

CHAPTER FOUR

"The Siona Hallucinogenic Ritual: It's Meaning and Power"

E. Jean Langdon
Cedar Crest College

ABSTRACT

Using Geertz's definition of religion, the paper explores the hallucinogenic ritual of the Siona Indians as a dramatic symbolic presentation of the key conceptions of Siona world view. It also analyzes the use of hallucinogens as a powerful method fusing the imagined and common-sense realities and deeply affecting daily life and behavior.

"Beware of snakes and piranha," I was warned by well meaning relatives and friends as I set off to live with the Siona Indians of the Amazon Basin. Arriving there, I received an entirely different set of warnings, "Don't go out at night, the spirits are out; don't go near the silk cotton tree or you will get ill; don't go in that clearing in the jungle, for those spirits don't like women." I found that the Siona live with feelings of awe and fear of the jungle, but that their fears do not correspond with mine at all. I feared getting lost, lacking the knowledge of the jungle paths. They feared being captured by the spirits, which cause them to get lost. I feared snakes. They feared the shaman who sent the snake to bit. I feared the jaguars; they feared the shamans who were jaguars. I feared the strength of the river current and the electric eels. They feared the river people who eat your soul and cause illness. Our conceptions of the order of the world differed radically, and we travelled in very different jungles that were colored by our different perceptions.

In this paper I shall explore the process by which the Siona conception of order works to color every day life. Clifford Geertz's model of religion as a cultural system will be used.² His definition of religion provides a useful way of looking at Siona religion, for it focuses upon religion as a symbolic system and the way in which the symbolic system fuses religious conceptions and everyday life. Three aspects of Geertz's formulation will be explored here. First, the key conceptions that formulate Siona cosmic order will be outlined. Second, their hallucinogenic rituals will be

examined in an effort to delineate how the ritual utilizes symbolic vehicles of this world view in particularly powerful ways to unite the imagined and common sense realities. Finally, the paper will examine how deeply these conceptions go in providing a template for action in the secular world. Religion pervades all aspects of the Siona's lives, and it is hoped that this study of the hallucinogenic ritual may give particular insight into the nature of its power in their lives.

Religion as a Cultural System:

As defined by Geertz, "... a religion is:

(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.³

This definition of religion holds within it the double aspect of religion that accounts for its power in human life. It is both a model of reality and a model for reality. On the one hand, religion is an attempt to "conserve the fund of general meanings in terms of which each individual interprets his experiences and organizes his conduct."⁴ These meanings are stored in symbols and "are felt somehow to sum up, for those for whom they are resonant, what is known about the way the world is, the quality of the emotional life it supports, and the way one ought to behave while in it."⁵ We find in religion a cluster of symbols that are woven into an ordered whole. This cluster formulates the general order of existence for a culture. On the other hand, the conceptions of the universe conveyed by this symbolic system are

given a strong sense of reality. Powerful and pervasive moods and motivations are induced in men and guide their activities in the world. Thus, religion shapes reality as well as provides a model of it. The model of reality it presents appears so real that it is used for a plan of action.

Ritual plays a key role in religion's ability to create the "aura of factuality." It motivates men to behave as if the conceptions of general order are the true reality both within religious and secular behavior. In ritual, the world as it is imagined and the world as it is lived become fused in one set of symbolic forms. Both the dispositional and conceptual aspects of religious life converge for the believer in a "cultural performance." This convergence of ethos and world view in the ritual provides the authoritative experience which justifies the conceptual order and induces one to behave accordingly. The "moods and motivations induced by religious practice seem themselves supremely practical, the only sensible ones to adopt, given the way things 'really' are."⁶ Thus, the individual leaves the ritual and returns to the common sense world changed by the experience, and in turn, the common sense world is changed.

The Imagined World:

The Siona Indians live in the dense rain forests of the Northwest Amazon Basin. Most of their settlements are scattered along large tributaries of the Amazon River in Southern Colombia and Northern Ecuador, including the Putumayo

and the Aguarico Rivers. Although the recent development of oil resources has greatly influenced the group along the Putumayo, the Siona way of life has not disappeared. Men still hunt and fish for their major source of protein. Both sexes carry on slash and burn agriculture, growing traditional crops for home consumption as well as new cash crops. In particular, the Siona continue to orient to a universe whose formulation of order has been carried down from their ancestors.

