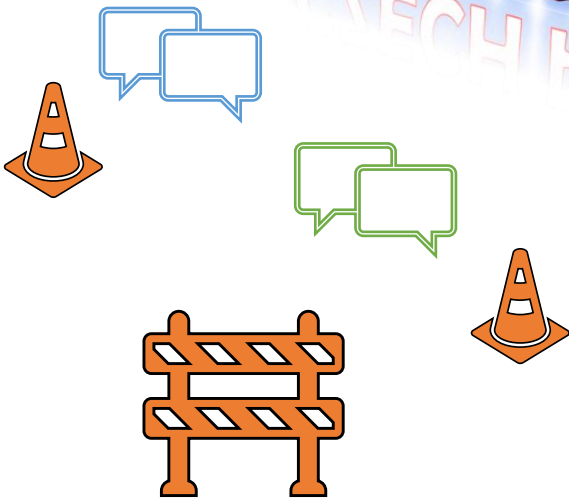


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CZECH PSYCHEDELIA CZECH PSYCHEDELIA



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(RE)INTRODUCING PSYCHEDELICS... AND MY QUESTION

With this paper I aim at contributing to the body of knowledge about psychedelics and the Czech psychedelic culture. The introduction starts with a general overview of the history between people and psychedelics and today's growing field and industry around them. I will then zoom in on a recent development in Czechia and argue for the research perspective I take.

The use of psychedelic substances, such as psilocybin mushrooms or ayahuasca, has existed among indigenous people for thousands of years, while in modern societies it has flourished during the 20th century especially due to the hippie counterculture in the USA. Eventually, the mainstream culture of USA pushed back by illegalizing psychedelics, which then as part of the global War on Drugs became the international approach to psychedelics. Among the effects of this approach is that the use of psychedelics has been driven underground and it has become more difficult to conduct research with them. Yet, in the past couple of decades psychedelics have again started gaining in popularity as more research has accumulated. Due to such turn of events, Dr. Ben Sessa in his book subtitled *Reassessing the Role of Psychedelic Drugs in 21st Century Psychiatry and Society* coined the term "psychedelic renaissance" to describe today's ongoing renewal of interest. (Sessa, 2012)

Why are psychedelics interesting to research though? I pose the question to argue for the topic of this paper as well as to explore the psychedelic renaissance. When one would go and browse the internet with such question, they would soon find out about their healing potential. This type of benefit that psychedelics can provide has been utilized for thousands of years by various indigenous societies, for example ayahuasca (containing NN-DMT) has long been used "as an integral part of folk healing procedures" (Dobkin de Rios, 1971) within the Amazon valley in South America (Nichols & Barker, 2016). One is though more likely to encounter news media articles that talk about this type of benefit (or its supposed discovery) in connection to mental health (Busby, 2021; Silva & Stocker, 2023). The number of articles published by popular news media also appears to be increasing, which suggests that psychedelics perhaps have become mainstream by now. Most of these articles though focus on the advances in research of psychedelic therapy and there is a reason for that – it is often called the new paradigm of treatment (Tupper, Wood, Yensen, & Johnson, 2015) which appears to deliver great results.

In a meta-analysis of placebo-controlled trials of psychedelic-assisted therapy published in 2020, the authors found high quality evidence in support for the efficacy of the treatment for PTSD and specific forms of anxiety and depression (Luoma, Chwyl, Bathje, Davis, & Lancelotta). Since then, another trial was published in NEJM journal that compared psilocybin and escitalopram, a commonly prescribed

antidepressant. Although the authors reported no significant difference between the treatment outcomes, 58 % of people in the psilocybin group showed alleviation (remission) of depression compared to 28 % in the antidepressant group (Carhart-Harris, et al., 2021). Another key difference to the antidepressants is that the psychedelic is used only a couple of times and the effects manifest during therapy sessions alongside trained professionals, but the healing effects persist afterwards (ibid). It is for example shown in a trial, where MDMA was given three times alongside therapy to treat PTSD, 19 out of 25 participants did not meet the diagnostic criteria a year after the last dose (Ot'alora, et al., 2018). These results and the fact that the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) granted these therapeutic techniques the status of "breakthrough therapy", supporting their development (MAPS, 2017; COMPASS Pathways, 2018), shows us that it may not be a question of *if* psychedelic therapy is legalized as part of modern healthcare, but rather *when*.

The private sector has already realized this potential as several market analyses suggest. From 2018 to 2021, the investments into psychedelic-focused companies rose from 63 million USD to over 2 billion, most of which went into the R&D of biopharmaceutical firms (Rivlin & Sharpe, 2021). Although the investment has decreased to 520 million in 2022, new entrants joined the market (Psychedelic Alpha, 2023). As of now, the Psychedelic Invest Index contains 57 public companies with Dublin-based GH Research and London-based COMPASS Pathways sitting at the top with market caps of 435 and 366 million USD respectively (Psychedelic Invest, 2023). Anticipating the eventual shift towards legal access to psychedelics, various organizations have filed or been already granted patents (430 in total), which has opened an ongoing conversation in the public about the validity of some of them (Berkeley, 2023).

In fact, the shift towards legal access has already started and is picking up the speed. Switzerland, Canada, and Israel allow clinicians to use psychedelic therapy in specific cases (Ducharme, 2023). Jamaica and Costa Rica already have legally operating psilocybin clinics. In the USA, Oregon has legal psilocybin use under professional supervision, people in Colorado just voted to do the same, and states like New Jersey and California have also moved closer to legalization. And lastly, Australia has passed laws in February of 2023 to allow clinicians to prescribe psilocybin and MDMA for specific conditions (ibid). What we can see so far from this development is that there are different forms of psychedelic legalization and that the process through which it comes also differs.

For example, Oregon's citizens voted directly with 56 % majority through a ballot initiative in 2020 (Acker, 2020) to allow firms and individuals to get licenses for partaking in the psilocybin supply chain processes, from manufacturing to provision (Oregon.gov, 2023). Providers are required to have special facilitator

training as “individuals will be able to access psilocybin services *for any reason*” (Oregon Health Authority, 2022). Whereas in Australia, it was the elected politicians in government with the advice of experts, who passed the law enabling the prescription of psychedelics by “specifically authorised psychiatrists for the treatment of certain mental health conditions” (Australian Government, 2023). These two processes differ in the degree of citizen involvement in the decision-making process as well as in their results – is access open or restricted to medical use?

This is an interesting question because other than for healing psychedelics have also been used as part of spiritual practices for their ability to evoke mystical experiences (Sessa, 2012; Richards, 2014). And as culturally significant tools, in indigenous and countercultural contexts (Sessa, 2012; Tvorun-Dunn, 2022), partly due to their ability of belief transmission (Dupuis, 2021). Further, even their healing potential may not be fully realized within the paradigm of biomedicine.

