or rejecting) something as a message, the opposite may be the case, so then you should always be open for the corrections that the Great Spirit sends you (e.g., Octavio's initial misconception of his totem-animal). Only through being aware and opening up, you can move away from your egocentric view. In short, concluding from Octavio's remarks, whether it is out of "arrogance" that one incorrectly appropriates or interprets a message, or out of disbelief or modesty that one rejects a message; in either case, the key to eventually understand a message is to open yourself up for the instructions of the Great Spirit.

Hence, with respect to (animal) messages, it is not within the power of the Great Spirit to make a person realize whether he/she are corrected or confirmed; it very much depends on the attentiveness or consciousness of the individual who must be aware, pay attention ("estar atento/-a"), to these corrections. Even though a person can be mistaken in the (non-)appropriation of the message, by paying attention, at least he/she creates a platform in which he/she can be corrected or confirmed. Therefore, as Octavio concludes, awareness or consciousness is always preferred over unconsciousness or indifference, for it is only by being consciousness that you can receive additional specifications concerning the correct interpretation of a message. In all cases, the Great Spirit will there to help us, by correcting or confirming our interpretations.

One of Octavio's stories illustrates how he was corrected by the Great Spirit: One evening, when he was in the middle of his preparations for a Tobacco Prayer ceremony, Octavio realized that he did not have enough firewood. As he was about to jump on his bike to quickly go and buy some, a thought crossed his mind: "Can I leave the dog loose or would he demolish all the attributes?" (Octavio had pillows, feathers, and other sacred objects exhibited for the ceremony.) "I will have confidence," he decided. About fifteen minutes later, when he came back with the firewood, Octavio encountered a complete chaos in his garden. All his stuff was spread throughout the garden and torn apart by the dog. The essence of the story, Octavio explained, was that he should have listened to the voice within him, the voice of the Great Spirit who was warning him:

> "We ask for instructions, for guidance, for care and protection, and when it tells us something we do not do it. [...] And I got angry with the dog and later I realized...something told me "but I warned you" or some-

number that reveals itself to me very often, which is the number eleven or hundred-eleven. Sometimes on my watch or on my cellphone, it says eleven:eleven or twenty-two:twenty-two. [...] at the moment when you see it [the number], you should ask it a wish [do a wish], or [ask it] to clarify you something which is happening. These are moments of power and something will show itself to you, right? You should be aware for this. If you are not aware, it just passes by like a wave, a current."

> thing... That is, it told me 'you were warned and you did not pay attention'."

In analogy to living a spiritual life, Octavio argues, following a particular (spiritual) path does not guarantee anything. It is not enough to just "follow the steps as they are presented to you," such as for example in a book or tradition. People can fulfil all four stages of the Vision Quest and still remain at the same point as where they started. "If you walk your path with conscience, it has much more value," Octavio explains. In other words, *awareness* is the first step to discover a message that is sent to you by the Great Spirit; and thus the first step of listening to your heart. But awareness of what? What form can a message have?

5.2 Messages in Practice: Communicating with the Great Spirit

In Octavio's view, animals and other "things" (e.g. numbers) are *seres de luz* (beings of light); they are the servants or messengers of the Great Spirit. There are many ways in which one can communicate with the Great Spirit. For example, sometimes an animal bears a message by simply appearing to you. At other times, the animal talks to you with a voice or through a thought in your head. Sometimes, you even communicate directly with the Great Spirit through ideas that manifest themselves in your head. The key (and the difficulty), Octavio emphasizes, is to open up for all these forms of communication by "listening with your heart".

People at the Camino Rojo have all kinds of ways to converse with the Great Spirit. Such a form of conversation is different from way they are held between human beings. It is a form of conversation or communication which not bound to the act of saying and the sensation of hearing; it can also take place through *feelings*, *thoughts*, or just by *knowing*. An example of how difficult it can be to learn how to receive and listen to a message, is given by Alejandro Spangenberg in his book *Conversaciones con una Mariposa* (Conversations with a Butterfly). Spangenberg explains about his experience of a conversation he once had with a butterfly, through which he had learned that animals communicate "directly through thought":

> But it was not easy for me to accept the possibility of dialogue with an insect. Later I would learn that the problem was not to start talking to it, but rather that the difficulties would begin, at least for my poor head, when it would start to answer me. (Spangenberg 2011, Ch.1)

Spangenberg, being academically educated as a psychologist, struggled to accept the idea that an animal could actually talk to him. Though, while reflecting on this incident later, he learned that understanding what happened was

not the point. What he had to learn, was how to listen through his experience rather than through his mind. For Spangenberg, to understand that he could communicate with this butterfly depended on *experiencing* the conversation, living it.

It is not always the case that people experience a direct form of conversation: since every animal has its own "medicine," the appearance of an animal itself can be a message. When you are not sure about the message a particular animal is bringing you, you can look up its medicine on the internet. For example, that time when the cricket jumped between Octavio and me, I asked what he thought the message was. Octavio responded that he did not know: "At times when you are not sure, if an animal appears to you, you just enter the Internet and look for it's medicine..."

Figure 5.1: This is the description of the medicine of the *grillo* (cricket) from the Camino Rojo Facebook-album *Animales de Poder* (Power Animals). On the photo it says that the medicine of the cricket is "Good fortune, the power of the voice." Key-terms in the description on the right are "intuition," "sensitivity," and "consciousness." Furthermore it is said that crickets help us with our (subconscious) communication in order to achieve what we want. They are associated with "resurrection" and "transformation": encountering a cricket means that a certain change is awaiting you (Camino Rojo Uruguay 2012). [Screen-shot of Camino Rojo Uruguay Facebook-page.]

When animal appears, this can mean that it is bringing you a message that particularly responds to the situation you are in. However, if an animal appears more frequently throughout your life, this can mean that the animal, in a way, *belongs* to you and to your personal spiritual path. It could be your animal of essence. In our conversations, Octavio told me about his special relation with spiders. Since this animal has appeared to him on many different occasions, Octavio is certain that the spider is one of his totem animals:

> "..its medicine is *confianza* [trust]. [...] [I] am working and one [a spider] appears to me in a place at which I am working, there, passing by... And

> thus always I...I see it as if it were a message of trust. Trust, trust trust... Trust in what I am doing although it may be something simple..."

Octavio does not *talk* to the animal, nor does the animal talk to him. Still its appearance bears a message, a message about "trust," and that is very essential for him. He tells me that since he was young, spiders had appeared to him at different occasions. One time, still a kid, he even felt the presence of a spider in his room while he had his eyes closed. He felt that something was watching him from behind the curtains. And when he turned on the light and moved the curtains, there it was: a huge spider. Without a show of guilt, Octavio tells that before the Camino Rojo, he used to be a different person: a person who was not aware, who used to kill spiders.

The last time Octavio had a conversation with a spider, was when a big spider was living in his garage. He had found it and wanted to take a picture of it, but the flash of his camera made the spider run away. "I realized that I had scared it," he said. Then, another night, he had to get his clothes from the washing machine that he kept in the garage. As he opened the lock to enter the garage, he pushed the door while still holding the lock. He turned on the light and in a glimpse, he saw something running from where he was holding the lock, "and a fright hit me":

> "So I take it in my hand and say: 'Alright, now I know you are here...in this habitation. We can share, but we will not scare one another. I scared you, you scared me, we are going to make an agreement so that we can share.' And well... Yes! I feel this is one of my Animales de Poder. [...] I don't know how it works, to have it as an Animal de Poder and also to fear it, but...there must be a reason, I have no doubt about it."

One of the things I was told repetitively during my fieldwork, is that for the people of the Camino Rojo, everything happens for a reason. A very popular maxim among the Camino Rojo, Octavio reminded me of at one point, is that something is never *increíble* (incredible) or a *casualidad* (coincidence). In the vocabulary of the Camino Rojo, something can only be *creíble* (credible) or a *causalidad* (causality):[5]

> "For me, it is the causality. When you ask for something, it will be given. Well, sometimes we ask for things and they do not come to us right away. [...] I understand it thus that we should learn to understand that there is a time for everything."

In other words, with respect to receiving (animal) messages in our daily lives everything seems to be based on a certain trust in the Great Spirit (and other entities) and in his decisions about what is good for us and what we need to continue our spiritual path.

[5]The above distinction was not only emphasized by Octavio during our conversations, it was expressed by many others in other conversations (namely, among others with Martín, Gustavo and Lucas). Corchs and Spangenberg make the distinction as well.

5.3 Reflection - Ritual Framing and Personhood

In this chapter I addressed how messages of the great spirit are received–e.g., through animals–and how the content of the message can be discovered–through being attentive. Animal messages belong to the Tiempo of a Camino follower: they are not summoned or initiated through ritual or ritual practice. Instead, animal messages can come at any moment and at any place in our daily lives. When such a message is there to be received, it is up to the receiver to find its true meaning. In this last section I want to reflect on the above by relating the Camino's vision on animal messages to the concepts of *ritual framing* and that of *personhood*.

Ritual Framing: Attentiveness and Trial-and-Error

On the basis of this chapter, we can conclude that a person can find out whether the appearance of an animal or object bears a message for him/her *by paying attention to it* and through *trial-and-error* (e.g. the case of the cricket). What is more, a person can learn about the message itself through paying attention to signs of *confirmation and correction* (e.g. the case of Octavio's dog or of Octavio's animal of essence).

The process of receiving and appropriating animal messages can be better understood via the concept of *ritual framing*, as it was used by Terhi Utriainen in her study of angel practitioners in Finland (Utriainen, forthcoming). With ritual framing, Utriainen refers to the idea that, through certain ways of focusing (i.e., paying attention), ordinary things can become special. Ritual frames are "communicative frames which, by and through directing participants' attention, position the participants into desired and often, in some ways, altered moods" (p.2-3). In other words, ritual framing does not necessarily refer to grand performances, they are mostly "practices, coming and going quickly in the midst of daily concerns" (p.5). At the Camino Rojo, we have also seen that an animal visit can come "quickly in the midst of the day," implying that the practice of paying attention also comes quickly. Throughout the day, people can tune in and out of "communicative frames" with animals, which can bring them in so-called *desired altered moods*.

However, it is of crucial importance to note that–whether through the visit of an animal or something else (e.g., a number)–for a follower of the Camino Rojo, the meaning of a message is not *made*, or even *ascribed*; rather, their meaning is already *given*. In other words, the meaning of a message is *determined* in the name of the Great Spirit. Therefore, for a Camino Rojo practitioner the question will never be "How do I interpret this message?" but actually "What is the right attitude through which I can find out what the message *is*?"

Although paying attention is an intentional act and although the recognition of the "specialness" of the appearance might be part of this act as well, it

would be wrong to conclude that at the Camino Rojo, the individuals *ascribe* the meaning or specialness to an animal message.[6] For the Camino Rojo the specialness of the message is independent of whether the person *realizes* it is special (i.e., whether the person is ritually framing). What is more, a message does not only become special when it is framed as such or when attention is paid to it; to the contrary, whether or not a message is for you and what meaning it bares is already *given*.