The Siona often describe their universe as being composed of two sides. One side, called "this side," is the reality that we all perceive through our ordinary senses: the people, their gardens, homes, animals, and plants; the river and its fish; and the jungle and its animals. "The other side" is one of the supernatural forces and realms that cannot be seen by ordinary men and women. It consists of a world of five ascending levels, each one inhabited by various classes of supernatural beings. There is a replication on each level, for all the beings live a life similar to that which we see in "this side." The beings or spirits have houses, clothing, foods, furniture, and utensils similar to those of the Siona. The Siona believe that their own customs and material goods have been copies from their spirits. Some of them live in clan-like groups, consisting of the head spirit and his followers. The Sun is surrounded by red dancing women and young men who help guide his motor canoe that travels across the sky river every day. The Thunder Being has people who beat his drums and drink chicha, the native beer, with him. On this side, when it thunders and rains,

the Siona know that they are partying with their drums and chicha. The thunder we hear is the beating of their drums and the rain is the chicha that they are spilling.

The other side of reality is of fundamental interest to the Siona, for all aspects of existence in ordinary reality are influenced by these forces and their activities. Every location, plant, and animal has a corresponding spirit in the "other side," and the activities of the spirits affect the events in this side. The supernatural forces cause the world and man to function normally. They determine good weather and the changing of the seasons for crops, the appearance of game animals for hunters to shoot, and the proper growth process expected of humans. They may also disrupt the normal routine and present dangers to the security of life. Disruptions generally occur as physical sickness, but they may be the occurrence of other dangerous abnormalities, such as food scarcities, deviant behavior, floods, and earthquakes. Hence, to live and prosper in this world, to ensure one's security, and to counteract dangers, it is necessary to learn how to live with and influence these ultimate forces. The shamans are the individuals with the knowledge and ability to enter at will the other side and to deal with the beings there. They have gained the knowledge and power to do so through frequent controlled ingestion of the hallucinogen Banisteriopsis, called uko in Siona, and widely known in ethnographical works as yage or ayahuasca.⁷

Traditionally the shaman is both a religious and political leader, although on the Putumayo there is no longer anyone considered knowledgeable enough or will-

ing to assume the role. As the religious leader, the shaman leads the communal hallucinogenic rituals that are held weekly. Under his direction the community members ingest the hallucinogenic brew. Through songs and chants he guides their visionary journeys in the other side. The shaman also contacts the master spirits of the animals in order that the hunters may find game and influences the spirits of the seasons so that harvests will be abundant. During these sessions, the shaman is believed to see into the past and future, to ward off disease-causing spirits, or to cure afflicted community members. Diagnosis and cure require that the supernatural force or being be known; who, if anyone, sent the force through sorcery; and the removal of the intruded object left by the force that it may be sent back to its place of origination.

Key Symbolic Conceptions:

Geertz adopts Langer's definition of symbols when he speaks of religion as a system of symbols. A symbol is "any object, act, event, quality, or relation which serves as a vehicle for a conception — the conception is the symbol's meaning."⁸ Within the Siona world view, four terms sum up the major conceptions of the Siona's universe and how the Siona hope to relate to its order. These terms, wahu, dau, ?uko, and hun?i, are not easily translated into equivalent terms. The total meaning of each one encompasses an important and general conception of their world view. By exploring the different uses and concrete representations of these terms, we shall be able to gain an understanding of these general conceptions. In

this exploration we will also discover the Siona's dispositions toward them.

The first term, wahu, sums up their concern with the well being of their life and the desire to maintain health. When a Siona greets another in the traditional manner, he inquires "Are you wahu?" When translating this into Spanish, they say it means "Are you fully living?" If well, the reply is "I am wahu," or "I am living." The Siona also describe a fat person as wahu, and the quality of fatness symbolizes good health. This kind of fatness is epitomized in the plumpness of healthy babies, who are just beginning this process of living. Wahu is also used as an adjective to describe unripe plants, immature animals and people, and living objects or beings that are fresh, young, or tender. It is also used to mean light shades of the color green, such as those we might associate with spring. By examining all these meanings, there emerges a concept of what the Siona consider to be the desirable state of wahu. It implies a dynamic state of youth with the plumpness and promise of further growth. This concept is made concrete in their daily lives through the objects and people that exhibit the different qualities associated with wahu. They strive to maintain the state of wahu through the weekly hallucinogenic rituals and daily rituals performed to help them be fat, young, and healthy.

If the individual is sick, he will reply to the traditional greeting "I am hun?i" or "I am dying." Hun?i is the opposite state of wahu, and one is considered to be either in the state of growing or dying. Dying, like living, is a dynamic state for the Siona and not the short act preceding death that it is for us. For all the quali-

ties associated with wahu, there are opposite qualities that imply the conception of the dying force in the universe. Unlike wahu, however, these qualities are not subsumed under a general term, but are expressed in various terms. Qualities associated with the state of dying include emaciation or thinness, darkness, and rottenness. These are symbolized in visions and dreams by black or rotten objects, wet or dirty clothing, or very thin spirits. The most common descriptions of poor health include references to the individual's loss of weight. Old age is also associated with being thin, when the dying forces of life are gathering strength over the living. One is past the peak of growth and now becoming old and skinny.