My home country Czechia is another country where experts and some politicians, including the commissioner for drug policy Jindřich Vobořil, have been considering a move towards some kind of legalization of psychedelics (Dleštíková, 2022; PP - Česká tisková kancelář, 2023). Czechia has a legacy of psychedelic research (ibid.) and its drug policies have been gradually evolving towards less and less punitive forms since 1990 (Belackova & Stefunkova, 2018) with a current plan to create a regulated market for recreational cannabis (Palata, 2023). Furthermore, a recent prosecution of a Polish group holding ayahuasca ceremonies in Czechia met criticism from experts and civil society, which eventually led to them being pardoned by the president (Kauza Ayahuasca, 2023). Lastly, there are a number of organizations active in the Czechia psychedelic culture, among which is also Psyon, a clinic providing legal psychedelic therapy (Psyon, 2023).

To sum up, the advancement of the psychedelic research and healthcare industry have opened up numerous questions that go beyond the biomedical sciences. Many of them can only be properly addressed when the perspectives of socio-politics, economics, ethics, and philosophy are developed and taken in account. This is acknowledged by academics like Peter Sjöstedt-Hughes (2023) or Nicolas Langlitz, who proposes a cultivation of "psychedelic humanities", so that the questions around psychedelics can be explored with interdisciplinarity (2023).

With my paper, I aim to contribute to this end, particularly by studying the discourse around psychedelics. They have had a rich and turbulent history and recently been gaining popularity in sciences, news media, and industries. As such, there likely exist a variety of discourses today that form our understanding(s) of psychedelics. These not only shape the individual's psychedelic experience through the collective set & setting (ibid.), but they also influence the process behind psychedelic legalization and the industry's future evolution. I focus my analysis on the discourses in Czechia.

Therefore, I ask: **What understandings, that discursively construct the meaning of psychedelics, are held by key players in the psychedelic culture of Czechia?**

PROCESSES LEADING TO AND HELPING ANSWER THE QUESTION

I will use the current chapter to reveal my personal history related to Czechia and psychedelics, as well as the philosophy guiding me in this study towards an answer to the question given above. Here, I define constructivism and discourses, while only outlining discursive analysis and reflexivity, which I will explore more in depth in the following chapters. But first... who am I?

I was born in 1997 and have grown up in Czechia. During elementary and high school, I remember having special one-day events for drug education. These included us watching movies and reading booklets, that portrayed the use of illegal drugs as extremely dangerous. Some of these were the products of the Foundation for a Drug-Free World (2023). Additionally, supposed experts talked with us about their horrifying experiences of dealing with people who use drugs. I remember one story we were told of a person who by taking psilocybin mushrooms started hallucinating worms crawling under their skin, which caused them to panic and thus they had to be restrained to prevent self-injury. Years later I was shocked to discover that my friends, who I knew as being generally smart and kind, had experiences with cannabis and psilocybin mushrooms. Initially, I was strongly judgmental of their behavior, which partly severed our friendships. As time went on though, I saw that they appear to be well functioning despite their "dangerous" drug use. This discrepancy between what I was told and what I saw led me to ponder where the truth lies.

Fast forward to today, I have partaken in 4 international conferences about psychedelics, that for example hosted Rick Doblin, the director of MAPS leading the development of MDMA therapy for PTSD. I also have my own psychedelic experiences and have been participating in the psychedelic culture in Czechia for years now. Such ethnographic knowledge informs the current research.

By psychedelic culture, I mean a rather heterogenous group of people, who have personal psychedelic experiences and/or engage with others, who they think are knowledgeable about psychedelics. There have been Facebook groups directly dedicated to psychedelics, yet fully compliant with Meta's guidelines, with thousands of Czechs and frequent interaction between them. These can be understood as examples of Czech psychedelic culture. Other than that, there are also a number of psychedelic-focused organizations, such as the aforementioned Psyon clinic, or the Czech Psychedelic Society (CZEPS) that educates about the risks and benefits of psychedelics. Despite me being a member of CZEPS, my perspective of their activities and the psychedelic culture as a whole remains critical. Similar to scientific progress, I believe critical reflexivity offers the potential benefit of enriching our shared knowledge.

I will now explain how I aim to embody such reflexivity by conducting a discursive analysis. As I documented before, most psychedelic research today is done from western therapeutic and biomedical perspectives. These studies generally focus on first-order observations, such as measuring the effects of psychedelics (Luoma, Chwyl, Bathje, Davis, & Lancelotta, 2020; Carhart-Harris, et al., 2021). Their results are very often shared within the global psychedelic culture, influencing people's understanding of psychedelics. Some of these people live in countries with an active public debate about changing the law for psychedelics and/or an emerging psychedelic healthcare industry. This paper is different in that it provides a second-order observation focused not on what psychedelics are nor their effects, but on how people in Czechia understand them and who promotes such understandings.

The shift from first to second -order observation is typical for constructivist research and implies the prioritization of epistemology over ontology. In other words, studying our knowing of the object instead of studying the object itself. Thus, in this paper I work with an empty ontology, where the meaning that people assign to psychedelics is analyzed *as is* without the scrutiny of its truthfulness (Andersen, 2003). This doesn't deny their existence outside of human thought, but asserts that what they mean and how they are understood are always dependent on discourses (Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000).

