

Psychedelic Society

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What I want to talk about tonight is the notion or the idea of a psychedelic society. When I spoke at Santa Barbara at the Psychedelics Conference last year, my contact lenses failed me at a critical point in my lecture and I simply had to wing it. Later, when I played this tape back, I heard this phrase, “psychedelic society,” and I had never used it consciously in a lecture, but because I had said it, and because there had been a ripple of resonance to it from the crowd of people there, I began to think about it, and this evening I will just generally assess what it might mean for us.

I’m definitely a pioneer in this field. I’m sure you are all familiar with the book *Megatrends*, which is making quite an impression at the moment. Well, *Megatrends* nowhere mentions the imminent transformation of society through the application of psychedelic drugs. I don’t know what they were thinking. What the notion of a psychedelic society means or implies to me in terms of ideology is the idea of creating a society which always lives in the light of the mystery of being. In other words, that solutions should be displaced from the central role that they have had in social organization and mysteries, irreducible mysteries, should be put in their place. The British biologist J. B. S. Haldane, in the 1920s in an essay, said, “The universe may not only be stranger than we suppose, it may be stranger than we *can* suppose,” and I suggest to you that as we look back over human history, every pinnacle of civilization — whether it be Mayan or Greco-Roman or Song dynasty — has believed that it was in possession of an accurate description of the cosmos and of man’s relationship to it. This seems to go along with the full flowering of a civilization. From the point of view of our present civilization, we regard all those conceptions as at worst quaint, at best half right, and congratulate ourselves that *our* civilization at last has its finger on the real description of what is going on. I think that this is not true, and that, actually, what blinds us or makes historical progress very difficult is our lack of awareness of our ignorance, and that beliefs should be put aside, and that a psychedelic society would abandon belief systems for direct experience.

The modern dilemma is that direct experience has been discounted and in its place all kinds of belief systems have been erected. I would prefer a kind of intellectual anarchy where whatever was pragmatically applicable was brought to bear on any situation, but where belief was understood as a self-limiting function; because, you see, if you believe something, you are automatically precluded from believing its opposite, which means that a degree of your human freedom has been forfeited in the act of committing yourself to this belief. I maintain that it's pointless to have beliefs, in a sense, because the universe really is stranger than we suppose, and what we need is a return to what in the 16th century was called Baconian method, which means not the elaboration of fantastic thought constructs which explain, but merely a phenomenological cataloguing of what we experience.

Computer networks, psychedelic drugs and the increased availability of information in the world have actually made possible the evolution of new alien information states which have never existed before, and we are processing these things, but at a very slow rate, because we are hindered by ideology. I mentioned in an earlier workshop this afternoon that Freudian and Jungian models of the psychedelic experience, which saw it as somehow a stripping away of resistance and a revealing of complex and hidden emotions, motives and belief systems, have been replaced in the last five to ten years with the shamanic model of hallucinogenic experience. This model holds that archaic peoples have deputized special people to probe hidden information fields using psychedelic drugs and that the information extracted from these information fields is then used to guide and direct the society. Now, I'm interested in this second model, and spent time in the Amazon and am familiar with the operational mechanics of shamanism and shamanic personalities, but I believe, actually, that the psychedelic experience looms larger than the institution of shamanism, and that *we* hold a unique opportunity which is sort of the flip side of the cultural crisis. Our ability to destroy ourselves is the mirror image of our ability to save ourselves, and what is lacking is a clear vision of what should be done.

What should be done is certainly not the accumulation of ever larger nuclear arsenals and the promotion of all kinds of primate game-playing of the sort that Tim Leary is well versed in denouncing. What needs to be done is that fundamental ontological conceptions about reality have to be remade. We need a new language, and in order to have a new language we must have a new reality. It's almost a kind of ouroboric equation or a bootstrap situation. A new reality will generate a new language; a new language will *fix* a new reality and make it part of this reality. These psychedelic drugs can be conceived of as points on an informational grid. They provide new perspectives on reality, and it is when you connect all the points of perspective that you have a reasonably applicable model, what Wittgenstein called, "something which is true enough." The "true enough" mapping of experience onto theory is what we're looking for, but experience must be made primary. The language of the self must be made primary. Anarchy carries this responsibility, even when it's only political anarchy. What I'm advocating is that we each take responsibility for the cultural transformation by realizing that it is not something which will be

disseminated from the top down, it is something which each of us can contribute to by attempting to live as far into the future as possible.