Examining the associations with these two conceptions represented by the terms wahu and hun?i, we can see that wahu is associated with the waxing forces of life, those that express good health and growth. The conception of dying is associated with the waning forces, those of aging and sickness. In their formulation of the cosmos, the Siona envision a life in which one or the other of the forces predominates, depending upon the disposition of the supernatural forces and the shaman's ability to control them.

?Uko is an important element in influencing the balance between those two states. When the Siona wish to contact the supernatural agents that give life and power to this reality, they gather with a shaman to ingest ?uko, the hallucinogenic brew. Both the vine and the drink are known as ?uko, as well as a very large number

of plants, animals, insects, and their preparations. These latter kinds of ?uko are not intended for visions and their names consist of ?uko and an additional term that specifies the substances' use or purpose. Thus, there is cough ?uko for curing a cough, getting fat ?uko for gaining weight, and hunting ?uko for success in hunting. The hallucinogen, simply called ?uko, represents the fundamental and most general conception of the term. The specific classes are believed to derive their meaning, use, and power from this prime ?uko.

The general meaning of the term corresponds to our term "medicine," although its use indicates a meaning far more general than our connotation of the term. Its medicinal quality applies to the whole cosmic order as well as to the social order and one's bodily health. This is reflected in the two major classes of ?uko, those that produce visions and those that do not.

The ?uko that produces visions is used for its power in enabling the shaman and others to enter into the other side of reality to see what is really happening. It is essential to maintain the state of wahu and to prevent danger or disruption of normalcy by allowing the shamans to know and influence the ultimate forces behind events in this world. As we will see in our discussion of dau, ?uko, is responsible for imparting knowledge and power to the shaman which allow him to bargain with the spirits. It is also responsible for the more specific powers of the non-visionary medicines, for it is said that all other ?uko were first discovered during hallucinogenic visions. The Siona recognize and occasionally use other hallucinogenic substances,

but Banisteriopsis is considered by them to be the fundamental medicine.

The non-visionary medicines are expected to relieve physical symptoms or to alter physiological states of man, plants, or animals. Like the vision producing medicine, this group is employed to maintain well being in all aspects of life. For example, during birth and puberty rituals specific ?uko are employed to ensure that the person will perform his or her tasks and develop properly. Medicines are applied to animals and fields. Dogs are given medicine to enable them to smell the game better. Manioc digging sticks are rubbed with medicine so the crop will be large. Medicines are applied to hunters and babies to defend them against malevolent spirits. The majority of non-visionary medicines are used to prevent or combat illness. Depending on the seriousness of the illness, these medicines may or may not be employed in conjunction with a hallucinogenic ritual. They are used in pragmatic ways, and their benefits are judged by the practical results they yield.

While hallucinogenic medicines can only be administered to others by a master shaman, this is not true of the other class. All Siona, male and female, know many herbs and other substances employed as medicines. Within the community some individuals are believed to have more knowledge than others and are consulted when no one in the immediate family knows the proper herbs. However, there is no one, professional herbalist. Advice and help in obtaining herbs is given free. Although anyone with the knowledge can administer the medicines, it is considered desirable for the shaman to chant over them in order to impart some of his curing power

that he has gained from the hallucinogenic ?uko. Also, if the illness is very serious, a supernatural cause is suspected and it is deemed imperative that the hallucinogenic ritual is performed before the other medicines can restore the person to total health. Thus, although one use of medicine relates to the prevention and curing of illness in a pragmatic sense, a fundamental aspect of the conception of ?uko has to do with the power it gives to an individual to see into the unknown and to understand the true reality behind events. Seeing this reality is essential for the maintenance of a state of well being.

The final and perhaps most difficult concept to define is associated with the term dau. In response to the traditional inquiry about one's health, a Siona may reply, "I am dying from a dau," indicating that he or she is feeling ill. Dau cannot be translated simply as sickness, for its meaning is far more complex. We will explore three different meanings: 1. dau as the shaman's knowledge and power which may be embodied as a substance that grows within the shaman's body; 2. dau as a concrete witchcraft substance; and 3. dau as a sickness substance, causing a bodily ailment similar to our own colloquial meaning of "illness." In each of these cases, dau is a concrete thing existing independently of the individual rather than as an inherent quality or function of the individual.

