

Psychedelics and the Feminine

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1989

I was going to mention three books — I might mention more as time goes on — but these three are central to understanding what I'm going to be saying this month. They're very different books. Many of you may have read this one, *The Chalice and the Blade* by Riane Eisler. This is the book that talks about the partnership versus dominator model of society and gets rid of the gender tension inherent in the matriarchy/patriarchy way of framing that problem. It gets that out of the way because it just says: dominator and partnership. She believes and offers evidence that there never was a matriarchy, that the whole notion of a pendulum moving between patriarchy and matriarchy is not valid, and she and I are in agreement in that we both see something happening to human beings around the emergence of pastoralism, around the time when the domestication of cattle became a major concern of human beings.

This great goddess religion that was worldwide in prehistory is inevitably a cattle religion. She talks a lot about this, and she talks a lot about early cultural accomplishments — she's trained as an archeologist — such as Çatalhöyük. This is a civilization in southern Turkey that is important for my argument, too, because it was very, very early and achieved a sudden and extreme flowering of culture. Nothing would rival it for several thousand years. Mary Settegast calls it, "a premature burst of complexity and brilliance." Riane Eisler uses dynamic theory borrowed from modern mathematics — borrowed from Ralph Abraham, who I'm sure many of you know — to make cultural models. There's been a lot of excitement about this book among feminists, but what has been sort of overlooked is that this is the first time there has ever been a mathematical application of dynamics to human history. So this is a good book, and she is not psychedelic. She and I did a weekend together at Ojai where she was wonderfully generous and tolerant of my dancing around in the middle of her parade ground because I'm saying that the dynamic that drove this cultural transition had to do with psychedelics and that this goddess-cattle religion had to be also a mushroom religion.

The second book which I think you'd enjoy is called *The Creative Explosion: An Inquiry into the Origins of Art and Religion*. Now, notice that both of these books that I've recommended contain long passages about sudden outbursts of creative brilliance on the cultural level. This is very interesting to me because this is this stuff called "novelty" that we talked about yesterday. Tracking these outbursts of brilliance and complexity in cultures and our own lives is the way we confirm for ourselves the existence of this topological manifold over which probabilistic — or previously thought to be probabilistic — events are flowing. The book is a study of the cave art of Spain and southern France. Some of these things are hundreds and hundreds of feet underground down very narrow passages, and you have to go through all these contortions to get to them. Anyway, John Pfeiffer says in this book that this was a manipulated environment, that these were created and placed in this way to evoke very strong emotional responses from people. Even today, with very high-powered flashlights and nylon ropes and all of this stuff, it's a very big deal to descend hundreds and hundreds of feet into the ground; you can imagine people who had tallow lamps. . .

It appears that they went into these places and made these things and then only returned very briefly, on a cyclical basis, afterwards. In other words, they didn't inhabit these places; these were ceremonial places. What he's talking about is the high Magdalenian, which is 17,000-12,000 years ago, when, for the first time, there was bone and antler technology. In other words, the Stone Age is ending and there's a bone antler technology and this tremendous outpouring of creativity, mostly vented on a depiction of these images of animals in a state of semi-domestication or balanced upon the probability of domestication. So what we're seeing are herds of deer, cattle and primitive sheep and this sort of thing. Both of these books point to unexplained outbursts of creativity in the human past and document them very well, but without offering a causal mechanism.

Now, on a more practical bent, this directly addresses the psychedelic issue. If you're at all interested in psychedelic plants, this is the bible. It occurs in several different forms; this is *The Botany and Chemistry of Hallucinogens* by Richard Evans Schultes and Albert Hofmann. Schultes was the Harvard botanist who basically single-handedly created the field of ethnopharmacology. Early on, Schultes understood that what native peoples were saying about disease and plants was very touched with folklore and cultural factors, but what they said about psychoactive plants you could rely upon. So he reoriented his career toward the psychoactives, and from the '50s through the '80s, he and his graduate students shed light on a previously completely unexplored area of botany. We know through books like this and his more popular book, *Plants of the Gods*, these basically list and discuss the major psychoactive plants of the third planet from the sun. If you need information, this is where you go, and there are extensive bibliographies. This is the first edition and it's now been issued in a second edition, but this is pretty indispensable.