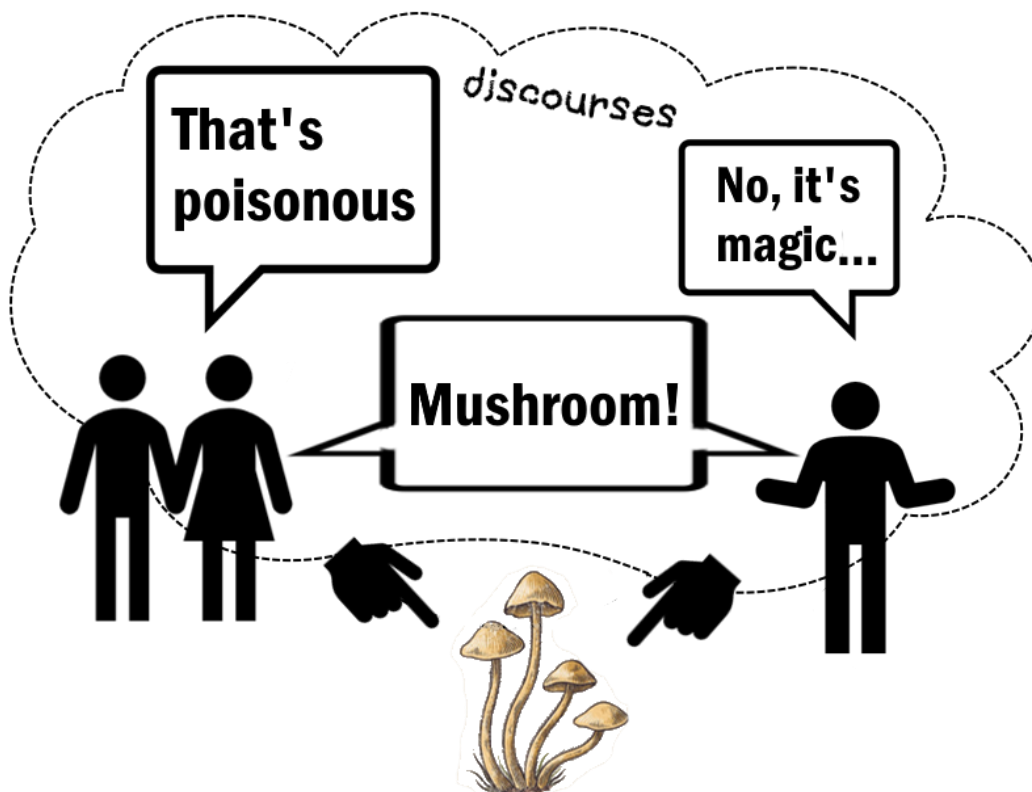


FIGURE 1 DISCURSIVE STRUGGLE OVER "PSILOCYBE SEMILANCEATA"

Discourses refer to “systems of meaningful practices that form the identities of subjects and objects” (ibid. p. 5). Here, practices are to be understood as actions and social relations, which are meaningful, because they shape what meaning we assign to subjects and objects. As practices change, so can the meanings. This makes discourses political, because how we relate to, for example, psychedelics individually and collectively is linked to whether we view them as dangerous hallucinogens or as psychotherapeutic tools. The exercise of power then dictates which discourse/s is/are dominant and which ones are excluded, as well as how they contest one another. (ibid)

Lastly, with the constructivist rejection that people can make objective claims about reality opens the topic of relativism, which also connects to reflexivity. My embracement of relativism in this paper allows for, and encourages, radical questioning of every discourse, which doesn't mean that we should avoid discoursing (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Instead, through the questioning I hope to provide a reminder that the claims we make around psychedelics are always open to democratic and scientific discussion. Through the constructivist lens that embraces relativity we see all discourses, including the one I'm creating with this paper, as equally good at describing reality (ibid). And yet, to function in reality we also need to evaluate what discourses are of higher quality, for example to even be able to consider the usefulness of my writing and if it is to “[...] to count as qualified academic research” (ibid. p. 171). I view such paradox of constructivist academic work as suggesting that we don't rely only on one lens in our lives. Therefore, to improve the quality of my research as perceived by those evaluating it, I will be enhancing the reflexivity by also applying the questioning to myself as well, which is explored in the next chapter.

METHODS FOR REFLEXIVITY

In this chapter, I will explain methods that I used alongside my research with an attempt at enhancing its quality. The first one of which is a redefinition of my relationship towards the subjects under study that aims to move from a hierarchical to more dialogical research (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Such move is in practice achieved by a more thorough inclusion of the subjects into the data gathering and analysis processes, as their views are viewed as valuable. It is to turn subjects into co-researchers and make the result of the research a *social* construction (ibid).

My attempt to make my research more dialogical is found in the use of an open-ended survey with which I invited the members of the Czech psychedelic culture to participate in data collection and influence my direction for data analysis. Yet, I acknowledge that the effort is not sufficient and therefore I argue that this paper's publication is to be viewed as a first imperfect result of many others to come, which will eventually be released in Czech on my blog site (knihovnadrog.eu) to best contribute to the psychedelic

culture. My research thus goes beyond the scope of this paper, as I plan to use the first publication as a material for discussion with the subjects. These then inform my future publications about the discursive analysis of the psychedelic culture in Czechia. This promise is in line with constructivist and dialogical research (ibid.), puts a perspective on my research aims, as well as expresses my personal dedication to the culture. Thus, I welcome criticism and your feedback.

The second method of experimental writing, or specifically reflexive boxes, connects to the first one as it tries to equalize the relationship between me as the author and the readers, some of whom will be the subjects themselves. This method “strive[s] to show the construction of the text *in* the text, so that the reader is constantly reminded that [...] knowledge does not just exist but rather is produced by choices made by specific people in specific situations” (ibid. p. 200). I used reflexive boxes in the analysis part, where they contain self-reflections that accompanied my research process.

To improve my self-reflections, I decided to go beyond constructivist conceptions of reflexivity and intentionally use an array of methods that I’ve become familiar with in the past. Instead, I utilized literature from transpersonal psychology, which has a tradition of studying psychedelic experience. The one I’m most familiar with is spending time in mindfulness meditation, which is defined as ““a sustained nonreactive attention to one’s ongoing mental contents and processes” (Samuelson, Carmody, Kabat-Zinn, & Bratt, 2007, p. 255 [quote by authors]), including thoughts, perceptions, and emotions” (Friedman & Hartelius, 2013, p. 132). Among the practice’s benefits for researchers is the cultivation of meta-cognition, awareness of one’s own knowing (ibid.), which then helped me scrutinize some of my own assumptions present during this research process (Anderson & Braud, 2011).

Further, I often combined mindfulness meditation with other methods such as lone walks in forests and parks, various forms of yoga, dancing and breathing exercises. I was also intentionally choosing my work environments and the sounds/music I listen to while working. This set of practices helped me reduce the degree of fatigue, keep an open mind, realize overlooked levels of complexity in the data, and gain inspiration from ways of knowing other than analytical thought. (Anderson & Braud, 2011; Friedman & Hartelius, 2013)

Lastly, to take advantage of these self-reflective methods I developed a habit of interviewing myself by recoding my voice via my phone. I used it to refine my insights by attentively giving myself questions about them and to actually implement them in the paper by re-listening to these short recordings on demand (Anderson & Braud, 2011). The contributions of my use of these self-reflective methods were most explicated in the reflexive boxes in the analysis part of the paper.

The chapter explained the methods that I used to bring more reflexivity to my research, where one of them is specifically expressed in my use of an open-ended survey. The details of which are explored in the next chapter.