When a man begins to drink the hallucinogen, it is said that a substance begins to grow inside him. This substance, called dau, embodies the knowledge and power that he is gaining from his experiences with the visions. The master shaman has a large amount of dau which enables him to travel to the different realms of reality in order to contact and influence the spirits; it gives him power to cure or to cause

misfortune to others. The shaman derives from it the ability to induce visionary states with lesser stimulants or curing powers from the state of sweating. Without dau, he is "only a man." Non-shamans with lesser portions of dau are also able to leave their bodies and travel to spirit realms in the other side. However, since they do not possess as much knowledge and experience, they cannot travel as far as the shaman, nor do they have the power to bargain with the spirits there.

Dau is said to be dispersed throughout the shaman's body, not residing in one particular location nor having a particular form. When it leaves the body, it takes a particular form, most commonly that of a dart, a stone, or a snake's tooth. Other forms include a "rotting substance" or a "black butterfly." When a shaman teaches an apprentice his visions and songs, he imparts some of his dau to the apprentice. In these instances where the dau leaves the body, it is not implied by the Siona that the actual quantity of dau which the shaman possesses is decreased. In the abstract sense, dau is imparted as one imparts knowledge. This act is made concrete by the symbolic objects of dau that may be found outside his body. Although imparting his dau does not weaken the shaman's own quantity of dau, the novice may eventually become more powerful than his teacher and damage his dau. If the shaman fears that this may happen, it is said that he will destroy the dau that he has given by causing bad visions for the novice.

During his apprenticeship, the novice accumulates dau in his body as he continues to ingest ?uko and to travel in the visionary realms that the master shaman is showing him. As dau grows, the recipient must be ever alert to protect himself

against influences that could damage it. Dau is very sensitive and vulnerable. It can be easily damaged, which results in the loss of the man's power to use his knowledge. For this reason, the Siona employ the term "delicate" to indicate that a man has begun to see the visions and accumulate dau. He is beginning to build his power and knowledge, but he must protect himself from the dangers of damage to the power. Dau may be damaged through contamination from a polluted person or from sorcery. In both cases the general result is a frightening visionary experience while intoxicated with the hallucinogenic drug, followed by illness. The curing shaman must remove the dau from the victim if he is to recover. Such a cure implies that the individual has lost his knowledge.

When the Siona speak of dau inside the shaman's body, they are speaking of it in an abstract sense, as a symbol of his knowledge, as well as in the concrete sense where it is a physical substance that makes the body "delicate." When referring to dau as a witchcraft substance, the same two levels of abstractness and concreteness apply. In the abstract sense, dau is the knowledge that gives the shaman the ability to contact the spirits for beneficial purposes and also that which gives him the power to do the opposite, to cause harm. Thus, when the shaman "thinks ugly" of someone, it is the dau within him that causes misfortune to an individual. The dau has an existence somewhat independent of the action of its possessor. It is only partially under conscious control and can cause harm without the shaman actually intending his angry thoughts to take form. This is the doubled edged aspect of dau which makes its possessor so respected and feared. Dau empowers him to cure and influence forces for the best; it also gives him the ability to cause harm, either consciously or unconsciously. The shaman fights against evil, but he is

also evil itself.

When speaking about dau in the concrete sense of a witchcraft object, the Siona refer to it as a physical object which may be inside the shaman, flying toward the victim, or in the victim. When inside the shaman, the dau appears in the form of darts like those of the blowgun. The forearm of the shaman serves as the "dart holder," and the darts are shot at the victim through his middle finger. When he prepares a witchcraft weapon from the dau dispersed in his body, the Siona express it as "working" or "weaving" the dau. He works it and throws it at the intended victim. If the victim is to be cured, the dau must be removed by a shaman in a hallucinogenic ritual.

The third meaning of dau is sickness. Used in this way, dau does not necessarily refer to the sorcery substance inside the individual that is causing the condition, but may be referring to the general condition of sickness in the same way that we "have" a sickness. Thus, dau does not always imply sorcery or other supernatural causation but is used in a looser metaphorical sense to imply illness. It does, however, contain the element of anxiety associated with sorcery, and if the condition persists, the term will be used to refer specifically to a suspected sorcery substance and a shaman will be called upon to confirm the suspicion through his contact with the spirit world during a hallucinogenic ritual.

I do not wish to imply that the three meanings of dau are totally distinct in the minds of the Siona. Perhaps it is more correct to say that the various uses of the term function as symbolic qualities and objects that refer to an important general conception of energy or power. The conception lying within the meanings of dau

implies the potential energy source which powers the dynamic states of being, living and dying. It is manifested symbolically as a concrete presence in the shaman and activated by ?uko, or as a dau in the sense of a specific illness or illness agent. The manner in which it becomes manifest and operative depends upon various circumstantial factors, such as the knowledge, experience, and intentions of the shamans, the intentions of the spirits, and the compliance or non-compliance with mores involving pollution and purity.