I thought I would talk a little bit today about how the psychedelic experience reflects on and relates to the feminine. First of all, a lot of this has to do

with how I think of the origin situation. I think everything was set then. It happened like this: there was specialization in these early protohominid and hominid populations and it generally divided along the lines of that the women, because they almost always had babes at breast, were more collectivized and traveled less. The men hunted and the women kept the children and all that together, and the women were gatherers — this is the important thing — and what they were gathering was plants, primarily. I'll show you something here. This is a description of a plant. You see, before the era of color lithography, botanists had this need to be able to exactly describe and differentiate plants one from another. The plant is *Methysticodendron amesianum*, and this is what is called the taxonomic description:

Trees up to 25 feet in height, leaves membranaceous, dark green, very narrowly ligulate, apically acuminate, basically long attenuate, marginally commonly subundulate or undulate, 20-26 mm long, 1.3-2 cm wide, minutely and irregularly pilous on both surfaces, flowers up to 28, usually about 33 cm long, apically 10-13 cm in diameter, very strongly sweet-scented at sundown, calyx spathaceous green, papyraceous or membranaceous, 2-5 fid with acute teeth, 3/5ths as long as corolla, very minutely pilous, corolla divided 2/3rds to 4/5ths its length, usually with 5 lobes but usually 4/6 membranaceous, white spatulate or subspatulate, rhombi form, long acumulate and circinate.

That's half of the description.

Now, the point of this is that the need to describe a plant puts tremendous pressure on language to accommodate itself to difference; that's what they're doing there. They're attempting to create a word picture that will make it possible to tell this thing from any other thing. Well, women who were gatherers in this early situation were under tremendous pressure to elaborate a vocabulary of visual distinctions: you eat the thorny one, not the smooth one; you eat the one with the leaves that have the crinkle on the edge, but not the one with the leaves that have the furry underside. This kind of need put on real pressure for language. Men in the hunting situation had, strangely enough, the pack signalling repertoire that we came down from the trees with. It's pretty sufficient for a pack hunting situation; in other words, you have forty or fifty barks and yells and you can direct a complex hunting operation. You don't have to have this tremendous stress on adjectives. The major stress in hunting is often stoicism and silence. To this day, it's thought to be a sexist observation, but when you go into villages of native people they always speak of the chattering of the women. This is true; women chatter a lot about the details of ordinary existence. This is what they are heavily linguistically programmed to be into, the details of ordinary existence and especially this matter of food.

The way in which the mushroom fits into all this is that when the African continent began to dry up — this happened over a very long period of time and it wasn't just a gradual phenomenon, there were glaciations and interglacial periods — but generally speaking, over the past half million years Africa has

experienced a progressive aridity, and this forced our remote ancestors down onto an evolving grassland situation. Simultaneously with all these changes going on in the protohominids a lot of ungulate mammals were evolving in this sudden rich grassland environment, and in the dung of these particular mammals the psilocybin-producing mushrooms found a suitable environment. They are that kind of mushroom which is called coprophilic, which means likes dung. The mushrooms used in the Indian cults of central Mexico are not coprophilic mushrooms, with one exception. They are ephemeral, deep forest mushrooms and endemic communities of species seem to have evolved there, but the exception is the genus *Stropharia*. These coprophilic mushrooms, *Stropharia cubensis* and its conspecific species, appear wherever there are cattle of the *Bos indicus* type, which is the zebu, the humped white cattle. This is a very primitive form of Asian cattle, probably the nearest living relative to *Bos primigenius*, which was the prototypic Ice Age cattle. So the mushroom occurs in this situation in the manure.

The pressure in the environment for protein is intense, and I myself saw in Kenya tribes of baboons on the veldt, and they would go over and examine cow pies and flip them over looking for grubs underneath them. So it's in the repertoire of the behavior of these apes to associate with these things, and the mushroom presents itself as a completely startling phenomenon in the natural environment. I mean, I've seen them in pastures in the Amazon the size of small dinner plates and on stalks 11 inches high, so we're talking a hefty piece of protein. The question is, can you eat this thing?