SURVEYING FOR WHAT DATA TO ANALYZE

My decision to create and utilize an online survey came from two interconnected concerns. The first one was the attempt to make my research more dialogical, meaning to allow members of the Czech psychedelic culture to participate in my study. Then, me inviting other people to support my research via their input in the survey was a discursive interaction in itself that to some extent has influences on the overall culture. The interaction was in few times rich, as some of the people gave me thorough feedback on the survey before it was shared publicly. In one instance, it also started a discussion that helped me get to know another active member as well as some aspects of the culture. After it was shared, one person, who I did not know before, even contacted me privately to express appreciation of my activity. Although the rest of this paper, except its publishing, is not dialogical, I argue that the inclusion of this survey somewhat compensated for it.

The question of how exactly was the survey carried out is related to the second concern. It came mainly from my contemplation on what kind of data will I use for the discourse analysis and why. I chose to focus on data available digitally due to me not residing in Czechia. Specifically, data shared on Facebook. I also have long experience of observing and participating with various pages and groups related to the psychedelic culture, which made aware of how diverse it can be and that the culture and discourses also happen outside of the digital spaces (a limitation of my research). The survey was to invite people to help me decide what kind of digital data I should apply my discursive analysis to. I decided to focus on the discourses of the individuals and organizations in the Czech psychedelic culture who are recognized by the members of the culture. I deduce that the recognition may be connected to the power in the psychedelic-related discourses shaping these social actors, for example in a way that they generally attract more attention. Based on this, I argue that my focus on these subjects provided interesting data for discursive analysis as well as a reasonable way to limit the scope of the data to be analyzed.

The design of the online survey was open-ended, where I wanted the survey to encourage creative responses that may go beyond of my own experience (Morgan & Hoffman, 2018) by asking people to write the names of "key players" in the Czech psychedelic culture. I defined players as individuals and organizations, and chose this term instead of "leaders", because it may have less hierarchical meaning and connect to discourses around playfulness (i.e., children on a playground). The encouraged the respondents

to interpret what makes players "key" in their own way, but to avoid misunderstanding I listed seven general examples. To illustrate, three of them were: They provide education around the topic of psychedelics; They write digital or paper texts about psychedelics; They conduct or plan to conduct psychedelic research, therapy, or services; followed by "et cetera". I left the definition of psychedelics open in the way that I only said that it does not include marijuana or cannabis products. To avoid harm being done to anyone, I anonymized the respondents and discouraged them from naming players that provide/sell illegal psychedelic substances. Although my design choices did not appear to be popular among scholars who write about qualitative data collection, creative experimentation with methods on the other hand is frequently encouraged (Flick, 2018).

I distributed the survey at the end of March 2023 by sharing it in Czech Facebook groups that are directly dedicated to psychedelics and privately messaging people that I know follow or actively participate in the digital spaces of the culture. I also asked people in the post or message and at the end of the survey to share it with others. Thus, the distribution followed a combination of convenience and purposeful snowball sampling strategies (Schreier, 2018), which helped me achieve my goal of including more people in the study. The produced result was not meant to be generalizable.

After the distribution, 109 mentions were collected from 40 respondents and the resultant list of "key players" along with the numbers of their mentions are expressed in the software-generated word cloud below. My name was mentioned twice (once with a smiley face), which may be explained as the result of the convenience sampling, and I decided to exclude it. Names in purple received a single mention, dark to light blue had two to four, light to dark green had five to eight, and black had nine to fourteen. I used this product of the surveying process, as described above, to guide my choices about what social agents I focused for the gathering of data as well as how much of it I would gather for my discourse analysis. These data choices as well as the particular analysis process are explored in the following chapter.



FIGURE 2 WORD CLOUD OF "KEY PLAYERS" IN THE PSYCHEDELIC CULTURE OF CZECHIA; SIZE AND COLOR SCALE WITH NUMBER OF MENTIONS; LEGEND: CZEPS – CZECH PSYCHEDELIC SOCIETY, CZSUB – CZECHED SUBSTANCE, BEYOND – BEYOND PSYCHEDELICS; NUDZ – NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR MENTAL HEALTH; BWA – BRAIN WE ARE, SAPAS – SLOVAKIAN PSYCHEDELIC SOCIETY.

ANALYZING THROUGH DISCOURSE THEORY

The use of discourse analysis has been mentioned on numerous occasions in the previous chapters, but it is here that I explain the questions of what it is, why it is used and how exactly. In the following subchapter I describe how exactly was data collected. It is important to note that the philosophical premise of constructivism, which is necessary for the use of discourse analysis (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002), along with the definition of discourses were already given in the second chapter about Processes. Now, we are enabled to move into the theoretical and methodological aspects, which for discourse analysis are interconnected (ibid).

There are various approaches to discourse analysis that have been developed and become popular over the time, but the one I chose is Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's discourse theory (ibid). I argue that this approach fits my paper, because it enables the analysis of how the meaning(s) of psychedelics are constructed in different discourses of today's Czechia. Further, the history of the relationship between people and psychedelics, that has been explored in the Introduction chapter, shows that their meaning has already undergone several changes. Thus, I argue that the paper's topic also fits Laclau and Mouffe's theory, where meanings can never be permanently fixed to signs (such as the sign of *psychedelics*) and where there is a constant struggle between discourses for **hegemony** – to fix the meaning of a sign in their own way and then gain the appearance of naturality or objectivity (ibid). Importantly though, the examples from previous chapters such as Sessa's coining of the term psychedelic renaissance (2012), my own personal experience growing up, and the recent "Kauza Ayahuasca" in Czechia (2023) all suggest a currently unfolding **discursive struggle** over the meaning of psychedelics. With the current Czech commissioner for drug policy Jindřich Vobořil publicly discussing the need for a change in the legal approach to psychedelics (Kauza Ayahuasca, 2023; PP - Česká tisková kancelář, 2023), Laclau and Mouffe's understanding of politics "as the organisation of society in a particular way that excludes all other possible ways" (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 36) appears as applicable. Note that Vobořil was also mentioned by members of the Czech psychedelic culture in the word cloud as a key player.

Here, I'd like to argue for the relevancy of another concept from discourse theory. **Dislocation** refers to a social process or event that disrupts existing discursive structures, by which it is shown that their way of fixing the meanings to signs is not natural after all (ibid; Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000). The dislocation then can be understood as a crisis of meaning that is both traumatic and productive in that it "stimulates new discursive constructions, which attempt to suture the dislocated structure" (Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000, p. 20). I propose that the ongoing renewal of interest in psychedelics (psychedelic renaissance) is to

be understood as a prolonged process with dislocatory effects, which in the case of Czechia culminated in the particular dislocation of the *Kauza Ayahuasca* (2023). An event where the discourse around psychedelics, which has been relatively hegemonic by being politically embedded in law as well as the system of law enforcement and courts (judicial discourse), was disrupted by other discourse(s) that eventually shaped and included the pardoning by the president.

