



Terence McKenna

In the Valley of Novelty – Part 2

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Well, we said, I think, that when you take psychedelics you go up a dimension. And so this world of transience and flux becomes an eternal world. So in that sense, it's the same thing. Whether meditation and psychedelics are the same thing, I think depends on your meditation and your psychedelics! Different meditations strive for different things. Much meditation is about emptying the mind of phenomena. This certainly would not be a description of the psychedelic state!

Question from audience comparing LSD insights with meditational experience

Well, in the interest of keeping the number of singularities to a minimum, the most elegant thing to do is to wrap the theory around and say that the starting-point and the ending-point are the same place. Yeah, it's the place where all is co-tangent. How we could get the universe back into the primal dot in 12 years, I don't know, but there are some schemes to do that. There's always schemes to do it. You know, if the universe were some kind of vacuum fluctuation, and it had an anti-matter twin in a higher superspace, then there would be the potential, at least, for them to collide across all points simultaneously, and you would actually get the universe of matter disappearing instantly, and you would then be left with a universe made only of photons, because they don't have an anti-particle. What a universe purely made of light – what its physics – would be like, is hard to say; but it sounds peculiarly like certain Gnostic **theophanies [??]** about gathering the light and returning the light. Ultimately, the meditation path and the psychedelic path must somehow lead to the same kinds of data, if the claims of both are to be respected, which is that they give deeper knowledge about reality. Yes.

Question from audience about expression of information using new technologies that may replicate the psychedelic state

I'm all for it; I just haven't seen anything that convinced me that anybody had achieved it to any degree of significance. Yeah, you know, imagine a drug that did nothing more than allow you to remember your dreams! I mean, that's not exactly shooting for the moon, pharmacologically, these days. And yet a drug which allowed you full recovery of your dreams might unleash God knows what, because we don't know *what* we dream! The chemistry of DMT suggests that in deep REM sleep, it's possible every single night you have a DMT flash. But it does not transcribe into short-term memory. Or imagine a drug which allowed you to enhance long-term memory, so that you could slip into reveries of a summer day 30 years ago and play it back moment by moment by moment... again, this is not shooting for the moon pharmacologically. We're not talking immortality here, we're just talking simple neurochemistry. But all of these possibilities would change life beyond recognition. And I think these things should be pursued by any means necessary, you know – it's a false dichotomy, the idea that somehow you should be able to achieve these things on the natch, and

they're not authentic if you achieve them through psychedelics. This is just a con to keep lineages in business, I think, because they don't want you going off the ranch and charting your own course. But where shamanism becomes priestcraft, it's already well on its way to senescence.

Audience question re collective perception on mushrooms (nonverbal sharing of ideas)

A couple of situations, I've had telepathic things. I've had, in group situations, very quasi-telepathic social interactions. What I mean by that is, I'm recalling an evening many years ago taking ayahuasca with these people and they had a weird scene going. The shaman was a good guy, and a good shaman, but he had a nephew who was a jerk and was sort a pimp, and kind of a hustler. And the shaman was singing with his three friends, these ancient ancient songs, and this guy was drunk on *aguardiente*, and he would sing against them! He would sing against them... and this was in Peru, and if you know the style of rural Peruvians, people are so polite and so not-upfront, that no social problem is ever dealt with directly: people will tolerate incredible bad behaviour without turning on a person and saying "Listen, you're completely out of line – knock it off". So, 30 people – 30 Peruvian *campesinos* – were witnessing this sing-against, and the woman I was with at the time very much didn't like what was going on, and at the end of this, this nephew, this *sobrino*, at the end of his song of raucous interruption, I looked up just as he ended – the room was almost in complete darkness... I looked up just as he ended. I saw her look up and look at him with a look of utter disgust, and when these red dart things got to him, it knocked him off his feet! And I heard... the old shaman was sitting right to my left, and I heard him turn to his friend, and he said: "Ah! The *gringa* sends the *bazudalacathnda*..." [laughter]... and so it was like, "Wow!". But then, ordinary reality immediately reasserts itself and moves forward, and there's no time to say "Wait a minute, folks! – something paranormal just happened here, I want to interview everybody, get your impression" – it's never, you know, when it's real, it's always caught up in the on-moving flow of events.