We must get rid of the conceptions of the '40s, the '50s, the '60s, the '70s, the '80s, the '90s. We must *smear* the historical moment and become exemplars of the humanity of the end time. Those of you who attended my lecture about time this afternoon know that I believe that liberation, or let's even say decency, as a human quality is an actual resonance and anticipation of this future perfected state of humanity. We can *will* the perfect future into being by becoming microcosms of the perfect future and no longer casting blame outward on institutions or hierarchies of responsibility and control, but by realizing that the opportunity is here, the responsibility is here, and the two may never be congruent again. The salvation of your immortal soul may depend on what you do with the opportunity.

So, what do you do with the opportunity? What does it mean to say, in operational terms, "live as far into the future as you can live"? It means taking a position *vis-à-vis* this emergent hyperdimensional reality. It does not necessarily mean becoming a psychedelic drug user yourself, but it means admitting to yourself the possibility, and if you feel the heroic potential within yourself to be one of the experiencers, one of the pioneers, then you know what to do. If, on the other hand, you fear to be lost in the abyss, you fear what William Blake called falling into eternal death, falling from the spiral of being which connects one reincarnation to another and falling into the realm of eternal death, then you orient yourself toward the psychedelic phenomenon as a source of imagination.

A mirror image of the psychedelic experience in hardware are computer networks. Computer networks, paradoxically enough, are a deeply feminizing influence on society where, in hardware, the unconscious is actually being created. It's as though we took the Voltairean *bon mot* about how if God did not exist, man would invent him, and say if the unconscious does not exist, humanity will invent it in the form of these vast networks able to transfer and transform information. This is, in fact, what we are caught up in: a transforming of information. We have not physically changed in the last 40,000 years. The human type was established at the end of the last glaciation, but change which was previously operable in the biological realm is now operable in the realm of culture, and we are shedding cultural adumbrations of our vision of the unitary mystery at a faster and faster rate as we try to accommodate ourselves and mirror ourselves to the mystery which lies ahead of us in time, and which is throwing this vast shadow of fatedness back over the entire experience of human history for everyone who has lived in it. Previous to our own era, the only control language which could be applied to this thing, which was bringing people together and causing birth and death and tearing down and erecting civilizations, was God, and it was imagined as a self-conscious force that was leaning into the world like a cat into a fish bowl and making things happen.

Now we have a different notion, a notion of a vector system where forces over a large area are oriented toward a very small space. This is what history is: it's an inrushing toward what the Buddhists call "the realm of the densely packed," a transformational realm where the opposites are unified. The way

I characterize this unity of opposites is to say that it is that realm where the body is finally interiorized and the mind is finally exteriorized. The way I think of the mind is as a fourth-dimensional organ of your body. You can't see it because it's in the fourth dimension, but you experience a sectioning of it in the phenomenon of consciousness; but that is only a partial sectioning of it, the way a plane gives a partial picture of a cone when it truncates it. The growth of information systems is only a mirroring in masculine hardware of what already exists in nature as a fact, and it is up to us to hone our intuitions and to become aware of this preexistent system of communication and wiring so that we can step away from the dualisms which separate us from each other and from the world. We need to realize that there is a gene swarm, not a set of species, on the earth, that half the time when you think you are thinking you are actually listening, and that ideas are remarkably slippery things and are very difficult to trace to their origins, that we really are one-on-one and all together in a dimension that is not as accessible as you might wish to be congealed, as *Finnegans Wake* says.