The Ritual:

Let us now turn to the Siona ritual and examine the fusion of the two sides of reality through symbols and the moods and motivations produced by them. For us, it consists of a series of antics, such as dancing, singing, whistling, growling like a jaguar, climbing the rafters, and so forth. These activities are dramatically performed by the shaman, with the community members actively participating through the visions they are seeing and through singing in response to his songs. For the Siona under the effects of the hallucinogen, what happens on this side is only symbolic of what is really happening on the other side. The ritual is the visionary reality. It is experienced with all the aura of factuality that one can have in an experience. For instance, when a novice begins to drink Banisteriopsis for the first time, he has a vision in which he faces death, becomes a child, is swaddled by the Jaguar Mother, and then is thrown out by her. It is a powerful vision and is considered necessary to have it in order to leave your body. The Siona say that when the Jaguar Mother throws them out, they are seen in this side as falling from their hammocks. Onlookers know what is happening in the other side when they witness this.

Both men and women not in a state of pollution may take part in the event. The ritual is of concern and importance to the entire community, including those who will not participate, since its purpose is for the general good. Any community member's actions may affect it if he or she fails to observe a taboo, thus causing an evil spirit to "damage" the ?uko infusion, rendering the medicine dangerous for those who drink it. While the drug is being prepared on the day of the ritual, the entire community observes the taboos necessary to avoid the intrusion of evil spirits. No one bathes in the river past the noon hour; hunters stay at home; and dogs are tied up to prevent their wandering into the jungle, possibly attracting spirits. Those who plan to participate in the ceremony fast and take emetics to purge their bodies of polluting substances so that they may be lighter (*wahu*) for travel in the other realms. They will also paint their faces and adorn their bodies with seeds, feathers, and jaguar or wild pig canine necklaces. The Siona say that some of these adornments were received in previous rituals when the ally spirits from the other side threw them down to them. These adornments, along with sweet smelling herbs, are important in attracting the beautiful ally spirits, the Wahu people, who will help them in their journeys in the other side.

At sunset, those participating in the ceremony gather at the "Medicine House," bringing their hammocks to pass the night there. This small hut is located in the jungle away from the settlement and is used only for the purpose of hallucinogenic rituals.

At one end of the hut, the shaman sits upon a low bench with the ?uko pre-

aration and its implements arranged on a small table in front of him. These include a chalice-like goblet made of clay with a small clay bowl stacked upon it, a bowl of a tree sap to one side of it, and a whisk of dried leaves on the other. The sap is classified as being "fresh" (wahu) and is drunk during the ceremony to create the sensation of freshness while intoxicated with the hallucinogen. The whisk is used during the ceremony to ritually prepare the ?uko before drinking it and also to cleanse participants and patients in the ceremony.

About seven or eight o'clock, the shaman begins to prepare the ?uko in the chalice in order to rid it of possible harmful effects. A larger pot of ?uko is placed on the floor next to him for use during the night. He sings and shakes the leaf whisk over the brew. Next he prays over it so that it inspires the visions desired. This is done by invoking in song the visions and spirits that the shaman wants to see. Each ritual is addressed to a specific supernatural realm or spirit the shaman wishes to see, and thus this preparation is a deliberate attempt to bring about the desired visions. After the invocation is complete, the shaman purs the first bowl and quickly drinks it, testing to see what kind of visions it will give. He may drink up to three bowls, each time performing the same ritual until the desired visions occur. If the affects desired are not achieved but instead prove to be unpleasant, the shaman destroys the ?uko and ends the ceremony, asserting that the drug has been damaged by a spirit. However, if the visions occur as expected, the shaman begins to sing of the sights that he is seeing on the "other side." This is the signal for his assistants to bring him his large feather crown and feather staff made of scarlet macaw feathers. It is said that the Sun spirit wears a similar crown in his journey across the sky each

each day and that a scarlet macaw sits upon his shoulder. Others present now request that they receive a bowl to drink. Each receives one after it has been ritually prepared. The group drinks from three to five times during the night, waiting an hour or two between each dose. After drinking, each person returns to his hammock to wait for the visions. During intoxication, they may be quite agitated or lie in silence. The shaman and his assistants sing and wildly stomp around the house. The shaman also growls, runs in and out of the hut, and occasionally climbs the rafters. Much of his singing is devoted to descriptions of the spirits, their clothing, their designs and colors. He also plays music from small reed pipes which are said to have come from the spirits during a previous ritual.