Question from audience

Well, if you've taken – what you don't want to do is take... here's – this is reasonable advice, too, I think. Where the problem area lies, people think it lies in taking too much. It lies in taking too little. Because if you take too little, you can resist it. You can struggle with it, and then it can turn into a real mess, because you're afraid of it and you actually have the power, to some degree, to resist it. What you want to do is take sufficiently enough that there's no escape, and that the transition from ordinary reality to fully loaded is as quick as possible. Because the going up is somewhat terrifying.

For example, let's use psilocybin as the model. Here's how it works for me – this is not tea, this is eating raw mushrooms: it comes on more slowly. So after an hour or so, you know, and the way I do it is I sit... as soon as the mushroom enters my body, I sit and meditate. I noticed in South America they don't do it like this: they dose the ayahuasca, and then everybody just goes on, talking about their motorcycles and the jobs at the saw mill, and who's conning who... it's like, totally – there's a brief moment, they pour, they toss it down, then they all go back to raving at each other about mundane life; and then 30 minutes later, on the dot, the shaman blows his whistle, or shakes his **chakupa [??]**, his dry leaf bouquet, and everybody settles down – it's like it comes on within two minutes: as soon as the guy starts singing, he just invokes it.

But the way I do it is, I take the mushroom (or the ayahuasca), and then I sit and I roll bombers, so I'll have them ready if I need them, and I just sit as I'm going to sit during the trip, and I've unplugged the telephone, and I've gotten everything squared away, and it begins to come on at about the 40-minute or the 60-minute mark; and there's sometimes some nausea as it comes on. And then I smoke a

bomber, or half a bomber. And then it catapults it into the full deployment of the thing, where you just hang on – there’s about a 25-minute period where your only job is to hang on. It builds. It’s like watching an atomic explosion on the other side of 50 feet of absolutely clear crystal glass. I mean, you “can’t believe this is happening – *in my mind*”. You have the feeling that everyone from Seattle to San Diego has just crawled under their desk as this thing tore past; but it’s in your mind.

And then there is the interaction with it, which – moment to moment, you are pretty coherent; but you lose it – a lot of it doesn’t transcribe into short-term memory. And then after about an hour or 40 minutes of that, it becomes more manageable, more memorable. The most mind-boggling parts of it are just not possible to bring out of it, because language fails; because English... there are no words. There are no words even close. I mean, sometimes you’ll bring out an image or a metaphor, but out of five hours of tripping, you bring out half a notebook page of metaphors and yet you were entirely engaged during that time – now, this question about fear, which is a real question, because when everything begins to slide, if you are not – it’s more than most people who haven’t done it expect. They have heard it, they’ve read the books, but they think it’s a metaphor. They don’t understand: it’s really going to happen, and it’s really going to happen to *you*. And there’s a tendency to clutch, or to try and resist it.

The thing to do in those situations, I think – and it’s counterintuitive to how Western people think – but the thing to do is to sing. To sit up, not to assume the foetal position – see, what you might tend to do is assume the foetal position and tell yourself, “My God, this is the most appalling thing that’s ever happened to me – if I can just live through it, it’ll be all right. I’ve taken this drug: if I can just wait through – how long did they say it would be? – seven hours, I see. It started two minutes ago. If I can just...” – No, the thing to do is to sit up and to sing! Why? Well, being practical people, to oxygenate your brain. To move the entire – this thing that’s happened to you, though it may have one claw in heaven, its roots are in your neurophysiology and in the chemistry of the drug. You want to move your physiology around. So oxygenating your brain can’t fail to do this. So you sing. And this almost always is accompanied by a sense of power, control, equilibrium, and so forth and so on.

Not always. I mean, let’s face it: you’re a product of a nutty society and there are unexamined crevices and uncleaned-out drain traps in all of us, and you’re going to encounter that stuff. The good news is, the earlier psychedelic trips tend to deal with that. You will quickly discover, taking psychedelics, that either you can work through your personal issues and become a psychedelic explorer, or this is just stronger medicine than you are up for, and you would be far better to go back to psychoanalysis or whatever works for you. Some people just can’t take it. Why is that? Well, because what it does is it dissolves boundaries, and most of us are over-boundary-defined. But some of us are having an uphill battle getting some boundaries in place, and realising we are not the telephone or the tree or the person we live with; and so for those people, who are having trouble establishing and moving boundaries, this is the last thing on Earth they should get involved with.