This is different from what Utriainen detects with the angel practitioners, who *intentionally* tune in and out of the spiritual realm–sometimes deciding to interpret a feather as a sign, at other times ignoring it–depending on the context and "their mood". In other words, when applied to the Camino Rojo, the notion of ritual framing–i.e., reading and appropriating an animal message–is for the Camino Rojo followers a matter of *trial-and-error* in appropriating *correctly* and finding the *right* meaning of a *given* message: it is not a matter of *deciding* whether or not to ascribe a meaning.[7]

Animals and Personhood

In order to properly understand the role of animal messages in the lives of the Camino Rojo people, it is important to recall the Camino's philosophy with respect to animals and the universe. The holistic worldview of the Camino Rojo expresses that everything in this world is related to one-another; all that exists bears a piece of the Great Spirit and is therefore family. When we look at the way people relate to other "things" (such as stones, animals or tobacco), the previous chapters showed how these "things" are not just dead objects (with perhaps some symbolic meanings); in fact, these "things" are alive, they have agency (e.g., animals come and bring messages, Grandparent Stones absorb our sorrows, Tobacco answers our prayers). In other words, following anthropologist Graham Harvey (2012), they are "other-than-human persons": they have *personhood*.

For the Camino Rojo the universe is full of other-than-human persons. The notion of personhood is a consequence of, what Harvey calls a "non-anthropocentric" worldview. By distancing themselves from a modern worldview in which human beings have separated themselves from the world in which they live, the people of the Camino Rojo want to "recover the ancestral memory" that animals and other "things" are in fact *beings*. Like humans, they are children of Mother Earth and Father Sun, making all beings family and equal.

Harvey describes things that have personhood as follows: "They may be called for help, but they do not exist primarily for human benefit" (p.198). This latter point is very important: as we already saw in the previous section,

[6] Cf. *ascribing* specialness in: Taves (2009).

[7] Graham Harvey ascribes the tendency to think in terms of symbolism rather than in terms of reality to the Christian heritage in the West (Harvey 2012, p.207).

the agency of animals does not depend on whether a person ascribes agency to it through ritual framing. This agency is independent on whether a person recognizes it. When an animal comes to a human being to transfer a message, this event is based on a relationship between the Great Spirit and the animal itself, completely independent of any human interference. In other words, the animal is a *messenger* and not a *message*.

For the people of the Camino Rojo the livelihood of things seems to be enduring and independent of the livelihood of people. Note, however, that even though ideally Camino Rojo practitioners aim to experience this livelihood in all aspects of being and at all times, their egos may distract them from achieving this perception and may enforce upon them, once again, a modern perspective in which the separation between dead objects and living subjects is fixed.According to the Camino Rojo, an animal–or some other being–is always alive and *never* an "it", even when there is no direct or functional contact between the other-than-human person and the human person.

Chapter 6

Martín: The Everyday Challenge of Being Connected

The first few weeks of my stay in Montevideo, my living situation was far from ideal: I lived partly in a hostel where I shared a room with seven others and partly in the house of a friend, who always had people over to party and make music with. I really wanted to find a quiet place where I had a private room to withdraw and write my field notes. Now I had already met some Camino Rojo followers, I decided to give it a serious try and contact some of them. I hoped that I would not only end up in a quieter household outside the city-centre, but also to be able to closely experience the day-to-day life of these people.

Carla, a woman I met the day before at a Temazcal ceremony emailed me back after only a few seconds: "My 12 year old daughter is moving in with her dad tonight, so I think you could take her room and move in with us, but I will first have to ask my partner Martín and the kids what they think. I'll get back to you soon." It surprised me that, of all people I approached, this hard working single-earner woman with three kids contacted me. One hour later she wrote me again, saying that they (especially the kids) would be delighted to have me as their new family-member. That same evening I moved into my own private room.

The previous day, after the Temazcal ceremony, Carla and I chatted about the plans for my research as we walked back from a refreshing dive in the sea. I told her that my research was an uncomfortable conversation topic for me because I was afraid that people would see me as an intruder. She told me not to worry: "As long as you remain honest in explaining your plans, people will appreciate and respect you. They will feel you act from your heart."

When we got back at the site, some new people had arrived. All of us were hanging out in the shade, drinking mate and having a discussion about the differences and similarities between the spiritual knowledge of indigenous groups from all over the world. "And what does the new girl think?" I was suddenly asked by a man in his forties, who must have had arrived while we were

away swimming. His expression was friendly and a bit frivolous as he leaned back in his chair pushing his round stomach forward like a proud pregnant woman. "You drink mate?" he finally asked. Surprised by my confirmation he poured me a mate while mumbling something inaudible. Then he laughed and giggled with full dedication: "I am Martín, but most people here call me *Manzana* (apple)." As I asked why, he laughed again and some others did too. "Well, look at him!" the oldest lady said. With his hands, Martín grabbed his cheeks between his fingertips so that two shiny red round bulbs of flesh were accentuated. It was true, his cheeks looked just like ripe apples.

* * *

Martín had lived with Carla and her children for three years now. Since Martín was unemployed and taking care of the household, both of us were at home most of the time and he and I spent a lot of time together. Martín was very interested in my research: he shared much of his knowledge and thoughts on whatever he found relevant for it (without me even asking).

But Martín was not merely my informant. Apart from providing me with theoretical information, connecting me to important people, and telling me about his own and others' opinions about the Camino, he was, above all, Martín: an intelligent man with an interesting, almost childish character who liked to laugh and make provocative jokes to emphasize the absurdity of things (though often clumsily timed). During the time we lived in the same house, Martín was a man whom I learned to love and care for; who could surprise me, annoy me, or even frustrate me, yet also made me laugh.

By presenting a close-up of Martín as I came to know him, I hope to demonstrate how Martín walks his spiritual path on a daily basis, as well as the challenges he encountered during the three months I spent in Uruguay. In doing so, I hope to make visible how the "specialness" of ritual time is embedded in or swallowed by–and even at times rebelling against–the daily life.

6.1 Daily Life in a Camino Rojo 'Light' Family

The family lives in *Cerrito de la Victoria* (Little Hill of the Victory), a suburban working-class neighbourhood of Montevideo (see fig. 6.1). Just around the corner of our house, across the street, used to be the home-base of the local communist party (as Martín once pointed out to me). Furthermore, the neighbourhood contained a public primary school and two public secondary schools. Almost every street-block had its cafeteria where *milanesas* (breaded meat) and other typical Uruguayan fast-food were sold. Furthermore, the district had *verdulerias* (vegetable shops), *tiendas* (local private grocery stores) and *panaderias* (bakeries) in abundance. Due to the absence of big supermarkets–twice as expensive as small shops–and private schools, and the presence of

many factories, one could tell that we were in a relatively poor working-class area.

In our neighbourhood many people had a dog (most houses included small patios). This led to a non-stop dramatic symphony of dog-barking. Furthermore, the big garbage-containers were practically always flooding and–besides to dog-poo–trash was scattered all over the streets (because of rambling junkies and alcoholics, but mostly because of an overflow of doves, seagulls, cats and dogs).

Figure 6.1: A photo of the Montevidean neighbourhood *Cerrito de la Victoria* (Hill of the Victory). One can see the Church and the water tanks behind it. [Source: `https://urumont.blogspot.nl/2016/02/barrio-cerrito-de-la-victoria-clik-para.html`, last accessed 20/12/2017]

Martín once told me that the neighbourhood received its name *cerrito* (hill) because the neighbourhood goes uphill, and *de la victoria* (of the victory) because it once was an army-base at a time when the Spanish were kept out of the city. The neighbourhood is known for its massive red church on top of the hill called *Santuario Nacional del Sagrado Corazon de Jesus* (National Shrine of the Sacred Heart of Jesus). In a length of two blocks right behind the church, enormous grey water tanks are built that are responsible for the entire city's water-supply.

Daily Routines

At the time I was there the household consisted of five people (including myself) and the young, wild, and unmanageable dog, called *Amigazo* (buddy), or Ami. Because I moved into the room of their older sister Aimara (12), the two brothers Tristan (9) and Julian (5) had me as their new neighbour on the first floor of the house. Five days a week, Carla worked in an office. Every morning

she woke the boys to get ready for school. A chaotic start of the day, for the boys were usually having a hard time with their morning ritual: they did not want to get out of bed, brush their teeth, eat their breakfast and, what they particularly appeared to hate, lace their shoes. Before Carla went to her office, she dropped the boys off at school.

Every day, after the majority of *la banda* (the band; which is what Carla and Martín called their household) had left the house, Martín tidied up the entire house, leaving no trace of the chaos of that morning and the previous evening. He cleaned up the battlefield on the breakfast-table; did the dishes; re-ordered the house–by putting away all toys and clothes of the boys that were laying around scattered throughout the house, and shaking up the pillows and the sofa-bed–vacuumed and the swept the floors; cleaned the bathroom; and did the laundry. After finishing his cleaning-routine, he prepared and ate lunch and then withdrew to his room for a couple of hours; to have a siesta, watch some documentaries and surf the Internet for job-vacancies.

Between 17.30 and 18.00, Carla and the boys usually came home from work and school. Carla started preparing dinner while trying to make the boys–who by then had gotten tired and troublesome–take a shower and put on their pyjamas. This time of the day was usually the most hectic and it often ended in a quarrel; either between the boys themselves or between them and Carla.

Every evening before dinner commences, one of the family members was appointed by Carla to pronounce the verse of thanks:

> *Gracias Madre Tierra, Gracias Padre Sol, Por estos alimentos, Y la luz de mi corazón.*
> (Thank you Mother Earth, Thank you Father Sun, For [this food], And the light of my heart.)

The decision on who had to say the prayer was often determined by what had happened earlier that day; for example, when one of the boys had been troublesome. To make up for his behaviour, the boy would have to say the thanks. This would make him get even more stubborn. He would mumble the thanks insincerely, after which Carla would let him say them again, but now as if he *meant* it. Again, to the boy's frustration. It was therefore not uncommon that what started with the intention to express gratitude, resulted in one of the boys being send to bed without dinner.

After dinner the boys were sent to their shared bedroom (if all had gone well, that is), followed by Carla some minutes later to read them a bedtime story or to tickle them (which they loved). These were the moments during which Martín sneaked outside to do a rezo. He told me that, in general, he preferred doing this on the first floor terrace because there he could watch over the roofs of other buildings, had a view of the sky and the moon, and was able to see the tree across the street to which he liked to direct his prayers. Only when Carla was bringing the boys to bed, he preferred to do his prayers downstairs in the garden, where he felt less conscious of the boys. Martín told

me that, in contrast, Carla preferred to do her tobacco prayers downstairs. He thought this was because she liked to be directly in contact with the earth.[1]

6.2 Martín's Relation to the Camino Rojo

One night, with a pizza waiting in the oven and the boys busy running around the house–fighting with one-another and exciting the dog; all this to avoid taking a shower–Martín, Carla and I talked about community-life among the Camino Rojo. The families of Spangenberg and Corchs had recently bought a big piece of land in a south-east province of Uruguay, Rocha. Their plan was to set-up a community there. Martín, who calls himself a communist, said that although he has always dreamt of becoming part of such a community, he never would be able to do so: "This is only possible for the rich among us, not for me, not for us."[2]

In another conversation we had, discussing the people (like Gabriel) who critique this 'privileged' form of community-life, , Martín said the following: these critics are not the same kind of *comunistas* (communists) like me: they are much more activist and militant.[3] Martín describes his own kind of communism as idealist, peaceful, and more personal. Although Martín acknowledges that there is inequality between the richer and the poorer followers of the Camino, he disagrees with critics like Gabriel who find this is wrong. Martín's view can be formulated along the following lines: These people, the leaders, have particular wishes for the (expensive) piece of land they bought. As they happen to own the money to fulfil these wishes, and as the land is theirs, they are allowed to organize their community in the way they want to. Accepting the privileges of the wealth of some others of the Camino Rojo,

[1]The distinction Martín makes is based on his idea that women are more "earth-based" and men are more "floating, philosophical". This idea of his corresponds with the Camino Rojo's distinction between the sky being masculine and the earth being feminine.