When the Siona describe this ritual, they concentrate on how all these antics are seen in the other side. The other side becomes a reality for them and the worlds of spirits and men blend. They say that everything is transformed into a brilliance and beauty unequalled in this reality. The shaman's sons are addressed to the spirits, and in the other side one hears the spirits reply and sees them descend. The special ally spirits, the Wahu People, are the first to come. They are adorned in clothing and ornaments similar to those of the Siona but far more beautiful and intricate in their design and colors. All the visions take on the colors that the shaman intends them to have. Music fills the air as the shaman and spirits play the special reed flutes. The shaman also evokes beautiful music from the bowl of sap, from the end of his feather staff, and from pieces of wild cane that grow along the Putumayo River and the Heaven River in the sky. Small nuts and other items from the Wahu People fall to them when the shaman climbs the rafters of the hut. The participants

also see the shaman become an animal of the jungle as he "puts on the clothing" of the jaguar, wild pig, or anaconda. When he leaves the medicine house, they know he is travelling to the jaguar's house in the jungle, to the anaconda's house in the river, or to other spirits' houses. The participants may also travel with him, climbing on the back of a large anaconda who transports them to the other realms.

If the ritual is a curing ceremony, the shaman travels in the other side to find the offending spirit and bargain with him to save the patient. He must have sufficient dau inside of him to know the spirit's song and thus be able to speak with him. Otherwise he is helpless to counteract the spiritual cause of the illness. On this side, he ritually cleans the patient with the leaf whisk, chanting sacred songs. One patient told me how he saw the Wahu People descend to the whisk as the shaman sang. He also runs about, gesturing to the spirits, stomping and whistling, and plays a pan pipe. He sucks areas of the patient's body attempting to draw out the dau. Although not visible in this reality, The siona say that on the other side one can actually see the dau that he withdraws from the patient. He exams the dau to determine a prognosis of the case. If he finds it to be all black or rotten, he cannot save the patient. If it is clear, or wahu, in parts, there is hope for a cure. Dramatically he throws this substance away, sending it back to its origin.

Sometime before dawn, the activity begins to slow down as the people return to "this side." They drink a brew called "metal beverage," that has been specially prepared for ending the ceremony. The shaman then interprets the visions, drawing upon his knowledge of symbolic elements which he saw. In a curing session, he explains the supernatural cause and his success in dealing with the cause. Generally

he will implicate some individual, generally a rival shaman, for instigating the supernatural attack. He instructs the patient in the specific kinds of nonhallucinogenic medicines that should be taken. After a hunting ritual, he tells of the results of his bargaining with the master spirit of the animals, explaining where and when game will be found. He also relates what he learned about the future or any other significant information.

The hallucinogenic ritual is a particularly powerful experience that blends the two realities. Like all rituals, it fuses the concrete and supernatural world through a set of symbolic forms which sum up the Siona's conception of cosmic order. Every object and act in the ritual is a representation of the other reality: the delicate face designs of the shaman are copies of those seen on the Wahu People; the furniture and pots are replicas of their furniture; the shaman's crown replicates that of the Sun spirit; the songs are the spirits songs; and so on. Moreover, the ritual is a drama of the forces and influences, conceptualized in the terms ?uko, wahu, dau, and hun?i. ?Uko activates the Siona's power to see into the other realm in order to understand the real reality behind events and to influence forces to help maintain a state of well-being. Participants in the ritual have fasted and purged themselves to be pure and wahu for the travels. During the night, the sap is drunk so they will continue to be wahu. The shaman's dau is the source of his headship in the rite and his ability to protect them from intruding malevolent spirits and fearful visions. A curing ceremony is a ritual battle of the forces of dau possessed by different individuals and spirits. The shaman uses his own dau to battle that evil dau in the patient that has been sent by a spirit or other shaman. The outcome of the battle will be health or death, depending upon the one in the battle who possesses the greatest amount of dau.

The ritual not only presents the conceptions of the cosmic order in a very realistic way, but also induces very strong moods and motivations associated with those conceptions, emotions of elation, hope, fear, and anxiety strong enough to color the activities of daily life. These moods permeate the ritual. There is a sense of elation over the prospect of travel with the shaman into the other side which is so magnificent and beautiful. There is hope of favorably influencing the spirits. In cases of illness, there is hope that those travels will lead to a cure for the patient. At the same time, the entire ritual is approached with anxiety and fear that all may not go well and that one will enter the realms of the evil spirits to become entangled with them. There is blackness instead of light, and frightening spirits with big ears and long tongues attempt to tie one up. One may never return to this side or return ill with a permanently damaged dau that might prohibit him from ever systematically taking the drug again. Thus, the rituals are not a light matter. The pre-ritual observances, rituals in their own right, work to allay this anxiety but at the same time to remind the individual of the dangers of the journey. The shaman himself is the embodiment of both these moods. This is clearly expressed in his transformation into the jaguar during the ritual. He presents power that can help restore forces in favor of those who ask his help, yet at the same time, he has the potential to use that power against those same people. Moreover, he can be damaged in the hallucinogenic travels. Through possession of dau he embodies power, yet he also may face a power greater than his, and this incorporates the anxiety held by all in the ceremony. The ritual dramatizes the double nature of ?uko and dau.