Question from audience about the “bombers”

Cannabis. Cannabis. Cannabis! [laughs]

Question from audience about experience the loss of ego – is it possible that your physical self could cease?

Well, people often – yes, wondered. Often people wonder. You get into a place where it’s so unfamiliar that the question comes up: *Have I done it this time? You know, Am I dying? or Am I in*

danger? The answer is, the odds are incredible against you being seriously in danger. People don't die from psychedelics unless they have heart conditions or some incredibly rare medical condition. The problem is that the ego feels threatened by the boundary dissolution, and its ace is your self-identification with it. And it can actually say to you, *You are dying, and here's the evidence*; and you have to say, *It's unlikely*. – and sing your way through it. But this is really tough. I mean, the Buddhists talk about slaying the ego – this is slaying the ego for real. You *must* slay it, otherwise it will spread panic into your whole psychological system, will give way to panic and hysteria. So unless there is some real reason to think you're dying – and you should have done your homework: you should know what to expect... for example, if you take LSD and begin intense bouts of vomiting, this is not a proper reaction to LSD. Something is wrong, either with the LSD or with your relationship to it. You should know what a typical... a typical trip will put you through changes, but is not dangerous. But if you suddenly begin exhibiting some symptoms – heart fibrillation, or something like that – then you want to have...

This is why, then, there is always the issue of the buddy system: should there be somebody else there, and what about all that? My position is, if you are anxious, then you should have a sitter. If you're going to do it alone, you should certainly tell someone so that they will check on you after a while. I don't like doing it in groups or with sitters because inevitably I get spun into them. What I want to do is go as deep as possible, and even if I'm alone with one other person, culture is the third guest at the table, you know? I mean, if you start – I've often found myself in the middle of psychedelic trips thinking, "I'm sure glad there's nobody else here to see this, because I'm sure it would alarm an observer!" – because I have my leg thrown back over my neck, and I'm screaming in Urdu, or something. But it's OK, after a few minutes it's OK; but if there were an observer, they would feel the need to do something, you know... and often, like I've seen people smoking DMT; and people moan, and they say "No! No! NO!!!!" and they moan. So then, you know, you get them back together, and constituted, and you say, "How was it?", and they say, "It was *fantastic!*" So you realise that how they present is not reliable.

Well, setting has a great deal to do with it; and setting is a very complicated issue. *Setting* means everything, from the astrological situation at the time that you do it to the physical surrounding that you're in; and it's also a roll of the dice – you never know exactly what you're going to get. As far as the question about Buddhism and all that, my own, you know when I started taking LSD I thought I saw, in Tibetan Tonka painting and mandalas, the echoes of this same world, and pursued it: went to Nepal, studied Tibetan, collected the art... and it is similar. I don't know – I don't know to what degree the Buddhists, the Mahayanists, realise those states without psychedelics. I do know that with psychedelics, those meditations, those techniques, those insights, are supercharged. And I would suspect that Tibetan Buddhism, as it has its roots in Vedic Hinduism, there may be psychoactive plants in its past; but it's far in the past. Buddhism was brought to Tibet in 741 by Padmasambhava. There was an autophanous shamanism already present throughout the Himalayas, the Punpo. And it was largely based on cannabis intoxication at that point in history, not so much in the present.

But I think that this is a fruitful area – I just can't believe that Mahayana Buddhism could have gotten as far as it did without some reliance on psychedelics; and of course, cannabis – we in the West, our style is to smoke it; and that's a very mild way of dealing with it. I mean, if you eat – if you have unlimited amounts of high-grade cannabis, and you eat grams and grams of it, you will have experiences as extreme as anything that psilocybin or ayahuasca can deliver to you. You only have to read the descriptions of nineteenth-century writers on cannabis – Fitz Hugh Ludlow, S. Weir Mitchell,

these people – their descriptions of their trips are as psychedelic and as out of control as any acid reportage or psilocybin reportage.