What happens, you see, when you eat a little bit of psilocybin — and this was shown in experiments by Fischer years ago — is that there's an increase in visual acuity. It's very slight, but measurable. Well, this means that it gives you an evolutionary adaptation in the hunting situation. You have better eyesight than other members of your group, and than you, yourself, had before you admitted this item into your diet. This is a self-reinforcing situation on a scale of thousands and thousands of years; very quickly, those not availing themselves of this "artificial" augmentation to sensory clarity will be bred out because there's just no percentage in poor vision. At slightly higher doses, the psilocybin causes sexual arousal. Again, you don't have to be an evolutionary biologist to understand that the number of successful copulations that you complete has a direct bearing on the success of your reproductive strategy. These are all numbers games. Those who fuck more have more children, is what it comes down to. So if a certain dietary item is causing sexual activity, then we're going to see more and more of the children of the people who indulge in that dietary item, and this can be very unconscious, you see.

The third thing, of course, is that at higher doses it gives way to this mystical *tremendum*, or this entry into hyperspace. What this has to do with the feminine is that the women would have been the gatherers of the mushrooms. The women were the keepers of the reproductive mysteries, anyway. This cow cult that got going, it's very clear to me that from the point of view of a preliterate person, the mushroom comes from the cow. You can't explain it any other way; it has no seeds. I mean, this was puzzling to people up until the 16th century.

They couldn't figure out where these things came from. They were accustomed to the notion of plants having seeds, but these mushrooms which sprang up overnight just seemed mysterious. So I think very early in prehistory there was a religion which was a celebration of the feminine, a psychedelic religion, an orgiastic religion, to take account of this arousal factor in psilocybin. It was in this environment, over thousands and thousands of years, that humanness emerged: an environment of boundary dissolution, where erotic connection was actually the basis of community, and where there was a constant exposure to this unlanguageable, unassimilable, mystical *tremendum* and the psilocybin was acting then as a tremendous catalyst for language. Its primary role in prehistory — and in the present, possibly — is to catalyze linguistic shifts, because linguistic shifts then give culture permission to follow and erect whatever edifices it wants.

Now, throughout prehistory, this vegetable goddess is a horned goddess. It is a goddess of the moon, a goddess of cattle and a goddess of plants. What I'm suggesting in this book I'm writing is that the natural human condition is actually a condition of symbiosis with this particular hallucinogen; that the mystery of who we are, and the mystery of why we are so bereft, and, "Why history?" and why all this malarkey, is because things went on 15,000-25,000 years ago that we have repressed and never faced the implications of, that we actually had a symbiotic relationship on the mental level with some kind of feminine overmind. Never mind all the questions which this raises about, "Where is it?" "What is it?" "How does it do it?" but just that the Gaian process is more than a process; it is a self-reflecting entelechy of some sort. How can we pass judgement on this? What do we know?

The earth is 4.5 billion years old. Intelligence may come in many forms. Self-reflecting awareness may come in many forms; but what seems clear is that there was a dialogue with this Other and there was balance, there was wholeness, and there was a way of being which, well, it was paradisiacal. That's why we are so haunted by the loss of it. That's why all of our ontologies are the story of how something was taken from us, something was lost; and it's nobody's fault, exactly. It really has to do with the processes of the planet, that this partnership paradise that arose as we came to consciousness in the cradle of Africa was dependent on the continuation of this extremely rich grassland environment, which was, in fact, a transient phenomenon, so that by 8,000-12,000 years ago, visible pressure was being felt by these populations in Africa. Each time there has been an interglacial period over the last 100,000 years, human populations — and in the older strata protohominid populations bottled up in Africa — have radiated out across the Eurasian continent, but only in the last interglacial, 20,000 years ago, were those people leaving Africa true pastoralists. They had flocks, they had skin tents, they had a religion, they had language. We know this, there is no doubt about it. Before that, they were nomadic hunters and gatherers. This relationship to the mushroom and the relationship to the cattle — actually, the first payoff — was an entirely new order of civilization. The symbiotic relationship with the cow, which made life much, much easier, was either fueled by or fed into the symbiotic relationship with the mushroom which

gave more successful hunting, better sex, and religion, so there were all these factors feeding into the situation.