[2]Martín's ideal world is one in which people care for and support each other; where they care about Mother Earth and treat her respectfully. He dreams of living in a community with others, sharing resources and labour. Quoting someone he admires (I forgot who): "the true way to protect what is valuable to you, is to share it."

[3]Despite the Camino Rojo claiming to maintain a "horizontal" social structure (recall, 1.2.1), it is often criticized for having an untraceable financial administration and being too commercial. Both from within and from the outside, people express their critique about the inequalities between the families of the "leaders"–usually referring to Alejandro Spangenberg and Alejandro Corchs–and the rest of the participants. One person who has been very explicit in his critiques is my friend Gabriel. He has been part of the Camino Rojo for a long time–having fulfilled all four Vision Quests as well–but broke from his alliance a couple of years ago because he found that there was a skewed relation between "leaders" and the rest (in terms of economic resources and social status). However, as he has asserted me many times, this does not mean that he disliked the movement–after all, he was still directing Temazcal ceremonies that were published on the Camino's Facebook–but he argued that "love should not have a price". He is sure that eventually, most people will leave the Camino as they will start to notice these inequalities/insincerities.

Martín peacefully concludes that for him, in order to achieve his desire to live in a community, he will have to look elsewhere.

According to Martín, his communist worldview and the way in which he engages with the Camino Rojo are strongly linked: In the Camino Rojo he looks for a community in which everyone sees the other as equal and where love for each other and for Mother earth plays a central role. For Martín, spirituality means to "break with normal life" (*"romper con la vida normal"*). That is, with modern society. Martín says that for him, spirituality reflects a certain conscious break from the "daily path of the citizen" and his/her "roles/titles". He explains that he had to consciously–in terms of ways of thinking–*and* practically–in terms of possessions and lifestyle–break with his old "modern," "consumerist," "capitalist," and "performance oriented" way of life.[4] To give an example, Martín deliberately broke with his job as a co-ordinator in a big company, with his possessions and even with his family (his ex-wife and their child).[5]

Martín assured me that, although at first this "breaking with normal life" might seem very difficult and drastic, in reality it is very simple, for one only breaks with a "life that goes nowhere," a life that only reproduces what is superfluous and already there. In exchange for taking this step, Martín says he has received "unlimited freedom": a life in which nobody can tell him what to do and in which he can just follow his heart. For Martín, this change is manifested in all facets of his life, for example, his relationship with Carla. Martín tells me that, several times, Carla had expressed her doubts regarding their relationship. His reaction upon this was to ensure her of the open-ended nature of their relationship; that is, they were together because they chose to be and only until at least one of them chooses differently.

Martín describes his own attraction to the Camino Rojo as particularly socially and intellectually motivated (which, again, he thinks is strongly linked to his communist ideology, which he contrasts with a focus on spiritual experiences). In terms of his social interests, he is inspired by the idea that everyone is part of one big family, the idea of belonging to a group of people who are close to each other and who care about one another. The experience of being in a ritual with fellows is to him more important than the spiritual meanings that underlie the ritual.[6] To give an example, Martín explains that the reason he goes to a Vision Quest is to be part of the group of apoyo. Martín is first

[4]These terms are mentioned interchangeably as a reference to modern society. Not only by Martín but also by many other people of the Camino Rojo.

[5]This event of breaking with an "old" life is what many, almost all, people to whom I have spoken say to have experienced. Examples are: Octavio; Gustavo; Lucas; Sandra; Elsa and many other. Corchs also writes about his "break" with his life as an traumatized young man, indifferent and hiding after his "tough-guy" mask (Corchs, n.d.[a]).

[6]According to himself, also explains why Martín is more attracted to Spangenberg's more "academic and philosophical approach" to the Camino, in contrast to Corchs' focus on "personal experiences and feelings". He adds to this that Carla–in fact, most women–feel a closer connection with Corchs.

and foremost searching for a (social) grip or support in his attempt to internalize a holistic mindset and to liberate himself from the capitalist, modern, competitive way of thinking that, according to him, dominates the modern society he lives in.

Martín and Carla do not attend Camino ceremonies very often–approx. twice a month–nor do they intent to be planted or baptised. For this reason, Martín calls Carla and himself "Camino Rojo Light". On a daily basis, for Martín his affiliation with the Camino manifests itself in the performance of small rituals and routines that have a personal importance to him.[7] Every evening he does a Rezo de Tabaco in order to isolate himself from the noisy family life and to meditate on things for which he is grateful and things that are important to him (both practical topics, such as finding a job, and philosophical topics, such as contemplating life from a holistic point of view). Furthermore, Martín told me he has always felt a discrepancy between his aversion to smoking–because it is unhealthy and addictive nature–and his attraction to tobacco prayers as a daily retreat-ritual which allows him to contemplate in all tranquillity and connect with his heart. Since he feels affiliated with the Camino Rojo, for which tobacco plays an important role in connecting to the heart, he decided to include this ritual in his life. However, as a form of compromise, he does his tobacco prayers only once a day in the evenings.

Martín also attempts to build a water-ritual into his daily routine: every morning after the kids and Carla are gone to school and work, he fills a glass of water over which he will pray. He makes the standard gesture with his hands in order to receive the blessings of the cleansing and clarifying medicine of water, and he expresses his gratitude for having the access to this sacred medicine. Besides these rituals, he aims to keep his mind sharp and be conscious for whenever he sees trees or animals, so that he can try to get in touch with them. It is his intention to ask the animals that appear to him whether they may carry a particular message for him.

One day, Martín invited me to do a rezo because he found it important that I should learn about his particular way of doing a tobacco prayer. It is very common to add a personal and unique style to the more general customs regarding tobacco prayer, he argued, and since I was doing research among the Camino Rojo, I should learn about his. This personal touch, Martín assured me, is something one assimilates through practice and in conversation with Abuelo Tobacco: "when you listen to your hart, it tells you what it likes and what not." As an example, he explained me how he liked to tie his tobacco with four strings rather than one: one string for each cardinal direction, but also because in his prayers each string represents the end of a developmental phase and the start of a new one upon which he can meditates (i.e., birth;

[7]NB. Although Martín sees himself and Carla as "Camino Rojo Light," it remains partly unclear how this compares to other followers, since I have never followed any of them from this close by.

childhood; adolescence and adulthood).

It was during this prayer that Martín told me a story of how tobacco had become to play an important role in his life. It was a time when he and Carla were separated for a while, which at that moment was three years ago: Carla had decided to get back together with her ex, the father of her children. Martín was devastated. One time, when he was doing the night-shift in the factory where he was, Martín took a break to do a tobacco prayer. He sat down outside in front of a tree and intended to express and pass all his frustrations and grief about the breakup onto it. Suddenly, on a small bench in front of him, appeared first his mother and later also his father (both were deceased). His father had died when Martín was still a boy, making Martín, the oldest child, the one responsible for his younger brothers and sisters. Martín had always been angry at his father for this, but when he was doing his rezo and his parents appeared, he no longer felt any angry with his father. He suddenly understood that things were going the way they had to, and that this was what made him who he was. This realization also helped him to accept the situation with Carla, and to go on with his life. When his parents disappeared again and he got op to continue his work, a lightning struck right into the tree and split it in two.

* * *

A short while after Martín and I had talked about their previous separation, I started to notice a lot of tension between Martín and Carla. Eventually, Carla brought me the news: they had decided to break up. After having talked several times about her doubts concerning their relationship, it was Martín who had eventually urged Carla to be honest to herself and to take the decision. A strange time followed: Martín–having no job, no money and no house–slept on the couch. He stayed at home when the rest was out and tried to be away in the evenings when Carla and the kids were at home. Sometimes when I was alone with Carla she told me that she was having a hard time to stick to her decision, for she was afraid she could not take care of the household and kids by herself.[8]

6.3 After the Breakup

One day when Paolo, a friend of Martín, was visiting and the three of us were having lunch, Martín told us that at a tobacco prayer which he attended,

[8]My own presence in this whole situation was both awkward and useful. Awkward because I felt I was literally standing in-between Martín and Carla, sharing my afternoons with him and the evenings with her and the kids. Moreover, both parties discussed their thoughts with me. At the same time I felt like I could finally make myself useful in the family by taking care of the kids and helping in the household (something Carla did not really let me do before).

somebody had prayed for the ability to "trust and love his dreams". Martín said he felt that this prayer applied to him too. He told us how he was dreaming to live in a community where he could work on Mother Earth's land. He had recently been given a tip to call a person in Tacuarembó (a province in the far north of Uruguay): there was a small community looking for people to help in exchange for shelter and food. As Martín was telling all this, Gustavo suddenly sat up straight and interrupted him: "shhhht!" he said with his finger pointing to the air, "listen, a hummingbird!" Martín and I did not hear it, since we did not know the sound of a hummingbird. "This is for you Martín," Gustavo said. He explained to us that the hummingbird stands for love and that its appearance confirmed Martín's wish.

Martín understood very well that the breakup was definite: he directly started looking for a job. Sometimes said to me that things should probably be this way: he has something to learn from this. However, this explanation did not prevent him from feeling sad and lost. And not having a job or a place of his own intensified this sadness even more. I noticed that since the breakup, a change took place regarding the role of the Camino Rojo in Martín's life: for example, he was attending ceremonies much more frequently.

Addicted to the Great Spirit

One afternoon, Martín came back inside after a tobacco prayer. "Els," he said to me with a serious expression on his face, "I think I am becoming addicted to the Great Spirit". I was surprised, for Martín had assured me many times that his interest in the Camino Rojo was above all socially and ideologically motivated. I must have looked at him with a question-mark hovering above my head: he added, "I mean, this tobacco praying.. It is getting out of hand." Martín explained how he realized that he was doing prayers much more frequently than before, in order to find contact with Grandfather Tobacco. He told me that he found this problematic, not only because he was breaking his principle of doing only one prayer a day, but even more because he noticed that he often was not really consciously putting any intention into his prayers. I asked him whether he meant he was addicted to the smoking, but he said that this was not the case. So I asked whether he meant that he was afraid to be mentally addicted. But again he shook his head. "So what do you mean?" I asked, confused. Martín explained to me that he believed he should be independent and autonomous in the things he was doing. Instead, he was dependent on doing rezos in order to find the Great Spirit. "It is an addiction to the Great Spirit," he answered: "like being addicted to Ayahuasca or weed or going to a priest". I asked if he could tell me if he would distinguish between frequent tobacco prayers from frequent meditation. He said he would. "Meditation is something you do alone and only for you," he said, closing the topic.