which create opposite feelings in the Siona. Both can be utilized for the benefit of one, but if these concrete representations are angered or damaged, the forces will turn against one. This double edged quality of the two is very real in the hallucinogenic experience, for indeed many novices and shamans have experienced bad visions and have fallen ill, later unable to drink the hallucinogen without recurrent bad visions. Many Siona who can no longer take the drug accuse the shaman administering the drug to them as the culprit damaging their visions. The fears and anxieties inherent in the experience are carried with the Siona from the ritual back into common sense reality, motivating them to live a life as if these fears were normal, given the way the world really is as depicted in the visions they have seen.

Geertz maintains that the power of ritual extends beyond the ritual itself, that the individual leaves changed, and in turn common sense reality is changed as the person places it in the context of the formulation of order experienced in the ritual. The Siona consciously recognize this change in the individual. All Siona men are expected to ingest a sufficient amount ?uko as youth so that they are able to leave their bodies to see the other realms. The successive ingestion of the drug leaves within them dau that represents their power to see. This dau continues to build with each ingestion, and most young men hope that it will not be damaged so that they may become master shamans. Thus, for the Siona, one literally leaves the ritual changed and must live his life according to taboos and mores that will protect the dau.⁹ Although they do not possess dau, women must also obey mores intended to keep the dau from pollution, such as retiring to the menstrual hut during menses.

The way in which the two realities are blended in the ritual with particular emotional force can now be seen clearly. The key concepts of Siona world view represented in the terms described here take on concrete symbolic forms that induce strong emotions. In the case of the curing ritual, the participants witness an actual battle, as the shaman jaguar works his dau, removes dau from the patient, and sings and battles with the malevolent spirits. Moreover, these concrete representations have an existence outside the ritual. Immature plants and animals are wahu. Healthy people are wahu. Shamans and most adult men are "delicate" because of their dau; sick people have dau and are dying, and so forth. The dramatization of the general conceptions of order via concrete symbols in an emotionally charged and uniquely realistic ritual fuses together the imagined and common sense realities.

As the Siona carry out the routine of their daily lives, they are constantly aware of the two sides of reality. While a hunter walks through the jungle, he is continually aware of the other side of his reality and more concerned about the dangers coming from there than those coming from nature. He applied an ?uko in the morning to protect him and also one to his dog to make him a better hunter. He knows that the trees appear as spirit houses in the other side and that certain locations, such as small natural clearings in the virgin jungle, are the house sites of certain dangerous spirits. He must be ever aware that the beings in the other side could afflict him with illness and misfortune were he to break some taboo associated with them or suddenly mistake a spirit for a familiar person and actually follow him into the realm of the other side. Once there, nothing appears as it is in

this side, and the hunter may wander from spirit house to spirit house, not knowing how to find his way home again. The spirits will offer him rotten chicha. If he drinks it, he will be lost forever. Many hunters have perished, lost forever in the jungle. A few lucky ones, aided by a shaman "travelling" in a hallucinogenic trance, have returned to tell of the other reality they saw.

In the same way, the Siona woman goes about her daily tasks, well aware of the hidden reality and the need to influence it favorably. She applies an ?uko to her digging stick in the garden to help the manioc grow large. When she washes clothes in the river or fetches water, she is aware of the dangerous hours at the river when the spirits are active. She also knows that it is dangerous to take her child out during certain hours of the day or pass too near certain trees known to contain dangerous spirits. Children are particularly susceptible to spirit attacks, and she often applies an ?uko to protect her baby. She will apply different kinds of ?uko to make the baby grow and to be strong and willing to perform proper tasks as an adult.

The quality of Siona interpersonal relations, too, is affected by the world view and moods expressed in the ritual. There is little overt conflict between the Siona as they seek to maintain peace with their relatives and neighbors. Yet any serious illness or misfortune stirs up rumors and accusations among the Siona as they try to interpret who has been angered enough to perform the sorcery causing the illness. The shaman has the ultimate authority to locate the actual offender, but a great amount of discussion surrounding any misfortune or illness centers on the possible motives that others might have for wishing harm. Any strange event or object that holds within it the symbolic qualities associated with dau will be analyzed and considered in great detail during daily conversations.