To be able to apply Laclau and Mouffe's theory in the analysis of meaning construction, I also needed other key concepts. First, I bring our attention to the **nodal point**, which refers to a "privileged sign around which the other signs are ordered; the other signs acquire their meaning from their relationship to the nodal point" (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 26). It can also be understood as the point in a discourse that is made central through **articulation**, or a practice that establishes a relationship between signs. In doing so, "articulations reproduce or challenge the existing discourses by fixing meaning in particular ways" (ibid., p. 29). The new discursive constructions that may occur after a dislocation may also be understood as the products of re-articulations. Then, **floating signifiers** are important signs that different discourses contest over to fix their meanings in their own way (ibid). Nodal point is different in that it belongs to and temporarily structures a particular discourse and that its meaning is empty by itself but is filled by being linked to other signs. Though, the sign that is a nodal point in a particular discourse (perhaps *drugs* in drug prevention discourse) can at the same time be a floating signifier when there is a discursive struggle to fix the sign's meaning (perhaps *drugs* between drug prevention and party discourses) (ibid). Lastly, discursive struggle can be particularly identified when **social antagonism** occurs, that is, when discourses are mutually exclusive, because they provide understandings of reality that demand different actions (ibid). An example can be found in the Processes chapter, where I describe my personal experience with the discrepancy between what I was told about and what I later saw in the use of psilocybin mushrooms (they ruin lives vs. they don't). The case where one discourse, with its understandings and demands, succeeds over the others is understood as the antagonism being dissolved through **hegemonic intervention** (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Such as the law enforcement intervening in the illegal holding of ayahuasca ceremonies as well as the president's pardon intervening in the completion of the punishment set by the courts.

These concepts, marked in bold, form together Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory in the particular form that I applied to the collected data in the Analysis chapter of this paper in order to analyze the construction of meanings. Since the application of the discourse theory in "detailed empirical analysis [...] takes a little imagination" (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 49), I did so by the studying of the material in its entirety

before re-reading and re-watching the individual texts and interviews. I argue that it enabled me to contextualize the phenomenon under study and better apply the methods for self-reflection, as explained in the Reflexivity chapter. Individual texts were read multiple times across different days, environments, and states of consciousness, for example one day in library, after a cup of coffee and with psytrance music, while another day in a park after two hours of meditation and yoga and with sounds from around. With the analytical approach being clarified, we can now turn to the next chapter, where I detail the collection of data I applied it to.

HOW EXACTLY DID I COLLECT DATA

Above, I have given arguments for why I consider the Kauza Ayahuasca, an event described in the Introduction chapter that took place roughly between October 2020 (arrest) and November 2022 (pardoning)(2023), as a dislocation. Since it received attention from the members and key players of Czech psychedelic culture as well as various popular news media, it facilitated a livelier exchange, or discursive struggle, that also has been made and recorded in the form of digital texts, interviews, and videos (ibid). Therefore, I argue that the relatively high amount of attention and the availability of data made the event an interesting focus point of my analysis, as it allowed me to explore the understandings of some of the key players in a social context that also included other discourses, and clear examples of their struggle. This way my research aligned with the problem-driven approach of discourse theory, where it begins with a pressing and present political problem and then analyzes the more structural conditions that gave rise to it (Howarth & Torfing, 2005). Lastly, I argue that it, along with the focus on key players, helped me define a narrower context and a sample of data that may to some extent be representative of the wider discourses around psychedelics in Czechia, which make my data collection and analysis both feasible and appropriate (ibid).

Then for data, I collected all the texts available on the website of Kauza Ayahuasca (2023), which is copyrighted by the key player CZEPS, as well as all the news media articles shared there that were also written by any of the key players during or after the period of the dislocatory event (6 articles met the criteria). Since CZEPS received the most mentions, I also included the organization's manifesto on their website (CZEPS.org, 2023) and their blog post related to Kauza Ayahuasca responding to Jiří X. Doležel's article (CZEPSblog, 2022) as well as the article itself (Doležel, 2022), which helped to broaden the discursive analysis outside of the psychedelic culture and cover aspects of the discursive struggle. To this end, I also used three texts made by three different authors shared during the year 2021 on a public and popular blog page (blog.aktualne.cz) reacting to texts published by CZEPS (Sláma, 2021; Honzák, 2021; Hastík, 2021).

It is also important to note that all analyzed texts were in Czech, not English. I'm a Czech native speaker and have been learning and using English since young age, where I'm now certified at C1 level, so translating is not difficult. Yet still, due to the languages being bounded up in different discourses, and connect to different histories and across different spaces, meanings are sometimes rather difficult to translate.

Due to the limits in scope of this first publication of my research, I only provide the analysis of six key players. As I explained in the chapter on Methods for reflexivity, I plan on continuing this research with future publications, where I hope to also include source from the other key players, so that I can contribute to the Czech psychedelic culture. With that said, I continue with the presentation of my first paper's analysis.

DISCOURSES OF KAUZA AYAHUASCA

The study of the 13 sources related to the dislocation of the Kauza Ayahuasca included nine texts made by the various key players in the psychedelic culture of Czechia (CZEPS, 2022; CZEPSblog, 2022; CZEPS.org, 2023; Charvát, 2022; Tylš, 2023; Cink, 2023; Vobořil, 2023; Bém, 2023; Kauza Ayahuasca, 2023) and four that were responding to them (Hastík, 2021; Honzák, 2021; Sláma, 2021; Doležel, 2022). I propose that the discourses I interpreted from this dataset, except for Honzák (2021), are structured around the nodal point of *health* (which I will define later). Then, the present discourses infuse *psychedelics*, as the floating signifier over which they struggle, with different meanings by particularly articulating its relationship to health. I deduce three relationships between psychedelics and health that are characterized by their articulatory logics – the logics of hazard, of safety; and of benefit. The two discourses that define psychedelics to be safe or beneficial for health in the case of this dataset provide equivalent understandings of reality with shared demands for action, which is to challenge the system of law enforcement, or judicial discourse, involved in the Kauza Ayahuasca. The third discourse that defines psychedelics to be hazardous for health makes demands that are mutually exclusive to the two prior ones, and as such psychedelics appear to me to lie at the center of the discursive struggle around the Kauza Ayahuasca.

The above form the elementary conclusions from my analysis of the given data, where I'd like to remind that a different analysis of same methodology may come to a different set of conclusions. In the following paragraphs I attempt to explain how the study of the empirical material led me to construct such conclusions and in doing so I hope to show that they stand on solid basis.