I did not fully understand what Martín meant with his fear of becoming addicted. Was it a fear of letting go of his control or agency? Was it a fear of

Figure 6.2: A photo of Martín during the Búsqueda de Visión, 27/03/2016. [Photo by author]

becoming numb or weak? I did not know. As I was writing about this incident a year later, I decided to send Martín a message to ask him about it. "To be honest," he replied, "I do not remember anything of this, haha! I guess I understand your question and I could try to clarify this retroactively from the 'here and now', but it will be much more rational." He said he would reserve some time that evening to try to get back to this particular moment and send me a message about it. He later sent me a voice message:

> "And for the rational types like I am, a very structured man, right? I am a communist..I am a worker...for my entire life. Twenty-four years in the industries; I am [have been] very structured. Two times two is four! And here there was nothing more to hang on to. It was moving forward towards nothingness, right? The absolute surrender. Trusting in the Great Spirit, that deep down I am too. That was the surrender, right?

The fear of not being able to control anything. The Great Mystery."

The most evident explanation for the change in the role of the Camino Rojo in Martín's life, might be that Martín was trying to find consolation and support–and perhaps even answers–through his spiritual activities. In this sense, turning to the Great Spirit could be seen as some kind of coping-mechanism in times when the ground has fallen from under one's feet. I will come back to this point during the reflections.[9]

Temazcal of Gabriel

Often Martín had defended the Camino against the critical opinion of Gabriel. Martín also criticized Gabriel's style of doing rituals as too rough and tense. He preferred the Temazcals that had, as he called it, a more caring and loving atmosphere. One time, however, when I arrived at the site where Gabriel did his monthly Temazcal-ceremonies, I was surprised to bump into Martín. Did he suddenly change his mind about Gabriel? As I expressed my positive surprise, he replied that he thought he should give it another try, since it had been a long time.

After this particular ceremony, when I felt so weak that I had to lay down for a while (recall, 3.4), Martín insisted on travelling back home together. Once we were properly seated in the bus, he looked at me very seriously and asked me to explain to him what had happened just now. I said I did not really know, that I was surprised too. I told him that I simply could not handle the ceremony. He looked at me as if he was expecting something more. "You are not here for anthropology," he said; "you are here to learn and to experience. You are searching, just like us. You are one of us and people know this, that is why they trust you."[10] As we looked out of the window, both of us drifted off in our own thoughts. "And it is not a coincidence that you keep ending up making friends with the rebellious ones in the Camino!!" Martín suddenly exclaimed. I was not entirely sure what he meant with this, nor whether he meant to include himself to this group of "rebels," nevertheless it was obvious that in Martín's view, my presence in Uruguay had suddenly received a deeper meaning. From that moment on, Martín seemed to have found a new task for himself: being my teacher and preparing me to go to the Búsqueda de Visión, where for him I was not only going for academic reasons, but for my personal search as well.[11]

[9]For authors who have been writing about this, see among others Robert Orsi (2004), Micheal Jackson (2009) and Paul Stoller (2009).

[10]Only after my fieldwork, when I came across Juan Scuro's dissertation about the Camino Rojo, I found out that he has had an almost identical conversation with Alejandro Spangenberg (Scuro 2016, p.32).

[11]For me, in turn, the only form in which I felt rebellious, was in my reactions to Martín: many pages in my diary radiate a tone of frustration regarding this new self-acclaimed teaching-role, which I was not at all waiting for.

This shift in Martín's behaviour became very clear the week prior to the Búsqueda de Visión. Martín took upon him the task to prepare me as best as possible. He told me about the various household tasks there were at the Búsqueda and how each participant was supposed to sign up for one of the tasks. "That is an easy choice," I replied, "I will enlist with the cooking team." But Martín did not agree, he would rather see me join the baking-team. I objected, saying that he, of all people, should know that I am not an early riser. But Martín disagreed firmly. He argued that waking up early while the rest of the camp was still asleep, meant that I would always remain one step ahead of everything: it would give me time to reflect upon the previous day, to prepare myself calmly for a new day, and–while kneading dough–I would also have plenty of time to chat with the others about their experiences with the Camino Rojo. Besides, Josue, the chief of the kitchen-team, was way too strict and harsh for my sensitive soul, he added.

In my experience, the preparation-week for the Búsqueda was a remarkably chaotic period: Martín told me what to do and what not, but continuously changed his advice. I found myself in-between being frustrated about his inconsistency and interferences on the one hand, and being grateful for all his efforts on the other hand. In addition, and to my confusion, Martín himself started doing those things he had particularly advised me *not* to do. At one point, this resulted in Martín having his camping equipments and transport ready and his appointment for the money-transfer confirmed, while I had none of those things arranged because he had advised me to wait. I wondered how it happened that the man who used to help me so much, could now cause so much confusion. Was he trying to boost his self-confidence by making himself important? By making me, in some way, dependent on him?

Not only during the preparatory phase, but also during the Búsqueda itself several situations occurred in which Martín was "governing" me. For example, at some point he had literally pushed me towards Alejandro Corchs to get acquainted. At another moment, he decided where I was supposed to sit during the Opening Ceremony.

One night before dinner, I was talking to Nahuel when Martín suddenly interrupted our conversation. "You should try to be first in line for dinner, because you have to eat quickly. You will come with me to the Tipi to guard the fire tonight. Take your sleeping bag with you." And off he went. Nahuel and I looked at each other, not really understanding what had just happened. We concluded that Martín was "inviting" me to join him at his task to watch over the fire in the big Tipi that night. Coincidentally, Nahuel was also enlisted to guard the fire that night. Taking Martín's command not too serious, we talked a bit more and calmly went to get our dinner. We sat down with our plates, when Martín passed by again with two dinner plates in his hands. With a strict tone he said to me: "Well, I don't know what you are doing, but I have

to go now. I have to give food to the people who are finishing their shift and then I will take over their turn. You do whatever you want, I will see if you decide to come." And off he went again. Nahuel and I looked at each other and giggled.

After I finished my dinner, I got up to fetch my sleeping bag to go to the Tipi. Nahuel would come later. When I arrived in the Tipi, the two guards of the previous shift were eating their dinner. Martín was sitting on the tip of his folding-chair, his eyes fixated on the big Grandfather Fire that was burning. A steady flame that rose from the intersecting ends of some logs of wood. Every now and then people entered the Tipi to do a prayer with Grandfather Fire. Martín insisted that I should take charge over the water: every time when visitors came in, I should offer them water and offer some herbs to the fire, for the visitors were not allowed to do this themselves. Later that night Nahuel arrived. Martín adjusted the logs of wood while he explained to me how the logs of wood were supposed to be positioned: Two arms, one representing Mother Earth and one representing Father Sun. The angle should be ninety degrees and each arm should point to the North-West and the South-West. Nahuel was silent.

When we had all prepared our beds, Martín warned me to only sleep lightly, for it was our responsibility to wake over the fire and to make sure that it would keep it burning. After a while I was getting used to the crackling sounds of the fire, the high temperature, and the smoke that was filling the Tipi. Just as I was finally dozing off, Martín called me. "Yes?" "Whatever happens, if some creature comes at the door that is not from this world, and it asks you to let it in, whatever it says or looks like, how kind it may seem, do not let it in." I was confused. I asked him what he meant. "Oh you know, this is a very sacred place and you are a sensitive person, so just so you know that this could happen. That some kind of evil creature may want you to let it in. Sleep tight." I was very confused. Not because Martín had woken me up or because his warning scared me, but because it was Martín who said this. Martín who had always emphasized that he was not really interested in the "spiritual" part of the Camino Rojo. I just could not make any sense of it.

The next morning I woke up from a very deep sleep. Martín had been watching the fire the entire night.

* * *

After the Búsqueda, I never saw Martín again (though we kept in touch): I went to visit my friends in the province, while Martín went home. He had received a message that he was welcome at the community-farm in Tacuarembó. And so he left for the province almost immediately after his return to Montevideo. Martín worked there for some months, until he decided to return: he wanted to see his son more often. Back in Montevideo, though, went through another existential crisis (or the same). Not being able to find himself a job, he

started following the "Curso de Milagros".[12] After some more months, Martín found a new job and a place to live. For over a year now, he has been living just outside Montevideo–relatively close to his son–and working in a fruit orchard, plucking pears and, of course, *Manzana's* (see fig. 6.3).

Figure 6.3: A photo that Martín has sent to me about a year after we last saw each other. In the photo, various objects are depicted that are typical of Martín. On the foreground are his plastic bag of tobacco-material and a lighter, a thermos for drinking his mate, and an apple. In the back, we see Martín's dream: working with Mother Nature. [Photo by Martín]

6.4 Reflection - Turning Points in Everyday Life of Martín

In this chapter I have tried to illustrate the daily life of Martín and the (changing) position of the Camino herein. Looking at his life, it has become clear how in Martin's existential quest, spirituality does not only function as a source where he can find answers to questions, but it is itself also questioned in relation to his overall idea of who he is.

[12]The Curso de Milagros is an existential/spiritual course that is very popular among Camino Rojo affiliates. Here people learn to distinguish between their "functional" selves in life (roles), and their true core (heart). Carla was also following this course at the time Martín and Carla were still together.

Camino Rojo as a "Sentimental Educator";

A breakup: what appears to be a nightmare for most individuals in real life, might be a surprising piece of luck for the anthropologist. A true *turning-point* took place in my research. Anthropologist and ethnographic writer Kirin Narayan describes, paraphrasing Theodor Rees Cheney, the concept of a turning point as a "category of scenes with dramatic potential," and an attractive source for ethnographic writing (Narayan 2012, p.10). In "real life" terminology, indeed, the term *drama* would be more appropriate for the havoc in Martín's life: a breakup with his partner, his house *and* his only "job" (as a housekeeper).

What makes such a turning point interesting for anthropologists, is its provocative character, causing what anthropologist Paul Stoller (2009) refers to as a state of "in-betweenness": a situation in which a person is asked to act upon the unexpected. Stoller's colleague Michael Jackson talks about the "penumbral" (coming from the Latin 'paene'-almost, and 'umbra'-shadow), referring to the confusing region between the "I" as an actor and the "I" as being acted upon. When we feel no longer at home in either of those; that is, when we no longer know what is happening to us, nor how we could deal with what is happening, we are ina *bordersituation*. However, says Jackson, "[b]ordersituation not only imply a radical break from the known; they presage new possibilities of relatedness" (Jackson 2009, p.xiii). What happens when a part of who you think you are is suddenly denied? How does one fill this sudden existential emptiness?

Martín–who had always been cautious with the frequency of his tobacco prayers–suddenly clung to them, in search for the Great Spirit to soothe his worries. This form of leaning upon the Great Spirit is similar to what Robert Orsi once explained as religion playing a functional role as a "sentimental educator": that is, "one of the primary mediators between historical circumstance and individual experience and response" (Orsi 2004, p.169).