That which makes the Siona ritual particularly powerful does not lie so much in the ritual dramatization of the key conceptions of the cosmic order, as all rituals do this. It is the particular use of hallucinogenic visions as the major aid in transforming this reality and fusing it with the ultimate reality in a highly emotional and visual way. The hallucinogenic experience is a powerful one of the unconscious. What the Siona manage to do with their ritual is harness and channel this experience into culturally directed visions.¹⁰ No hallucinogenic ceremony can be conducted without the presence of a shaman, the expert in travelling in the visionary realm. His role is to guide others through the realities that are visited during the night. He also must protect them from the dangers of such a journey. He sets the themes of the visions they will see. When he invokes the ?uko prior to drinking it, the participants are informed of where they will be travelling. To guide them once they are under the influence of the hallucinogen, his songs include details of what he is seeing. The spirits and their designs in his songs are not unknown to the Siona. The design motifs adorn the painted faces of the elders, the decorated pots, and other artifacts, including the clothing in times past. Much Siona oral literature includes descriptions of the spirits and journeys to see them. They are familiar with the other realms through myth, and the visionary experience gives them a particularly powerful knowledge and experience of the cosmic order. It seems reasonable to conclude, then, that the hallucinogenic aspect of the ritual gives it a singularly powerful ability to fuse the imagined and common sense realities. At the same time, it induces strong moods and motivations to adopt this vision of the world in common sense reality.

Summary:

Siona cosmology and ritual are central to the entire culture. The cosmic order depicted in them pervades all aspects of everyday behavior, both in the Siona's observance of a large number of ritual practices and taboos and in their interpersonal relations. I have tried to show that perhaps one key to the pervasiveness of religion stems from the power of the hallucinogenic ritual to blend so successfully the imagined and commonsense world. I do not wish to say that there are not other means of accomplishing this. Geertz has already demonstrated that this is so in his description of ritual in Bali.¹¹ The Balinese use an emotional theatrical experience to induce a trance that allows them to cross the threshold into another order of existence. The Siona, however, use the visionary experience, equally powerful in the emotions and sense of reality it conveys. The hallucinogenic experience, as developed by the Siona into a cultural channeling of the visions, lends to the cosmological formulation of order a particularly strong authoritative experience which affirms that it is the "really real." The centrality of the ritual to Siona cosmology and life seems to be substantiated by the changes the Siona on the Putumayo are currently undergoing as they adapt to modern society. With the encroachment of whites in their former territory, few Siona youth have sought apprenticeships with master shamans. Of those that have, none have been successful, for they have all been plagued by bad visions. Most claim that living so close to white society has made it impossible to maintain the proper taboos that protect dau from damage. The last Siona master shaman of the Putumayo died in the 1950's, and now the Siona must seek shamans of other tribes or travel long distances to participate in the ritual. The elders evidence anxiety about living in a world whose workings

they can no longer see and attempt to influence as in the past when the rituals were routinely held for the benefit of the community. While the youth hold the basic cultural suppositions about the world, few have participated intensively in the hallucinogenic rituals. They are increasingly drawn into the social and cultural spheres of the whites around them, abandoning many of the mores and taboos designed to protect dau. As the hallucinogenic ritual has passed among the Siona of the Putumayo, so will the Siona culture when the elders who participated in the ritual are gone. The Siona world view derives much of its authority from the renewal and reaffirmation given to it by the ritual. Without the authoritative experience of the ritual, the system as an ordered whole will not persist in the face of increasing contact with Western culture.

Notes

1. The data upon which this work is based were gathered during eighteen months of fieldwork in Colombia between 1970 and 1972. The study was supported in part by the Tulane University International Center for Medical Research grant AI-10050 from NIAID, NIH, U. S. Public Health Service.
2. Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion (London, Tavistock Publications, 1966), pp. 1-46.
3. Ibid., p. 4.
4. Clifford Geertz, "Ethos, World View, and the Analysis of Sacred Symbols," The Interpretation of Cultures (New York, Basic Books, Inc., 1973), p. 127.
5. Ibid.
6. "Religion as a Cultural System," p. 38.
7. The u in uko and wahu is written phonetically as /i/, a high central vowel. Siona is a Western Tukanoan language. The Siona on the Putumayo are bilingual in Siona and Spanish. The major portion of the research was conducted in their own language.
8. "Religion as a Cultural System," p. 5.
9. Although women can participate in the rituals, very few women have become shamans. The Siona say that frequent ingestion of the hallucinogen causes sterility in women, and since their prime role is that of mother, women do not ingest the drug as often as men. No woman was ever said to possess dau as the substance gained from the drug.
10. See my article "Yage among the Siona: Cultural Patterns in Visions," Spirits, Shamans, and Stars: Perspectives from South America (Chicago, Aldine Publishing Co., projected date 1979), for a full explanation of culturally directed visions.
11. In "Religion as a Cultural System," p. 32, Geertz demonstrates that the Bali are also projected out to the common place world via a mass trance induced by the theatrical performance they are watching.