IDENTIFYING THE NODAL POINT

Since I argue that the discourses related to Kauza Ayahuasca are organized around the nodal point of health, I start my explanation by providing the evidence for this claim. First, three of the texts explicitly frame the understanding of psychedelics from the perspective of health. Vobořil (2023) starts his text by claiming that the court set “extremely strict punishments for actions that are often non-issue” followed by: “this approach from the perspective of the protection of public health or public safety does not make sense”. The passing of judgement in these cases depends on the consideration of health as something important, without which the arguments in the text would not hold much weight. Cink (2023) titled his text “ayahuasca from the perspective of a scientist”, where he establishes a relationship between ayahuasca and psychedelics multiple times throughout the text and also explicitly structures it around the topics of “health risks, addiction potential and social risk”. Though, the definition for health I provided

Reflexivity box – what do I mean by *health*?

I was alone in a park on a sunny day after two hours of meditation and yoga, observing ants in the grass and birds in the sky, pondering about what term I use to describe the nodal point. I considered *risk*, *effect*, and *condition*, but eventually chose health, which I find often in many different contexts, or discourses, including this one, to be implicitly considered as something important. I've seen it often refer to an individual (physical health; mental health...), but also to collectives, such as health of a community, a relationship, a culture, an animal species, and to systems and institutions, such as health of an ocean, a democracy, the Earth. I'd like to encourage the linking of *health*, which I understand as the conditions that (re)produce wholeness, to all such constructions. Because it may help us people navigate the problems we face, alone and together, more intentionally and intimately.

above includes all three of these topics, as the author appears to articulate "health risks" to be only biophysical phenomena, such as heart condition; hormones; blood pressure; toxicity (ibid). On the landing page of Kauza Ayahuasca (2023) the website is described to be designed with the intention to facilitate a discussion about a range of health-related questions, first of which is about "whether Ayahuasca containing DMT is life threatening or hazardous to health or alternatively it has medical potential". Additionally, the other questions also focus on addiction and social hazardousness, which some of the aspects of health as has been defined by me above.

Although this last quote organizes Ayahuasca and DMT, but not *psychedelics* in connection to health, I argue that since news media and scientific articles have been describing both of these as relating under the category of psychedelics, the connection of the three is established within the discourses under study, mostly implicitly, but as we will at times see also explicitly.

Next to the three examples of explicit mentions of health, I argue that except for one of the sources (Honzák, 2021) all of the other texts had articulations that implicitly connect psychedelics to the nodal point of health in varying degrees, and through various logics which I will also discuss later. CZEPS (2023) & CZEPS.org (2022) are articulating psychedelics to be either "beneficial and relatively safe" (ibid) or that their use has "generally low toxicity and risks" (2023), and also have therapeutic potential for some diagnoses and illnesses (2022; 2023). From these I identify the presence of medical and health discourses, which together provide an understanding of psychedelics as therapeutic tools that are safe or beneficial for one's health even when not used for the treatment of illnesses. Such articulations are consistently justified by drawing on scientific discourse with words like "empirical research; studies; psychedelic research" (2022) and "review article; scientific evidence; science; scientific data", plus with the inclusion of bibliography with sources referenced in text (2023) that follow the same style as I do in this paper.

Tylš (2023) distinguishes two types of uses prevalent in the West, one of which is “psychedelic assisted psychotherapy conducted by medics and psychologists, which today in states of the US and EU is entering the healthcare system”. Here, psychedelics are being linked to western medical discourse through words like “psychotherapy, medics and healthcare system”, where with the assumed continuation of the “entering” is in my view implied that scientific discourse is shaping the risks & benefits of psychedelics to be fitting the conditions of western healthcare, which may likely be connected to the discourses of psychedelic renaissance and progress. The second type of psychedelic use is constructed to be “various workshops and ceremonies inspired by shamanic discourse, whose quality varies [...but...] real social hazardousness is in my experience very low and in most cases has beneficial effects on the individual and community” (ibid.), where I deduce from the accounts of hazard and beneficial effect as references to health, which is here even explicitly said to be individual and collective. Further, Tylš relies at multiple points in his text on logics of personal experience, which we will also see in later texts, as well as the text of Honzák (2021). From my observation the logics frequently occurs in the wider discourses around psychedelics, especially in relation to the presenting or describing of subject’s particular psychedelic experience (i.e., trip report, integration) and to standards in psychedelic therapy.

The text from Bém contains a chapter on “perspective from psychiatrics and addictology” that describes psychedelics “as natural drugs or more accurately medicine”, which are “today the object of extensive clinical and experimental research” that shows their current legal classification as ““especially hazardous drugs without medical utility” is absurd and from medical perspective unsustainable” (2023). Thus, the text exemplifies the linking of health, medical and scientific discourses with psychedelics, but also explicates a direct critique of their current legal classification and the court’s decision, which I interpret as the social antagonism over the meaning of psychedelics between the aforementioned discourses and the judicial discourse (psychedelics having vs. not having medical utility). This is especially exemplified in the conclusion: “I view the whole verdict as a total failure of Czech judiciary, and even as the loss, if I may say so, of their “healthy reasoning”” (ibid). Note that the sign of *Czech judiciary* is here constructed to have reasoning abilities whose *health* has been lost. Also, Bém draws on the progress and psychedelic renaissance discourses by including in his critique that “in relatively near future most of these psychedelics are going to be reclassified in most medically developed countries of the world as completely legal for their medical utility” (2023). From this understanding, psychedelics are used in a logic of differentiation, where the progress discourse induces the use of words like “medically developed country; modern society; modern judiciary” in opposition to the current state of the Czech judicial discourse making demands on psychedelics that are then framed as “a return to the medieval ages” (ibid).

Reflexivity box – What is *protopia* and why do I use it here?

After days of listening to various playlists with psytrance, a music genre popular in the global psychedelic culture, I realize how often they include a sentence or two with voices describing some kind of idea or process that I find insightful and spark in me awe and inspiration. It reminded of term I've discovered lately in circles of people that are described as futurists. It is *protopia*, which I understand as the pattern of processes that over time move us towards a mutually desired state of society. I decided to use it here to popularize the term in the context of psychedelics, as it can help us point towards concrete "things" that make us feel hopeful. It may even be a better antidote to dystopias than utopias are.