However, to think that his spiritual affiliation with the Camino Rojo presents him a ready-to-use toolbox from which he can pull out a solution, implies a blindness for the complex struggles that follow in Martín's–or anybody's–life. It looks like Martín was not only trying to find a way to cope with the loss of (part of) his identity, but also, and just as importantly, Martín was challenged to rethink, and experiment with, his very relation to the part within himself that was trying to walk a spiritual path; for example, by going more often ceremonies often, by attending ceremonies of other people than he used to (of Gabriel), but also by joining the Curso de Milagros. In other words, the drastic changes in Martín's life did not only motivate him to use the Camino as a toolbox to overcome his problems, these changes actually drove him to completely reconsider his personal relation to this "toolbox" in the first place; that is, the Camino Rojo. Note that, if we would not have studied Martín's

daily life, this might not have come to the fore at all.[13]

Instead of regaining control via the Great Spirit, Martín found himself addicted to Him. He explicitly realized that doing a lot of tobacco prayers was in contrast with his principles as well as with his interests in the Camino Rojo; namely, the social and intellectual aspect of the Camino Rojo. Hence, Martín's existential uncertainty was not solved by his spiritual beliefs, in fact it was for a part manifested therein. To sum up, the above shows us that one's spiritual path does not always provide the comforting shoulder in times of trouble or the enlightening source in the dark: sometimes it *is* trouble and darkness.

Religion as a "Mode of Being"

What too often seems to be neglected in studies of lived religion, is the *intersubjective* relation between being religious and other aspects of life; that is, between being religious and other "modes of being." As Jackson and Piette put it: "we live *en passage* between different narratives and worldviews, as well as different modes of being" (Jackson and Piette 2015, p.9).[14] With the relational character of modes of being, I mean that modes of being are *inter-acting*. A mode of being religious is continuously (re-)negotiated in relation to a person's other ways of being at that particular moment.

Drawing his inspiration from Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, Michael Jackson explores the meaning of *intersubjectivity* in relation to life as it is lived in its totality (Jackson 1998). Among other properties, he sees intersubjectivity as something that not only takes place between human beings or between humans and other-than-human beings–such as animals or entities–it even takes place between an individual and his/her *ideas* (think for example of the expression "the *subject* of this research"). A person not only objectifies his/her ideas (both internally with relation to self-identity and externally through positioning self in relation to other), these ideas are subject to *change* as well. That is, they are not static–as merely being internalized or articulated–they can also be surpassed and altered (p.8).

[13]The fact that Martín himself did not remember the incident in which he was scared to become addicted, while he *could* explain it in retrospect, suggest that the everyday struggle in all its complexity, has been transformed into a chronological and sound story. (Cf. In *The Stories We Live by. Personal Myths and the Making of the Self*, Dan McAdams (1993) explains how this myth-making unfolds.) It would provide interesting insights if we could study, for example, the evolution of the meaning of certain crucial events in the lives of people. A focus on how people relate to something important that has happened to them, and on how this relation may change throughout time (and how, eventually, it may even be completely forgotten), could provide us with insights regarding identity-formation and storytelling. Which in turn could become a relevant niche within the overall study of everyday "life-as-lived".

[14]The term "modes of being" as used by Jackson and Piette builds upon the concept of "roles" by Goffmann (Jackson and Piette 2015, p.17-18). Elsewhere, Jackson (1998, p.10) also refers to William James' notion of "selves". However, I prefer using "modes of being" because I think that the being is still singular. Other scholars emphasizing the role of the intersubjective are Paul Stoller (2009) and Robert Orsi (2004).

Again, the example of Martín's alleged addiction illustrates the above clearly. (However, illustration can also be found in more concealed ways.) Martín experiences friction in the relation between "life-as-lived" and "life-as-imagined" (Van de Port in 1.1.3), which made him re-explore, re-negotiate and re-legitimize himself as an ex-partner, a jobless and house-less person with ideologies and political stances, but most importantly as a man with a spiritual path.[15] All these re-explorations seem to influence one-another. Consider the following examples that support this claim: Firstly, Martín started going to ceremonies of Temazcaleros whose views he had previously rejected. Secondly, Martín's interests in the social experience–which he used to prefer over spiritual experience–changed into an addiction to the Great Spirit. Lastly, the shift towards an emphasis on the spiritual, expressed in Martín's warning that "evil" spirits may try to enter the Tipi at the Búsqueda. Furthermore, I can only guess that his loss of "purpose"– being jobless, homeless, etcetera–was perhaps the cause of his more authoritative attitude towards me. To conclude, intersubjectivity is thus indeed not only a relation between human (and other-than-human) subjects, it is also a relationship *within* the individual. A person in the *singular*–that is, within one body–has a relationship with his different "modes of being" and with his/her "life-as-imagined".

[15]NB. I am not suggesting that this re-exploring is a fully conscious act. It might be set in motion automatically, without realization.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

The Camino Rojo is a spiritual movement that aims to recover the ancestral memory of indigenous America and whose followers focus on finding their spiritual path; that is, their connection to the Universe. In their search, Camino Rojo followers perform different kinds of ritual practices which originate in different indigenous groups of the American continent. Although each ritual has its own emphasis and function, all these rituals serve the same general aim: to help people be tuned in with, and open up for messages from, the spiritual realm (No-Tiempo). These ritual lessons, in turn, are meant to teach people be and stay tuned in during their daily lives (Tiempo); that is, to live everyday life as a ceremony. This thesis aimed to show how the ritual-time finds a place in the daily lives of Camino Rojo's followers.

In this final conclusion I will summarize the most important topics that recurred throughout this thesis and I will reflect upon how these themes relate and contribute to existing issues and debates in academic research. Furthermore, I will reflect upon the methods I used throughout this research. Lastly, I will address possible future research ideas that arose as I wrote this thesis.

7.1 Summary and Reflections

In the introduction of this thesis I posed a set of operative questions that were meant to serve as guidelines for this research (see section 1.1.2; they were concerned with the following three topics: a) the role of experience with respect to connectedness; b) the tension between the holistic worldview and modern life; and c) the role of authority in the Camino Rojo rituals.) The answers to these questions are reflected in five general themes that recurred throughout this thesis: i) the notion of **preobjective experiences** with respect to Camino Rojo's ritual-and everyday-time; ii) the **metonymic structure** that underlies Camino Rojo's interpretation of these experiences; iii) the roles that **trial-and-error** and **authority** play in the attempts for being tuned in; iv) the meaning of **holism** for Camino Rojo practitioners and the struggles they may

have with the appropriation of this way of perceiving the world; and v) the role **ritual framing** plays in the way certain experiences are charged with with **specialness**. I will treat these themes respectively.

7.1.1 Preobjective Experiences

Directly at the beginning of my fieldwork, Luna Lunita pointed out to me that to really understand the Camino Rojo, I had to go to a ritual and *live* it, for only through experience can we really know who we are (and where we come from and where we are going).

The general aim at Camino Rojo rituals is for people to learn how to be connected to the Great Spirit through **direct experience** (e.g., of sincere speech, bodily manifestations, or acting out of unconditional love). What makes an experience direct, is that it is not explicable through reason or logic.[1] For example, think of the emphasis on hearing with the heart rather than with the mind (section 2.1), or the unconditional nature of love **indicated through the statement** "they love you, [just] because!" (recall, 4.3). In other words–reflecting those of phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty–for the Camino Rojo direct experiences are understood to be **preobjective** (see 3.5): they bypass the domain of thought and modern cultural logic, which is one-to-one linked to the domain of the ego.[2]

For people who undergo these direct experiences, the inexplicability of their experiences is not problematic. In fact, this inexplicability is actually sought after (recall, 2.3). Being disappointed with modern reason and logic–including everything else that is associated with modern man's unjustly self-appropriated superiority over the world surrounding him–for the Camino Rojo the inexplicability of an experience indicates the realness of it. It confirms being connected to the realm of the Great Spirit, the Universe, Love. In short, inexplicability can imply that one is *tuned in*.

From his research among Candomblé practitioners in Brazil, Mattijs van de Port concludes that inexplicability can be seen as a form of self-legitimization: "Declaring words to be inadequate to grasp the really real of their religion, they seek to restore their authority" (Van de Port 2005, p.149). Equally, Camino Rojo practitioners find themselves not only countering modern society, but also in the midst of it. Emphasis on understanding through direct experience rather than mediated through thought may work as an important form of legitimization. After all, the inexplicability indeed (automatically) confirms their holistic attitude of being part of and *played by* the world.[3]

[1] In this context the term "logic" refers to a modern, "mentalistic" way of understanding the world around us and is opposed to a more intuitive and emotional attitude towards (or better said in Camino Rojo terms, connection with) the world we live in.

[2] NB: As has been said earlier, this does not mean that the ego is something bad in itself. It is an inevitable part of humanity that needs to be tamed (see Ch. 1, n20).

[3] At the same time, this legitimization and restoration of authority is itself formulated in

7.1.2 Metonymic Structures of Messages and their Implications

Being tuned in is valuable, because it paves the way for spiritual growth. In the spiritual realm, growth can be encouraged through messages that are supposed to help people walk their spiritual path. However, we saw that it is not clear how to recognize such a message and how to determine it's meaning.

In line with the idea that experiences of being tuned in are direct, spiritual messages are also transferred directly. For the Camino Rojo, this means that these messages are not theorized upon in order to find their symbolic meaning, rather they are taken as they are: as a direct sign. In other words, messages are not metaphorically perceived–which would imply that meaning still has to be ascribed to them–but metonymically instead: this means that their meaning is already determined.[4]

This **metonymic structure** arose in different ways in this thesis. For example, at the Tobacco ceremony, where Grandfather Tobacco responded to my prayer for being more connected to my body by making me cough heavily; people ensured me that this cough was not symbolizing Grandfather's agreement, it was an *actual* reply of Grandfather Tobacco who was telling me that indeed I was too disconnected. Thinking of Victor Turner's ideas about *Rites de Passage*, in chapter 3 I showed that a Temazcal space does not *represent* a uterus, instead it *is* the uterus of Mother Earth. (Or, better said, it becomes the uterus as a consequence of certain steps of ritual initiation that are made.) To participate in a Temazcal ceremony does not make people feel *as if* they are being reborn; they *are* being reborn. In short, meaning is not ascribed to the experiences, meaning is understood to be already *given*, and thus meaning can only be *found*.

One way of finding out what meaning a massage can have, became visible in the way Octavio relates to animals. Animals are "beings of light" that bring us messages from the Great Spirit by appearing to us or even by talking to us. In other words, the appearance of an animal does not symbolize a message, the animal actually comes to us to bring us a message. In the terminology of anthropologist Graham Harvey, one could say that for the Camino Rojo, animals have *personhood* (see 5.3): they are other-than-human persons who interact with human persons deliberately. According to the Camino Rojo, a person does not have the power to decide what a message means or whether the message is meant for him/her. That is beyond this person's power. The only thing that his/her can decide, is whether or not to pay attention.

To sum up, for the Camino Rojo symbolization does not exist; rituals,

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the very language and logic of modern society; namely, by addressing criteria that are valuable to modernity (i.e., explicability/understandability). Perhaps this is inevitable because people are themselves struggling to let go of their modern background.

[4]Recall, inspired by Karla, in chapter 3 it was shown how signs are opposite to symbols and are metonymic (see 3.5).

messages, or experiences do not (metaphorically) represent a meaning, but they actually carry one.They are *real* (not imagined) embodiments of rebirth or manifestations of the Great Spirit or Abuelo Tobacco. In a world where all beings are brothers and sisters, and thus equal, it is not strange to think that human beings do not have the ultimate say in the meaning of things.