So the relationship of Indian and Buddhist spirituality to cannabis and other psychedelics is not understood. We do know that the whole Rg Veda is a hymn to a drug, soma, but we don't know what soma is. Well, the fact that it could have invited such attention to this Vedic civilisation – the 95th mandala of the Rg Veda says, "Soma is greater than Brahman, greater than Indra". Well, what is being talked about? How could such a great thing be forgotten and lost? What was it? And then, you know, almost as puzzling as *What was it?* is, *How could you lost such a thing?!* I mean, it's like us forgetting how to make automobiles or something! It was something so basic to the culture that how could you possible forget something so central? Yet apparently they did, and today there are scholarly fights. Was it *Amanita muscaria*? Was it psilocybin? Was it *Peganum harmala*? Or was it something else? Why is this so hard to figure out? The only thing I can imagine is that it must have been eventually restricted to a priestly class of initiates, and then there must have been a social revolt from the bottom, and all those people were put to death; and then, nobody knew what it was.

Yes, I think you have to push the psychedelics to reach these unitary states. What always fascinated me was hallucination. Because it was, to me, the proof that I was dealing with something outside myself.

Question from audience

Well, and here was stuff that amazed me, that I couldn't make up on my own, that would – you know, a single image would have taken me hours to draw and figure out, and here I was getting 28 frames a second of this unpredictable stuff!

Question from audience

Well, one of the nice things about the tryptamines, I think, is they leave the sense of self pretty much intact. In other words, it doesn't distort who you are; it does something to your sensory input. DMT is very, very surprisingly, like that. You smoke DMT: you are immediately plunged into an alien universe. But if you can keep your wits about you, and actually notice how you feel, you don't feel any different! You're not smarter, stupider; you're not more excited, or – once you get the initial panic under control, you realise – *My God, it didn't lay a finger on me! I'm me, I'm entirely intact! What has happened is that the world has been completely replaced by something completely unrecognisable and alien that I have no words for, that's blowing my mind, that's ripping apart my philosophical machinery as I gaze upon it; but when I bring my attention back into my body, I discover – I'm fine! I'm OK! It didn't change my mind, you could almost say, it changes 100% the reality around you.*

That's powerful, because it appears objective. I mean, the impression you have when you smoke DMT is, *This isn't a drug, that's ridiculous. Drugs, you know, make you smarter, make you stupider, make you fall down, make you stay awake... we know what drugs are; this is no drug, this is something else hiding under the label "drug". This is a doorway into another modality that exists all the time, independent of my thoughts or feelings about it.* Is that true? Well, I don't know! But it certainly doesn't seem to be a place constructed to fit human expectations. Like, one of the things that always troubled me about DMT being somewhat of a Jungian event was the question, *How come there's no hint of this in any mythology or religious tradition or alchemical text or fairytale or dream, or anything else?...* I mean, if this is so important a part of what it is to be a human being, how can it be so deeply buried, so secret, so unknown, and yet just one toke away?!

It still, that, confounds me. Because you can read all the Hindu scripture or Sufi mysticism, or all the stuff you want – occasionally, sure, you’ll find a phrase or two that could be mapped onto a DMT state, but nobody has trumpeted it. Nobody has said, “This is what it is”. And yet, as I say, it’s spread throughout Nature; it’s been known since aboriginal times. We used to, years and years ago, call it *the Secret*. And in a way, it really is the secret. Jorge Luis Borges has a story called *The Cult of the Phoenix*, and he talks about a secret that seems profound and yet preposterous to the initiates. One child may initiate another, and ruins are good places to do this... it just goes on like this for a page and a half, and you realise he’s – he must be talking about DMT.