Next, Charvát's text is titled "help psychedelics to therapeutic clinics. Before the change of consciousness, we must change the legislation" and describes psychedelics as "my doctor and [probably the most significant] teacher" and as a "medicine for the shadow, broken and destructive in a person. For fear, emptiness, greed, hate. They help a person open up to the world and people, cooperate, care, and love" (2023). I identify the mentions of therapeutic clinics, doctor, and medicine as clear linkages between psychedelics and medical discourse, but I argue that the described effects (i.e., destructive, hate, love) extend beyond the medical discourse and are more reminiscent of health and futurist discourse. Particularly because they are described as tools not only for therapy, but also teaching, elevation of consciousness, and creation of I'd call a *protopian* society (ibid). Similar to Bém (2023), psychedelics are also used here to differentiate between the currently hegemonic judicial discourse in Czechia with "draconian punishments" (ibid) and a society that instead utilizes "the fruits [(psychedelics)], which science has been revealing in the last decades" (ibid.) for the betterment of people, which includes "saving the ass of our planet Earth" (ibid). The inclusion of a hyperlink, and a comment urging the reader to use it, at the end of the text to an online petition for the "decriminalization of the punishing drug public policies and the ending of the war on drugs" (ibid.) in my view well describes the discursive struggle around psychedelics, and even drugs in general, with the current judicial discourse in Czechia.

The following sources from the three social actors Hastík (2021), Sláma (2021) and Doležel (2022) differ from the sources presented in this subchapter so far in that they construct the meaning of psychedelics with logics of hazard, rather than safety and/or benefit, which are still all sharing being structured around the nodal point of health. Hastík starts his text by describing psychedelics as "dangerous substances" (2021) and asserts that only those who have personal experience with them can assess the objectivity of the claims made around them. He follows by describing his own experience on psychedelic during a 1967 study in a clinical, which when he left the "hallucinations were still fading and he was unable to recognize if he is going to catch it [bus]" (ibid.), which makes him today "realize with worries, how a driver high on

LSD behind the wheel might react” (ibid). He follows with two examples, when a driver may not recognize speed or distance of vehicles and either hurt themselves or hurt innocents, based on which he concludes by saying “let’s keep psychedelics under the lock and for assurance let’s add more [locks]” (ibid). In the giving of the two examples, psychedelics are infused as a hazard to (/hurting) individual and collective health, here particularly in the context of driving vehicles. Sláma (2021) responding to CZEPS uses in his text the logics of personal experience in two ways. First, to critique the authors behind CZEPS, who contrary to him, and according to him, have not experienced the “era of psychedelics” in the nineteen sixties (ibid). By this process he is constructing his and CZEPS’ identities as different in terms of personal experience related to psychedelics. The second way I see is that he uses the logic during the infusion of *psychedelics* as a hazard for health, when he describes his observations of the effects of psychedelics, particularly those on his colleagues and patients:

“At first it seemed they [psychedelics] could [...] open people’s minds, but relatively soon after it was shown that they could also destroy them. I have experienced it myself as a student of psychology and beginning clinical psychologist. [...] I remember several colleagues, psychologists, and psychiatrists, who tested them on themselves, which caused psychotic states and psychosis, that have more or less significantly and permanently harmed them. I don’t even want to talk about the patients.” (Sláma, 2021)

Next, Doležel’s article titled “be careful with ayahuasca, it is the most dangerous natural psychedelic in our country” (2022) starts by criticizing “the excited public and unfortunately some drug experts are attacking the court’s decision as too strict, because ayahuasca is not that dangerous. This is non-sense, ayahuasca in Czechia has repeatedly killed” (ibid). Throughout his article he repeats this criticism and that “ayahuasca is the most dangerous natural psychedelic in Czechia” (ibid.), which he with various quotes and descriptions from academic literature, social media, and past Czech news articles. Similar to the two previous authors, the logics of personal experience are also employed, after when he articulates marijuana to be the weakest psychedelic, he then claims to be “living with psychedelics for 40 years” (ibid). I analyze the mentions of “killing, death” and that “the victims of ayahuasca end in the hands of psychiatrists, because they go mad because of it, or they are taken care of, after suicide, by the gravedigger” (ibid) as the presence of the health discourse. Thus, his text differentiates between “weakest” (marijuana) and “most dangerous” (ayahuasca) psychedelics, and the logics of hazard are to greater extent used in the articulation between health and ayahuasca, and only to a lesser extent with the sign of psychedelics. Because he still says that “the psychedelic induced state is understood as experimental psychosis, exceptionally deep regression, and nobody ever knows what it may do to one’s mind” (ibid).

Lastly, in the CZEPS's blog post responding to Doležel, his claims about ayahuasca being the most dangerous psychedelic are labeled as disinformation and him as either manipulative or "unable to work with information" (2022). Many of Doležel's quotes and descriptions of events are scrutinized by adding supposedly missing details and as in the previous CZEPS's sources, they again repeatedly draw on scientific discourse, where "science" is mentioned 6 times and 25 references are used in the text along with other relevant signs. I view that the scrutiny, scientific discourse, and the focus on health can all be seen particularly, when they say "ayahuasca (contrary to the arguments of mister Doležel that aren't backed by anything) does not have documented significant negative effect on human psyche and its physical risks are also small" (ibid). Doležel's linking of marijuana as a psychedelic is also contested by "It [marijuana being a psychedelic] is not in line with scientific consensus even though it is a relatively popular mistake" (ibid). Therefore, the discursive struggle to fix the meaning of psychedelics is primarily about their relation to health as well as what substances or drugs are to be contained within the category. CZEPS's sources also exemplify that scientific discourse has a relative hegemony over the claims of truth (i.e., as opposed to disinformation and manipulation) (ibid).

To conclude this subchapter, in the paragraphs above I have explored my reasoning for why and how exactly I identify health to be the nodal point around which the discourses present in the Kauza Ayahuasca are organized. In the process, each of the texts, except Honzák (2021), was analyzed where I put special focus on the identification of the nodal point. In the section I go on to explore the particular logics I interpreted being used to establish the various relationships between psychedelics and health.

THE THREE PSYCHEDELIC LOGICS

I have so far shown my analysis for why I identify health as the nodal point that organizes the discourses around Kauza Ayahuasca. In the following paragraphs I will explain one by one how I identified the three articulatory logics in the analyzed texts, which are the logics of safety, of benefit and of hazard. Each of these logics establishes a particular relationship between health and the floating signifier of *psychedelics*, and thus it infuses it with meanings that are different, which is where I also deduce the social antagonism to lie.