Another important point that should be addressed in relation to the preceding is that, as was shown in chapter 2, mediacy (for example the use of an instrument to achieve a connection, like with rapé, lava-stones, or tobacco) and immediacy (the directness of this connection) are modes of experience that, in the case of the Camino Rojo, are not necessarily contradictory, they are not even complementary, but they can actually *mutually occur*. With respect to animals carrying messages and the tobacco carrying Abuelo Tobacco, for example, it becomes clear that mediation functions as a prominent, if not fundamental ground for the possibility to be *directly* tuned in with the Great Spirit. Two crucial points, namely the emphasis on sign and metonym over symbol and representation on the one hand, and on thought being omitted in experience on the other, indicate the non-paradoxical possibility of a mediated immediacy in Camino Rojo spirituality.[5]

7.1.3 Authority: Persons and Entities

Although everything in the universe is connected and one "merely" has to be tuned in to find out which lessons the Great Spirit has planned for you, in practice it is not so easy to become tuned in. Especially in everyday life (but also during ritual time) because in the midst of modernity and with the disadvantage of a distracting ego, it is difficult to know whether one is truly with the heart; the default position of the ego and rationality tend to rule out the access to the voice of the heart and direct experience. (As we have seen in this thesis, these aspects can make it difficult, e.g., to recognize sincerity in Tobacco prayer or even in prayer in general; to sing from the heart but not too loud; to breathe into the stones rather than one's neighbour's neck; or to know what to talk about and what not to talk about–such as air-conditioning.)

There are two assisting authorities that help to achieve connectedness. First of all, people can be steered or corrected by other people who are more experienced, such as the leaders of ceremonies. (Note that this type of correction mainly takes place in ceremonial settings.) These corrections are often not only made for the sake of the experimenting individual, but also in order to guard the peace within the group: people are usually in a physically and emotionally vulnerable position during ceremonies.

Apparently, despite the emphasized "horizontal structure" of the ceremonies and the equality between (experiences of) practitioners, there is still a seem-

[5]That mediacy and immediacy do not have to be mutually exclusive, supports the both/and approach as it was suggested by Michael Lambek (see 1.1.3).

ingly hierarchic structure in Camino Rojo's organization. In their analysis of spiritual practitioners, Anna Fedele and Kim Knibbe show how people who call themselves "spiritual, not religious," actively oppose to "religion" and it's "institutional" character. By contrasting themselves with religion and calling themselves egalitarian, "spiritual practitioners [...] integrate social, psychological and cultural theories into their discourse, attempting thereby to limit the 'polluting' effect of power on their spiritual practice and to justify the presence of those power structures relationships that are [...] present" (Fedele and Knibbe 2012, p.16). In the case of the Camino Rojo, it seems that this friction between hierarchy and horizontality is subverted in popular claims of equality (and the comparison with and dissent against the much more hierarchical management in Díaz Tekpankalli's organization in Mexico (see section 1.2.1)). Furthermore, it is also rectified through emphasis on *guides* who *help you* find your path over *shamans* who *tell you what to do* (recall, Ch. 3, n1).

The second way in which one can be corrected, is by entities like Abuelo Tobacco, or even directly by the Great Spirit. This form of correction can also take place during the Tiempo, where a person is left to him/herself and which makes it difficult to distinguish between sincerity and insincerity (for example, in the case of Octavio and his dog, and Martíns fear for addiction (see 5.2 and 6.3)). By adopting an assertive attitude towards possible messages, a space is created for corrections or confirmation from the Great Spirit. It is via these forms of, what Terhi Utrianen refers to as **ritual framing** (i.e., paying attention) that people try to be or remain tuned in during daily life (see 5.3). Although different forms of authority play an important role in the attempt for tuned-inness, this is not guaranteed as long as the ego is there as well (and it will always be there). For this reason, being tuned in is a (never-ending) process of **trial and error**.

7.1.4 Between Modernity and Holism in Daily Life

The Camino Rojo acknowledges a holistic worldview: all living beings are connected with one-another as children of Mother Earth and Father Sun (recall, 1.2.1). Fundamental to this cosmological principle is the emphasis on experience over thought, on sign over symbol, and on "being" over "having". As human beings we should learn to experience how we are *part of* the universe rather than trying to have *control over* it (the latter being an anthropocentric value that is typical for modern culture). In their spiritual search for holism, Camino Rojo practitioners strive to feel one with the world: they want to harmonize with it.

The Búsqueda de Visión can be seen as the ultimate practice to achieve this harmony, for during this ceremonial retreat, notions of ritual-time and everyday life–or of "spiritual" and "profane"–are merged; they become one and the same. However, the harmony that is pursued during ritual time is supposed to serve the ultimate goal of finding this harmony in everyday life. This idea is

reflected in the following statements: "The most important ceremony of all, is the ceremony of daily life," and "[i]f we say that every day is a ceremony, then there are no moments that are more sacred, nor less" (recall, 1.1.2). Obtaining this harmony is challenging, because against the distracting background of modern culture, in which human beings tend to distance themselves from the world of which they are part, a troublesome entanglement may emerge between a person's different modes of being (some of which are of a more holistic and others of a more modern kind).[6]

Through a thick description of everyday life of Martín, it became clear how different **modes of being** inspired by different forms of engagement with the world, compete with one-another. As a reaction to the breakup, Martín's spiritual quest for a holistic approach conflicted with a more modern, egocentric, mode of being; namely the default mode inspired by the modernist worldview from which Martín intended to break loose. In other words, Martín's affiliation to the Camino Rojo was not only what Robert Orsi calls a **spiritual educator** to cope with difficult times, it could also become a source of disturbance itself; for example when it became (or threatens to become) an "addiction". The role of religion and ritual practice within a person's life may thus shift with its circumstances. Again, as we saw in the cases of Martín and Octavio, to be tuned in turns out to be a continues process of trial and error, re-exploring, re-evaluating.

* * *

In summary, through an interpretative description of the dynamics between ritual-time and daily life for Camino Rojo practitioners, I showed how spiritual experience is produced through social and ritual action, and how it is governed by modes of authentication. For Camino Rojo practitioners, to be and remain tuned in is a continuous process of trial and error. People are challenged to take rituals, spiritual experiences and animal messages as *real* and not as symbolic. However, seeing things this way not only in ritual-time but also in everyday life, takes place against a distracting background of a modern culture in which human beings are understood to be distanced from (or superior to) rather than part of nature. All in all, to make everyday life a ceremony may be the goal, but it is also a *path*. A path of trial-and-error that takes effort not to loose and effort to find back once lost.

7.1.5 On Spiritual and Profane: Concluding Remarks

In the midst of all conflicting modes of being, it is difficult to achieve and recognize connectedness, look for answers, and distinguish what experiences

[6]Note that this entanglement also occurs in ritual time, as has already been addressed in the previous sections. Nevertheless, the emphasis is presently on making *everyday life* like a ceremony.

or practices to pay attention to. Somewhere in-between buying firewood and praying over a glass of water lies the twilight-zone of experiences that seem *neither plainly sacred nor profane*. This grey area is under continuous alteration and strongly dependent on context. I have tried to bring this grey-area to the surface in a descriptive way, by showing how experience is produced and governed through **ritual framing**. In Part II it became clear how practices and experiences–such as drinking water or buying firewood–can be charged with specialness.

These continuous shifts between, or rather merging of, the everyday and the spiritual, which can be encountered in both everyday life and in ritual-time, have important implications for the study of religion: They remind us of how valuable it is to focus more on contextual change and the grey area *between* what is "profane" and what is "spiritual," rather to than fixate those domains as two radically distinct categories. After all, experiences are not always clearly, or *only*, special or profane; they often tend to encompass parts of both worlds and–depending on how one pays attention to them–their specialness may be illuminated or obscured.

As I already brought up in the introduction of this thesis, Ann Taves introduces the concept *experiences deemed special* to replace a whole variety of "second-order terms" for experiences are "religious," "spiritual," "extraordinary," or "unifying" (see 1.1.3). I believe that this dynamic, and often overlapping, relationship between what is sacred and profane, actually confirms the value of using the term **deemed special** based on an *additional* ground. Namely, the term *(deemed) special* highlights vagueness and context dependence and is therefore less occupied with confirming a dichotomous distinction between the domains of the "spiritual" and the "profane". This makes the term more inclusive to those experiences that can be found somewhere in-between.

In relation to the above, researchers of contemporary religious and spiritual movements in modern Western society have shown that there is a (general) trend in the desire to move away from modern, *disenchanted* life, and to bring the sacred back into the depths of the everyday.[7] Especially for those groups that try to interfere with and modify the role their modern cultural background plays in finding their spiritual path, a study of everyday life could turn out to be fruitful. In agreement with Terhi Utriainen, I also wish to advocate that scholars should pay attention to "the skills, practices and operations by which people relate to and adjust the religious presence to other (more 'secular') social realities, which they equally participate in and which they cannot, or do not want to, completely ignore"(Utriainen, forthcoming, 6). Such an approach is essential in order to better understand the complexity of the spiritual and

[7]Cf., e.g., Jane Bennett (2016) Richard Jenkins (2000), Christopher Partridge Partridge (2004/2005), Kocku Von Stuckrad (2002). Furthermore, Terhi Utriainen (forthcoming) gives a very thorough description of how angel practitioners in Finland struggle with the same kind of clash between a modern and a holistic world, as does the Camino Rojo.

everyday lived realities in which people may be confronted with (internally) competing worldviews and ontologies.

7.2 Methodological Reflections

With respect to the methodological choices I have made and the consequences these had for this research, certain important methodological issues should be addressed. These issues concern both fruitful unexpected outcomes of this research, as well as limitations to it. By reflecting upon the most important methodological choices, I wish to invite other researchers to relate to these as well.

7.2.1 Studying Everyday Life

Living with a Camino Rojo family has opened a new world for me that would otherwise have remained unexplored; it is one thing to study how people carry out ritual performances (in ceremonies or even on a daily basis), it is another thing to see how these ritual performances are embedded in a person's everyday life *as a whole*.

Many scholars in the fields of anthropology or sociology of religion and lived religion have plead for a focus not only upon beliefs, experiences, and performances in an isolated religious context, but also on the way religion is embedded in life as a whole (e.g., see Ammerman 2006; Harvey 2014). Especially in the field of existential anthropology, scholars have emphasized the importance to focus on the everyday dynamics between the ordinary and the extraordinary, between the social and the personal, between what people say and what people do (recall, 1.1.3).[8] These existential anthropologists try to show that people are reflective beings; they are storytellers who–in order to make life comprehensible and bearable–tend to tide up the loose ends, make straight what is bend, and clear up all that is foggy. However, although the above mentioned scholars may have extensively (and very convincingly) theorized about the importance to study religion as it is embedded in everyday life, so far such research has only focused on those aspects of everyday life that directly involve people's religious practices and beliefs, not on everyday life in the general, more broad sense.[9]

What distinguishes the present study of the Camino Rojo from other studies on everyday lived religion, is that it does not only look at concrete ritual actions people may perform or spiritual experiences they may have, it also actually addresses daily life *as a whole*. As mentioned in the previous subsection

[8] See also: Jackson (2012), (2009); Jackson and Piette (2015); Ingold (2011); Van de Port (2011).