Question from audience re the ego as a fairly recent phenomenon

Yeah, the great cultural accomplishment of Western civilisation is this thing called the free individual. But now that we’re on the brink of, you know, the electronic dispensation, exactly what we’re going to do with the free individual, and how that’s going to look, in an era where consciousness flows through a thousand portals, it’s not at all clear. It’s not clear whether we can somehow now carry the idea of the free individual to an even higher level, where each of us will become a kind of god – lord over our own creation, as vast in time and space, but virtual, as the cosmos in which we find ourselves embedded; or whether the free individual is going to turn out to be the problem all along, and we’re going to abandon it and become some kind of socialist gas, or some collectivist swarm, a hive mind, a world where intelligence flows where needed and identity is provisional and fleeting, and unanchored to place or body; I mean, much of this goes on on the Internet, you know. You can be an 11-year-old girl, you can be whatever you want. You can build your avatar and present yourself in many guises. It’s much more like a shifting fantasy-land than it is like the good old world of positivist rock’n’roll.

Question from the audience re shamanic singing as the catalyst for visual experience

Well, yeah, I think that, you know, we see shamanism from the outside with the values of Western civilisation unconsciously applied. In cultures that are taking psychedelics, this thing which we call singing is a very complicated activity indeed; and if you’ve ever sung on psychedelics, you know that – you know, it’s an ecstatic and complicated and synaesthetic experience. I mean, to make of your body a vibrator for sound, to – you know, move out into the Pythagorean octaves with the human voice, and – it’s extraordinary, actually, how capable of sound human beings are. No other animal has the range and control of voice. They say that this is because we’re adapted for spoken language, but I think we had a lot of this range and control before. So things – words that we use very knowledgeably, like *song*, *ancestor spirit*, *power place* – we’re not getting 90% of the nuance of these meanings, because they go so gracelessly into English. When a shaman talks about *spirit*, he’s using a term as technically complicated in his mind as when a physicist uses the term *beauty* to describe a quark. You know, it’s very technically defined. And we tend to simplify, and then suppose that we understand.

Part of the thing I found with hanging with shamans in various places and times is that once you get past the language barrier, what shamans are are simply curious people. Intellectuals of a certain type. In Australian aboriginal slang, a shaman is called a “clever fellow”. If someone says “I’m a clever fellow”, they mean, you know, I’m a shaman. Well, that’s all it is – it’s somebody who pays attention to how things actually work, and sort of transcends the culture by that means. It’s a weird paradox. It’s that the shamans, who are the keepers of the cultural values, are also necessarily the keepers of the secrets of the theatrics of the cultural values, and so they live their lives in the light of the knowledge

that it all rests on showbiz. You know, everybody else is a true believer, but these are the image-makers, the people who actually pull the strings and control the evolution of the mythologies. And in a way, it's a situation of alienation.

Mircea Eliade talks a lot about this in *Shamanism: The Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* and in *History: The Eternal Return*. He talks about how the shaman is socially marginal, politically marginal, lives at the edge of the village, and so forth and so on, and is feared by the people, because dealings with the shaman are always dealings about life and death. But then the shaman comes forward in this critical role, as go-between, as mediator, between the cultural mind and the real world, which is this potent set of forces and planetary cycles and meteorological events and diseases and, you know, fate; and the shaman mediates. In many languages, the word for shaman means "go-between". So the cost of this, or the price of this, for the shaman himself, or herself, is a kind of alienation from the cultural values, and a kind of understanding that it's a game that's kept in play.

And this is true in our culture as well: you don't think the people who market all this crap and produce all this bad art, and so forth and so on, love it?! or watch it, or consume it?! – they market it. Its basic purpose is to delude and distract the masses. So psychedelics, what they bring into that shamanic situation, is sort of rocket fuel for the project of cultural detoxification, or Gnostic rocket fuel into a realm of cultural alienation. And then, from that point of view, then these other dimensions of reality come into being and deeper understanding comes into being. I mean, one of the things I think, after spending a while with all this, is, it really helps to be educated. It really helps to cram a lot of information and experience into your head, because the Logos – the alien AI, the high ?? hidden god that is trying to reach down to you and deliver the message, is a collagist. It can't really compose the message except out of bits and pieces of what you already possess.