First, the articulatory logics of safety which I found to be the most abundant in the analyzed texts. Establishing this kind of relationship in the analyzed material has mostly taken the form of explicit negation of hazardous effects that psychedelics may have on health. For example, one of Cink's subchapters about health aspects of ayahuasca and psychedelics include the following: "As with all serotonergic psychedelics like ayahuasca and DMT the development of addiction is not possible" (2023). Similarly,

Vobořil describes the actions that the court punished as “not much socially hazardous” (2022) and further says “Psychedelics are not drugs of dealers and gangs, they are not connected with criminogenic risks nor with risks of addiction like alcohol and heroin” (ibid). While Bém says that the legal classification of psychedelics as ““especially hazardous drugs without medical utility" is absurd” (2023). The other frequent form of the articulation are direct assertions about the safety of ayahuasca and psychedelics. Such as “Ayahuasca [...] is according to available scientific materials considered as an exceptionally safe psychoactive substance” (CZEPSblog, 2022), “[...] growing number of studies showing their [psychedelic’s] benefit and relative safety” (CZEPS.org, 2023) and “Ayahuasca is generally considered to be safe” (Cink, 2023). Together, the logics of safety construct the meaning of psychedelics to have low risks for and be safe for biophysical health (ibid.), social health (ibid.; Vobořil, 2022), mental health (Bém, 2023; CZEPSblog, 2022) and health more generally (ibid.; CZEPS.org, 2023). Note that the presence of scientific discourse, which was already mentioned in the previous subchapter, is most prevalent in these sources out of the whole analyzed dataset.

Second, when the articulatory logics of benefit are used within the analyzed texts, it is always done so alongside the logics of safety. Though as we I will show in the examples to come, they are differences between them. The most common one among them is the linking of psychedelics with medical effects, often by mentioning "therapy" or "psychotherapy", which is also in all cases associated with scientific discourses (CZEPS, 2022; CZEPS.org, 2023; Cink, 2023; Tylš, 2023). The two best examples I can document are Vobořil: “In therapy they [psychedelics] are considered as effective tools, which enable insight and change of problematic patterns of behaviour, access to unconscious material or positive changes in personality and value system” (2022). And Bém: “All available data convincingly prove their [psychedelic’s] medical potential in the care for especially serious psychiatric illnesses, which are for example substance and non-substance addictions [...]” (2023) that he follows with an array of other *illnesses*. I’d like to remind the reader that although the analytical focus is on psychedelics, all kinds of signs make up the texts, for example *illnesses*. The other form of the logics of benefit construct psychedelics with positive changes in personality and value system (Vobořil, 2022 ; Cink, 2023), in self-development (Tylš, 2023), or even in the (protopian) evolution of society (Charvát, 2022), i.e., protopia, as I called it in the previous subchapter. The two examples are Cink: “current data gained from studies with psychedelics show that psychedelics develop prosocial behavior, empathy, cognitive flexibility, creativity, personal factors like openness, value orientation, relationship to nature, etc.” (2023). And Charvát: “I’m convinced that for the creation of society, where people respect and help one another, and put common interests before their own – society which we have not yet at all achieved to build – psychedelics will play a key role” (2022). As I have analyzed

in the last subchapter, his text constructs the meaning of psychedelics beyond the medical discourse, while using the logics of benefits. To summarize... whereas logics of safety infused psychedelics with low risks and safety (not being unhealthy), the logics of benefit infuse them with medical utility (treating the unhealthy) and positive changes (creation of conditions for health, in the full definition I proposed).

Reflexivity box – zooming out of the dataset

One day, while contemplating in silence on my analysis, I realized the presence of the medical and futurist discourses in the psychedelic culture of Czechia and abroad and how these two are in some ways antagonistic. I think the demands for action they make sometimes, but not always as *Kauza Ayahuasca* shows, where for example the medical discourse demands legal access to psychedelic therapy, while the futurist discourse demands legal access to psychedelics more generally, outside the institution of modern healthcare. I decided to include the reflection here to show some of the limitations of my chosen dataset, which only shows the co-existence of the two discourses.

Third, the articulatory logic of hazard is a part of discourse, where the relationship between psychedelics and health is articulated as mutually exclusive to the discourses with the logics of safety and benefit. Here, psychedelics and ayahuasca are linked to outcomes such going mad, psychosis, death, hurting or killing of others (Hastík, 2021; Sláma, 2021; Doležel, 2022). Specifically, Hastík constructs the effects of psychedelics as the inhibition of cognitive abilities that in the context of driving may lead to killing oneself or hurting others (2021). Sláma describes their effects as possible breaking of person's mind, psychotic states and psychosis that "have more or less significantly and permanently harmed them [colleagues of Sláma who tested psychedelics]" (2021). Lastly, Doležel repeatedly mentions ayahuasca to be "the most dangerous natural psychedelic" (2022) and links it various cases and reports where people got hurt or died. He also constructs the effects of psychedelics as "experimental psychosis [...] and nobody ever knows what it may do to one's mind" (ibid). As I documented in the previous subchapter, each of these texts also shows the logic of personal experience, which I'd therefore also assign to this discourse that constructs psychedelics as health hazards. Such understanding leads Hastík to caution against the use of psychedelics – "let's keep them under the lock [...]" (2021) and Doležel to oppose the people, who are "[...] attacking the court's decision as too strict [...]" (2022). Thus, the discourse that shapes their view on psychedelics makes them demand actions that are socially antagonistic to the key players' frequent challenging of the judicial discourse involved in the *Kauza Ayahuasca*. I conclude by saying that I find the discursive struggle in the *Kauza Ayahuasca* to be about the relation of psychedelics to health, which are constructed to be either hazardous or safe and beneficial.

CONCLUSION

In my research about psychedelics in Czechia, I employ the constructivist philosophy to study how subjects understand them and discursively construct their meaning. To choose the subjects, I dialogically engaged with forty members of the Czech psychedelic culture through a survey to produce together a word cloud that defines for my research the key players in the culture. Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory was used to analyze textual responses from six of the key players to the dislocatory event of Kauza Ayahuasca. I added few additional sources, including four texts that reacted to their responses, which helped set the discourses of the players within a wider social discourse around psychedelics. From the dataset of 13 texts, I identified *health* to be the shared nodal point which organized the discourses that infused *psychedelics*, as the floating signifier, with their particular meanings. I suggest that the various meanings of psychedelics were especially influenced by how was their relationship to health articulated to be. I then categorized three articulatory logics, which provide social actors the understandings of psychedelics as hazardous, safe and/or beneficial. The logics of hazard linked psychedelics with effects like going mad, psychosis, death, and hurting others, which demanded antagonistic opposition to the discourses of the key players. Those on the other hand used logics of safety, where hazard of psychedelics was negated and articulated to be safe, and logics of benefit that linked them with medical effects, (psycho)therapy in particular, and positive changes, such as in personality, self-development, and evolution of society. The discourses characterized by these two logics made shared demands of challenging, and eventually hegemonically intervening, the judicial discourse in the case of Kauza Ayahuasca.

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