[9] There are many inspiring studies that focus on people's religious everyday lives, see for example Luhrmann (2012), Orsi (2004); also, see Ammerman (2006) for a broad collection of studies.

on holism and modernity, this thesis has shown that focusing upon life-as-lived in its entirety can help to gain better insight in the way people deal with and relate to their spiritual mode of being. After all, this relationship does not stop or is not paused as soon as a spiritual performance or experience has ended.

Of course, it may not be easy for a researcher to come in a position in which he/she can share his/her everyday live with his/her informants. Nevertheless, this does not detract from the added value such a situation would have for the research in question. In order to provide some basic guidance for the study of (religious life as embedded in) everyday life as a whole, particular questions that would be worth paying attention to are the following:[10]

· What does the person's everyday life look like in terms of routines and customs?
· What issues or questions occupy the person?
· Which beings (people or other) does the person regularly spend time with? And why is this the case?
· Which persons, objects, routines, questions and/or customs are currently of particular importance to the person (and why)?
· How does the person think about life (what are his/her ideals, values, convictions, doubts) and how/what does the person think of his/her past and the future?
· Did any (surprising/unexpected) event occur in the person's life? Did this confuse him/her? What did/does the person do in response to this event?
· When and on what grounds does the person decide to get involved in (religious) ritual activities?
· Where do people come from, where do they go (back to) before and after such an activity?
· Where do people come from, where do they go (back to) before and after such an activity?
· What do they bring to a ritual performance and what do they bring back (or leave behind)?
· In what kinds of events does the person religious meaning?
· How and when can something become sacred that was profane before (or vice versa)?

7.2.2 Radical Induction

I went to Uruguay without having a specific research topic in mind. Instead, the method of radical induction was supposed to lead me to the issues or themes that played the most prominent role in the life of Camino Rojo practitioners themselves (recall, 1.1.3). This radical induction and the four paramount val-

[10]Note that those questions must be understood as open questions and thus are supposed to act as triggers for thickly described answers.

ues and methods that underscore this approach (i.e., intersubjectivity, radical empiricism, bracketing, both/and approach) have fundamentally contributed to the way this research has developed and was written-up.

Through engaging with the Camino Rojo participants in an **intersubjective**–that is, a very personal–way and by **bracketing** away the judgements that belong to my own cultural background, I was able to take the reality of the Camino Rojo and its followers as a *true* reality. As a consequence, the relationships I had with people of the Camino Rojo were fundamentally based on equality and trust, and I could live Camino Rojo reality in a very realistic, profound and vivid way. I gained insights and experiences that I would not have had, had I drawn a more strict line between my researching-self and my private-self. This especially came to the fore in the following experiences: living with a Camino Rojo (light) family, the close "father-daughter" relationship that emerged between myself and Lucas and which led me to become his apoyo, and the very intense experience I had during the Temazcal-ceremony of being caressed by all the women after expressing my personal struggles and fears.

Furthermore, **radical empiricism** helped me to resist the idea that thoughts (and words) should capture my own and other people's experiences as they appeared–that is, were presented–to me. This created space for a **both/and** approach to things that seemed contradicting, for I did not feel the urge to resolve or comprehend these contradictions. In this way, experience did not become subordinate to theorizing about it.[11]

Lastly, the methods of **bracketing** and **methodological ludism** have led me to understand one of the–or perhaps *the*–most fundamental aspects of Camino Rojo spirituality; it created an opening for me to realize, respect *and* accept that as human beings, we share our world and our experiences with all kinds of other-than-human beings with whom we are connected.

7.2.3 A (One) Man Show

There are two last remarks I would like to make that concern the methodology applied in this research. Firstly, in terms of in-depth ethnographic data about the everyday lives of Camino Rojo participants, I have only one individual case to draw from: Martín. This implies that the last chapter of this thesis–and to some extent also the before last–by no means represents *the* life of Camino Rojo participants *in general*. Although I was not looking for general representations–one might even argue that this is not possible at all–but in fact for concrete examples, more variety in resources might have been beneficial. Therefore, in future research it would be interesting to follow the lives of several individuals in the same intense way as I did in this research. However, this would, of course, have significant implications for the length of the research.

[11] What is more, not theorizing about experiences corresponds with what the Camino Rojo stands for and therefore, it is the most appropriate attitude.

Secondly, although it has never been my intention, my group of informants consists chiefly of male informants. During my fieldwork, I realized that the people with who I connected most easily, were men. In some way or another, it seemed that, at least for me, women were both more difficult to approach and took more time to open up to me. Nevertheless, I believe that my bias towards male-informants has not been so strong that it has significantly disturbed the outcomes of this research. Especially, since I focused on one informant in particular.[12] (As I said, my intention was not to write about the daily life of Camino Rojo followers *in general*–which *would* have required a representative set of examples–but rather to present an example of what everyday life *could* look like.)

7.3 Future Research

Already during my fieldwork, but especially during the analysis of my data, I came across many interesting topics worth investigating. Unfortunately, the scope of the present project did not allow for their inclusion. These topics were inspired by the Camino Rojo as a research subject, as well as related to central anthropological themes already occurring in this thesis.

7.3.1 Medicine Ceremonies

Apart from the three rituals that form the body of Part I of this thesis, there is one more ritual that I have participated in during my fieldwork with the Camino Rojo: the *Ceremonia Medicina* (Medicine Ceremony). Medicine Ceremonies are ceremonies in which brews made of *plantas de poder* (power plants) like Ayahuasca are consumed.[13] According to the Camino Rojo, these power plants—also referred to as "master plants," "teacher plants," or "sacred plants"–contain the power to give people access to the Universal knowledge these people need to walk their spiritual path. These medicine plants "expand the limit of your identity," as Alejandro Spangenberg puts it (Spangenberg 2016). In academic research on medicine ceremonies, the effect of medicine plants is often

[12]However, an interesting theme I encountered during my research that does explicitly involve a particular focus on sexuality and gender, is the popularity of femininity and masculinity as two different spiritual forces. At the Camino Rojo, the differences between the feminine and the masculine are very explicitly articulated: they are understood as complementary energies that are both present in each individual. Therefore, in a society in which feminine qualities are suppressed, people of the Camino Rojo emphasize, it is the task for both women *and* men to rediscover their masculine and their feminine sides. Subsequently, each individual needs to rediscover the balance between these two sides within him or herself. Although there was no space to integrate this topic into my current research, it would be interesting to carry out a follow-up study that elaborates on this phenomenon.

[13]At Camino Rojo's different kinds of medicine plants are used. The most popular of them all, Ayahuasca, also known as "the vine of the dead/souls/ancestors" (Znamenski 2007, 184). Cf. Apud (2015).

described as "hallucinogenic" or provoking "altered states of consciousness" (e.g., see Apud 2015; Shanon 2002; Horvath, Szabo and Szummer 2014).[14]

There are several reasons why I did not include Medicine Ceremonies to this thesis. Apart from limits to the scope of this thesis, I reasoned that without any additional substances, the other three ceremonies were already "consciousness altering" enough (especially to write about). Furthermore, whereas so much is already written on all kinds of spiritual movements that perform Ayahuasca ceremonies (among which Camino Rojo is only one among many), hardly anything is published about the other ceremonies of the Camino Rojo. Besides, not all participants (especially not the two key figures of this thesis Octavio and Martin) have been equally elaborative about Medicine Ceremonies. This in itself is an interesting finding, especially considering the fact that in all kinds of academic disciplines and in modern society in general, the topic of Ayahuasca ceremonies seems to be extremely popular.[15]

However, what I find particularly puzzling with respect to this "Ayahuasca-hype" in academic research, is why so little attention has been paid to the phenomenological experience of the ayahuasca ritual *in its entirety*.[16] Even within the social sciences and humanities, like anthropology, religious studies and sociology, where social dynamics and ritual performances are important sources of information, researchers of Ayahuasca ceremonies have directed their attention to many things other than to the phenomenology of the *ritual experience* (that is, including the intersubjective relationships with and between: people, things, entities, bodies, consciousness(es), time, space, and so on). I feel the need to contribute to the existing literature by providing a focus that is not only inward but also outwardly oriented. Therefore, I am currently writing an individual paper in which, through a panoramic description of a medicine ceremony in its experiential fullness, I show how the experiences people have at medicine ceremonies are embedded in and influenced by all kinds of (external or extra-human) factors.

[14] For a thorough description of the phenomenology of those altered states of consciousness see Shanon (2002).

[15] For more about this "globalising" popularity, see the following newspaper articles: Hill (2016) and Levy (2016).

[16] Scholars usually concentrated on: (a phenomenological account of) individual "spiritual" or "consciousness altering" experiences (Shanon 2002; Lewis 2008); the philosophical and/or theoretical and/or cultural foundations and ideas that underlie traditional use of Ayahuasca (Seddon 2014; Harner 1980; Taussig 1987); the origins of and modernization of Ayahuasca ceremonies (sometimes even politicized by opposing "traditional' Ayahuasca customs to modern western "drug tourism") (Fotiou 2010, 2016; DeRios 1994); providing functional descriptions of what Ayahuasca is used for (Fotiou 2012; Talin and Sanabria 2017); or a combination of those.

7.3.2 Political Ontology and the Ontological Turn

In recent years, a new approach to anthropology emerged that is currently receiving close review: the ontological turn.[17] Advocates emphasize the importance for anthropologists to open up for the possibility of multiple ontologies and to be more critical to the meaning of the concept "culture". They argue that modern ontology–i.e., the modern assumptions (or "story") about "what exists"–assumes a radical distinction between on the one hand "nature" as an autonomous reality "out there" and on the other hand "culture" as a way through which this reality can be "represented" (Blaser 2013). By making this radical distinction between *out there* and *representation*, modern ontology recognizes that there exists a multitude of cultural representations that is relative to only one version of the world out there.

The proponents of the ontological turn object against this modern ontology–and especially those anthropologists who posit it–because in studying other groups of people as having other "cultures," one would not be able to fully recognize the possibility that in the reality of these people, a distinction between "nature" and "culture" may not exist in the first place; instead, by not recognizing this possibility, one is imposing his/her ontology on other people's realities. In other words, by claiming the relative character of "culture," one undermines the possibility that this relativity does not exist.

According to Mario Blaser (2013), by acknowledging the relativity of cultures and the relative capacities cultures have to represent this unique reality out there, modernity puts itself in a privileged position: it claims to have neutral knowledge; that is, the knowledge of relativity. Knowledge, which other cultures that do not make this alleged distinction between nature and culture, do not have. Consequently, the modern approach assumes an *all-encompassing* ontology that fully acknowledges and comprehends the existence of other "cultures," therefore subordinating all of them under a single modern ontology.

As a response to this all-encompassing tendency of the modern reality and based on their own field-experiences, proponents of the ontological turn advocate the possibility of multiple ontologies. (A.o., those field-experiences involving Cuban Ifá diviners; Amazonian cosmology; and Yshiro people in Paraguay.)[18]

In his own study of non-modern indigenous peoples in Latin America, Blaser detected various examples of ontological conflicts: first of all, between the non-modern ontology of the indigenous people and the modern ontology

[17] Often named scholars in this field are Martin Holbraad, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro and–the most important source of philosophical inspiration behind the turn–Bruno Latour. For a good and clear description of this ontological turn, see Paolo Heywood (2017).