And so, you know, this came home to me very forcefully when I developed the timewave out of the I Ching and its sequence; because at the times when I was most inflated in my thinking, or most grandiose in my thinking, one of the issues for me personally was, "Why me?" You know, "Why are you downloading this millenarian visionary revelation on me?" And the answer from the mushroom was fairly humbling. It was, *You are the first person who has ever walked through this pasture who had these 64 hexagrams in your head. And that's all we needed: we were just waiting for somebody who could bring that much to the party, and then we could arrange the details and the mapping, and the arrange – but they had to arrive with that much, and you're the first person.* So it was like, nothing about, you know, my fine genes or cosmic destiny, but just, I was the first termite to happen by carrying the right scrap of information in their head, that this thing could then manipulate.

Question from audience

Well, most DMT in the underground has been synthesised from indole. It's a fairly simple process, like third-year organic chemistry. DMT does occur in Nature, in many plants. But usually there is little of it, so you have to process a lot; or it occurs complexed with other tryptamines that have various psycho and physiological activities that you don't want, and that's very difficult to separate them. So most DMT in the underground is made by underground chemists... and if any of them are listening, you might consider making a bit more! – because it's hideously hard to come by.

Question from audience

Ah, if you had an IND – if you had a licence to give it to human subjects. But so people have such paper that the practical answer is No. So it's like that.

Question about True Hallucinations – at what level have you experienced the shamanic ability to manifest miracles?

Well, aside from the story mentioned – no, no, a truthful answer is always complicated, although the truth itself is always simple. If you're asking me to tell a story of a miracle that I still cherish as authentic, I don't think it's told in *True Hallucinations* the book, because – well, you'll soon see why – but here's an incident that happened at La Chorrera that didn't make it into *The Invisible Landscape*, I don't believe. Dennis had this notion of what he called "the good shit". This developed in the days after the ideas about hypercarboration. And he claimed – it was like a fantasy, it was like a joke, it wasn't clear exactly what it was, but – it was this idea that there was this hash somewhere that had been rolled into cow dung, with cow dung, and then infected with psilocybin mycelium, so that the mycelium had completely replaced the cow shit in this bowl of hash, or this hypothesised kilos of hash, somewhere in the world. And so there was this psilocybinated, the *good shit*. And at one point, he envisioned us actually forming a rock'n'roll band which would play instruments that would condense this stuff out of the air over large audiences, and you know, we would go on tour, and at the end of the tour history would be – the whole thing would be in a shambles, because Uncle John's band really did come out of the woodwork!

So at one point he predicted – one night, after he had been moved to the river and the sort of semi-incarceration – he predicted that the good shit would come that night. And by this time, he was very suspect – I was highly suspect – everybody in the expedition was polarised against everybody else, and it was a pretty uptight scene. And so I left with my girlfriend of the time, and it may have even been the same night as the silver key incident – and it was pouring rain, and we made our way like a quarter mile, half a mile, back into the jungle to this other place where we were staying, where the original experiment had been done. And so then we get to the hut, and it's pouring rain, and I had scored this kilo of Santa Marta gold for the expedition, and we had smoked nothing of this – for Colombia, relatively rare – weed, for weeks. So I got it out to roll the evening's joint, and I was fumbling with it, and I got this thing lit, and this little crumb, this little burning thing, fell on the floor, and I lifted it up, and smelled it, and [laughs] the transubstantiation had occurred! It was, you know, like Mazari Sharif triple-A, red lion, hashish, of some sort; and I *know* hashish!

And here we were, in the centre of the Amazon, in this hut, in the pouring rain, and I could tell that it was the good, it was the good shit, actually manifest. And I showed the woman who was with me – who was easily led one way or another – but anyway, she didn't say it wasn't, and I stayed up late that night smoking this incredible hash and waiting for the rain to stop so that at the first grey light of dawn I could go down to the river and confound my critics with, you know, the stone itself! The alchemical quintessence, the concrecence, the *excretum bono*, the good shit! Here it was! And so as dawn broke and the fog lifted, I made my way across this rainy pasture, and sat down by the hammock of the sleeping form of my most vociferous critic, and sort of elbowed her awake, and you know, there were other instances where this was the principle at work... It didn't work: everything had returned to normal. It was the Cinderella screw-up, you know. It was just that I was a char-girl who washed pots, and there was no prince, and there was no coach, and there was no... and, plus, I was once again humiliated in the presence of my critics, who had further reason to think that – you know, a check-in to the local mental healthcare delivery system might not be a bad idea. These things happen.