Now, when these people got out of Africa and settled in the Middle East, it was a much dicier situation. If you know anything about Middle Eastern archeology, in Palestine there is a great puzzle because before 12,500 it's virtually empty. This is the interglacial — ice reached as far south as Sidon in Lebanon and this area was all frozen up — but as the glaciers retreated, suddenly there are people at Jericho and at several other places. It's always been assumed by archeologists on basically chauvinistic grounds that this must have been an outpost of old Europe, of the Balkan-Yugoslavian area that Marija Gimbutas has written so much about. Because these people are so advanced, they're called Natufians and they appear very suddenly in the archeological record around 12,500. 3,000 years later, they build Jericho, which is, at that time, the most advanced city site on the planet; but before they built Jericho, their habit of building was under rock escarpments, and this is the same style of Neolithic building that existed in the Tassili Plateau of Algeria.

In the absence of much archeology to support either side, I think it's reasonable to think that these people may have come out of Africa. In fact, there is some evidence of this because there is what's called Burnished Sudanese Ware Four found in these Natufian places, and Burnished Sudanese Ware Four comes from deep in what is now Ethiopia. So there was at least trade and while we don't have much art from Jericho, these people 2,000 years after Jericho — by now it's 7500 — they built Çatalhöyük in southern Anatolia, and this is truly a science fiction civilization. It's freakish; it's 7500 B.C., the pyramids lie 3,000 years in the future. One of the questions that will remain unanswered this month is why? Why is there this synergy between the plants and the human beings? Is it chance? Is it just that this is how it works out and we are now self-reflecting enough to be able to unravel the confluence of influences that created us, or is it plotted somehow? This is then the extraterrestrial gene theory: is this thing somehow strewn in our way?

I don't buy any of the extraterrestrial intervention theories that have them landing on the White House lawn or projecting images into the minds of people who live in trailer courts or all these things they're accused of doing. The one thing I grant extraterrestrial intelligence is great subtlety, and probably a long timescale to do whatever they want to do. It's possible to reach a point of deconditioning — it's a kind of reconditioning, but also deconditioning — where it seems obvious that the planet must be monitored. It is, after all, such an interesting planet. It seems that if anyone could monitor it, they would. We've already now, through the probes we've sent into our own solar system, seen about 33 worlds of various classes, and not one comes anywhere near to what we are. We are what astrophysicists have given the charming acronym: we are a WHORE. A WHORE is a water-heavy, oxygen-rich world, and water-heavy, oxygen-rich is rare, rare, rare.

So it may very well be that every one of these is closely monitored. Well, once you allow that notion, then the presence of the psychedelic activator in the environment begins to look more like a sort of biogenic engineering. It is

curious what these psychedelics do on the scale of a community: they release new ideas. You become a bearer of new ideas, or new tools, new techniques, new ways of doing things, and this is how culture moves forward. Culture is a phenomenon dependent on the generation of ideas, plans, notions, connections; this is precisely what these compounds are doing. So is that a coincidence or is it part of the regulator? Are we somehow being managed toward some point? And then the question becomes, of course, for what? And then it devolves into the realm of science fiction. I had a professor once who had a fairly grim view of things. His notion of what human history was all about was that it was a radioactive minerals mining project, and that when we finally had all these nuclear weapons stacked up like cordwood, somebody would come from another world and say, "Thank you very much! This is what we wanted and you've done a good job." All of human history was to stockpile plutonium for somebody else's very good reasons.

Well, I don't think it's anything quite so Jack Armstrong-ish as all that because what I sense in the mushroom is a tremendous heart. It's well beyond all of that. It's an emotional, intellectual, feeling-toned kind of thing; but is it a benevolent galactic monitor? Is it the beating heart of Gaia? Is it this entelechy that I spoke of at the beginning of the hour that is somehow the sum total of process on the earth? Or is it possible that I have been remiss in my assessment of the capacity of human beings and that this is nothing more than us? It doesn't seem to me like us. It doesn't look like that to me.