[18] Respectively: Martin Holbraad (2012); and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1998)–as referred to in Blaser (2013) and Heywood (2017)–and Blaser (2010), referred to in Blaser (2013). In fact, most research is situated in Latin America and/or involves indigenous people; this is in itself a scope worth exceeding.

of the general society in which these peoples were located, but also with respect to the modern ontology of some cultural anthropologists who studied those non-modern people (and cannot let go of their own modern logic in their attempt to understand these non-modern people).[19] From his research Blaser concludes that, as these confrontations between modern and non-modern ontologies show us, the idea of an all-encompassing modern ontology is under attack.[20] There is an apparent "clash of ontologies" and therefore it is the task of the anthropologist to seriously open up for the possibility of more than just one ontology.

* * *

When I started my research, I was not sure about what the advocates of the ontological turn were trying to tell. However, living among the Camino Rojo has helped me to better understand what it may mean to acknowledge the possibility of multiple ontologies. In fact, through this research I might have (unintentionally) taken a step in the direction of opening up for the possibility of multiple ontologies. (Whether or not I will eventually embark on the ontological (space)ship myself is something of which I am not so sure yet.)

If we look at the Camino Rojo, we see not only that the modern ontology (i.e., the modern story of "what is," based on a nature/culture distinction) is indeed being attacked; what we also see, is that an *opening* has been created for people of the Camino Rojo to accept the possibility of another, non-modern, ontology. Note that with the above I do not want to presume–that is, state with certainty–that the people of the Camino Rojo are (or are not) engaged to two different ontologies, for such a claim can presently not (yet) be verified. But then again, neither am I in the position to say that their desire for a more holistic engagement with the world is a typical feature of modernity or modern ontology (or of modern spiritual movements, for that matter). With respect to the people of the Camino Rojo, the emphasis on sign over symbol and reality over imagination *might suggest* that, indeed, these people may be (on their way to) a different, non-modern ontology. One may argue that, through the practice of *directing attention*, Camino Rojo followers are learning to live with another ontology.

[19] To illustrate such a confrontation in ontologies, Blaser gives an example of a conflict in Canada that attracted attention worldwide (p.548). There was a young killer whale that a group of environmentalists wanted to bring back to its pack, while the Mowachat/Muchalaht First Nation insisted that the whale should stay because it was the spirit of their deceased chief who desired to stay with his people. This conflict, Blaser emphasises, is not one being two interpretations of an animal. It is a conflict over whether there may be more realities than only that of the "animal" of scientific/modern ontology.

[20] Note that "non-modern" does not (necessarily) refer to the past; it is not a synonym for traditional, or old. Instead, with the term non-modern, Blaser simply means *other than modern*, which in this case implies the engagement with a world that is different from the modern world and its nature/culture distinction. I.e., "the attribution of modernness would go hand in hand with specific practices and not with a specific group" (p.553).

I would like to suggest two focus points for future research. First of all, it would be interesting to pay more attention to the Camino Rojo and other spiritual movements that originated within (and out of criticism to) a modern context. In doing so, paying attention to the possibility of multiple, clashing, ontologies, can shed new light to our understanding of the Camino Rojo movement and of other spiritual movements–such as the angel practitioners in Finland studied by Terhi Utriainen (forthcoming); the practitioners of witchcraft in England studied by Tanja Luhrmann (1991); or the Saint Mary Magdalene pilgrims who offer menstrual blood to Mother Earth, studied by Anna Fedele (2014).[21] It should be taken into account, that the possibility that those movements have *emerged* from modernity and as a reaction to modern ontology, does not necessarily mean that those movements will *remain* encompassed by a modern ontology. A focus on the possibility of clashing ontologies can both shed new light on existing studies, and suggest alternative perspectives for current or future research onspirituality, new age, new religious movements, re-enchantment, "modern" western shamanism, etc. [22]

Secondly, it would be interesting to pay attention to non-human beings as agents and, consequently, as informants. The ontological turn challenges anthropologists to be aware of the possibility that–to give an example relating to the Camino Rojo–a conversation with fire is, in another world, not a symbolic interpretation of crisping sounds, flickering flames, glowing embers, and figurative plumes of smoke. Differently put, it is not a metaphorical approach to profane, soul-less, and otherwise perfectly scientifically describable phenomena produced by the chemical reaction between oxygen and fuel. Rather, it is a *real* conversation with fire: it is a conversation between two real and intentional beings.[23]

For an anthropologist, to open up for the reality of other-than-human beings–i.e., to take an ontological turn–implies that besides a subject of study, those beings could be seen as possible agents with whom one can interact and engage. That is, they could be considered as informants from *whom* one can learn. What would such a study look like with respect to the Camino Rojo? (For now I can only finish with some suggestions; future research would necessitate the development of proper methodological guidelines.) A study could be carried out of the world of, e.g., the Great Spirit, Grandmother Ayahuasca, or Grandfather Fire, and the way this being relates to other beings (such as

[21] As I said, most of the important scholars in the ontological turn perform their research among indigenous people and/or in Latin America. Their subjects of study usually live rather "parallel" to (and sometimes clashing with) modern Western society. So far, proper attempts to study multiple ontologies *within* modern (Western) societies and groups of people, have hardly been made. One exception to this is Amy Whitehead's study of a Catholic cult of the Virgin Mary in Andalusia, Spain forthcoming.

[22] Compare, for example, with Heelas et al. (2005), Partridge (2004/2005), Fedele and Knibbe (2012) and Von Stuckrad (2002), and others.

[23] Recall that with conversation I mean communication: conversations do not necessarily involve speech or even words (section 5.2).

humans). In the holistic world of the Camino Rojo, in which not only humans but also other-than-human persons operate, it may be fruitful to pay attention to the way these beings act and "reason".[24]

Let us assume that I would include the reality of Abuela Ayahuasca in my research. What turn would such a research take? As an entity that goes beyond words, how can write about Her? Should I use other forms of documentation (e.g., video or audio)? Would I need to be able to communicate with Her? And if so, how would I do that? Would I need help of other people who are used to communicating with Her, so they can be my "human" or "modern" interpreter?And if so, am I not, still, documenting humans rather than on an other-than-human being? Of course, all these questions remain unanswered until one tries. Accordingly, carrying out an ethnographic research that concentrates on an other-than-human being might be worth the attempt. Even if it were only for the sake of experiment; i.e., determining the feasibility of such an undertaking and stretching the borders of anthropological research methods. After all, "[o]f course, the pluriverse is a heuristic proposition, a foundationless foundational claim, which in the context of the previous discussion, means that it is an *experiment* on bringing itself into being" (p.552 Blaser 2013, emphasis mine).

In my opinion, it is utterly important for anthropologists to be *truly* open for the possibility of realities other than one's own.This is not just the best way to a more holistic representation of different worlds including those of other–different–people, it also creates a space for accepting one's limitations. The interpretation of the anthropologist is not all-encompassing or neutral; it is limited by virtue of its own particular ontology. Hence, a humble anthropological account starts with the acknowledgement of its limitations: acknowledging that one was unable to converse with Grandfather Fire.

* * *

[24]Referring to their proper way of reasoning–i.e., conversing, non-verbal and verbal interaction–not to human reasoning in particular.

Epilogue - On Becoming Enchanted

One afternoon in early August, 2016, when I was in rural France for my summer vacation with friends, I decided to go for a run and explore the surroundings. The previous days, I had already seen a lot of birds of prey (falcons, hawks, buzzards). Initially I was thus more excited than surprised by the various birds I saw hovering over the rural fields. When, all of a sudden, I stepped on a big and beautiful primary feather of a hawk. Half a year ago I would probably have said to myself: "What a beautiful feather, how amazing that this is such an important instrument for a bird to fly with. What bird would it be of?" But this time, all I thought was: "Wow, a feather of a bird of prey, of what bird would it be? I should figure this out because there is definitely a certain message coming from that bird." My thoughts continued: "After all the birds of prey that I had already seen flying over my head these last couple of minutes, finding this feather can not be a coincidence any more."

As I picked up the feather and looked at it, I was aware that my coping with finding this feather had completely changed from what it used to be before my trip to Uruguay. I felt confused by the realization that I still had not yet fully distanced myself a from what I learned at the Camino Rojo. Of course it was a good practice to wonder what the people of Camino Rojo would think, but I felt like I did not control this inquisitive attitude any more. In reflecting upon my reaction, I could not distinguish whether I was wondering because they would, or because I wanted to find out about an underlying spiritual message. This, in turn, made me doubt the fundamental motivations behind my research: Was I doing this research for my anthropological passion, or for my own (spiritual?) interest?

Looking back at this moment of doubt, I realize that for me, being an anthropologist does not only mean excitement about trying to see the world through the eyes of others. It means much more than that. It means experimenting with my own perception; letting my world be turned upside down while looking for personal answers, meaning, and a purpose.

Although the anthropology of religious experience itself is a highly popular

and continuously re-created and re-negotiated field, the role that the relationships between researcher and participants, and between researcher and his/her own ('special') field-experiences, can play in the production of anthropological research, is in my opinion underexposed. A researcher with an *enchanted*, or–"worse" even–a *theistic* way of relating with his/her field of study, is for most scholars, even for most anthropologists, still one step too far. The value of maintaining "neutrality" and "objectivity" is still dominant in ethnographic studies of religious experience.

However, in the midst of a "post-secular" or "reenchanting" society, an important step that should be taken–by us anthropologists first and foremost–is to let go of our *own* bias against religiously affiliated researchers. We should re-evaluate the role that "religious" (or "special" or "enchanted") affiliation of the researcher may play in ethnographic research. There is no reason to presume that religious or spiritual affiliation, or enchantment, with the subject of study, will obstruct the researcher from his/her ability of doing good research: The quality of a researcher is determined by his or her sincere and open approach to the subject of study, not by his or her personal (dis-)engagement or religious affiliation with it. In fact, I am certain that a researcher writing about his/her personal religious experiences, can improve the worth of ethnographic writing. Through *enchantment* of the researcher, space can be re-created for confusion, mystery and for not-knowing. This way, in ethnographic writing, the subject is no longer only brought closer to the reader, the reader is also pulled out of his/her comfort zone and drawn closer to the subject.

All in all, whether theist, enchanted, agnostic or atheist, no approach in anthropology can be *intrinsically* worse or better than the other. At most, they may each lead to different kinds of insights (insights which, in turn, can be aspired for on the basis of different values): "Theism" in anthropological research most probably leads to a better understanding of the people of the field; the researcher can relate on a profound level to what he/she experiences and to what his/her informants share with him/her. An "atheist" anthropologist would (most probably) better be able to translate his/her findings to his/her public, because: both parties are initially unfamiliar with the research object, tend to (usually) speak the same or a similar language, tend to have a similar cultural background. Although a "methodologically ludic" or "agnostic" approach may be something that stands in-between and may therefore be a very fruitful "golden mean," just like the others, this approach too has its own limitations. An interesting method I would like to see developed in the future of anthropology, is a collaborative ethnographic study by an "insider" anthropologist and "outsider" anthropologist, or a cooperative study by anthropologist and a "local" (in case this is possible).

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