The psychedelics are a red-hot social issue precisely because they are de-conditioning agents. They will cast doubt in you if you are a Hasidic rabbi, a Marxist anthropologist or an altar boy, because their business is to dissolve belief systems, and they do this very well and then they leave you with the raw datum of experience, what William James called, in talking of infants, "a blooming, buzzing confusion," and out of that you reconstruct a world. You need to understand that it is a dialogue where your decisions, the projection of your grammar onto the intellectual space in front of you, is going to gel into a mode of being. We actually all create our own universes, because we are all operating with our own private languages which are only very crudely translatable into any other person's language. There's even a physical analog to this, which will further reinforce this notion of alienation. It is that your picture of the world impinging on your eyes is made of photons. Photons are tiny wave packets, so closely circumscribed that they can be thought of as particles. That means that every single photon which falls on the back of my eye is different from every single photon which falls on the back of your eyes. This means that I am using a 100% different section of the world than any one of you is to get a picture of the world, and yet we are sitting here with the naive assumption that our pictures of the world differ only by our perspective within the space of the room. We have numerous extremely naive assumptions like this built into our thinking, and our most venerable explanatory engines, such as science, happen also to be our oldest explanatory engines, and therefore they have built into them the most naive and unexamined assumptions.

For instance, we can demolish science in thirty seconds. Science tells you that a set of conditions will create a given effect, and that every time that set of conditions is in place, that effect will be found to obtain. Well, the only place where this happens is in laboratories. In our experience, it isn't like that. A contact with a person is always different. The experience of making love, having a meal, riding the bus: these things are always different. It is their uniqueness, in fact, and the uniqueness that pervades all being that makes it bearable at

all; yet science is willing to tell you that the only things worth describing are those phenomena that can be repeatedly triggered. This is because these are the only phenomena science *can* describe, and that's the name of the game as far as they are concerned, but we, to claim our freedom, to take advantage of the tiny moment between immense abysses of unknowability — perhaps death, perhaps other reincarnations, perhaps transitions into other life forms — these things we don't know, but in the moment of being human we have a unique opportunity to figure things out. I have a faith that it is possible sometime, somewhere to have a conversation — perhaps no progress would be made until the ninth hour — but a conversation in which reality could be, literally, pulled to pieces beyond the point of reconstructing.

I had a friend back in the '60s who, one day on LSD, sat for fourteen solid hours with a toothpick and a large red brick, and he demolished it. He reduced it to nothing with this toothpick, and his fingernail long after the toothpick was gone. This is what we have to do to the ideological concrete in which we are set. We have to *claim* anarchy and realize that systems have a life of their own that is antihumanist. There is definitely an antihumanist tendency in all systems. Ludwig von Bertalanffy, who was the inventor of general systems theory, said, "People are not machines, but in every situation where they are given the choice, they will behave like machines." We all fall into patterns, we all then hold those patterns ever more tightly, they cannot be violated, and this happens on the thought level. We are at the cresting of the historical wave of this kind of uptightness that stretches back millennia, and I think that we have now come to the end of this phase. Whether you buy into my own peculiar, apocalyptic, transformative vision involving 2012, or whether you can just tell by looking around you that the shit may soon hit the fan, I think we can agree that we have come to some kind of impasse, and what is going to come out of it is either going to be a great deal of dislocation in the biosphere, the invalidation of intelligence as an adaptation of biology, and our extinction, or we are going to become as James Joyce dreamed we could, "man made dirigible." In other words, the exteriorization of the soul, the interiorization of the body.

In this process everything is going to be challenged; the very notion of humanness is going to be challenged, because we are on the brink, through genetic manipulation of DNA, of actually taking control of the human form, of being able to extend the notion of art inward into the human body and form. Are we classicists? Shall we each be an Adonis and a Persephone? Or are we surrealists? Shall I be a potato and you a burning leopard? These are decisions which will have to be faced. These are the important questions, and this vertical gain which we see in the metaphors that are applied to psychedelic drugs — consciousness expansion, getting high, psychedelic tripping, shamanic flight — all of these things are being paralleled. It's like the drugs are the feminine, software, formative leading edge of what is happening. Coming along behind that is the hardware, engineering, masculine mentality that is processing all this stuff into hardware, and this will continue until the leading edge outdistances the engineering mentality through breakthrough. This is what I think the shamanic hope is: that we can find a way to use chemicals in our bodies, and our voices,

and our thoughts, and our hands upon ourselves and each other to transform ourselves without technology, to move into the realm of the imagination “on the natch,” as it were, with an interiorized psychopharmacologically-applied technology that frees us in the imagination.

At the same time that this is going on, the engineering mentality is going to set human societies in orbit around the earth and the moon and the near planets, but there’s a catch here for the engineering mentality, which is that the very void which surrounds the planet exemplifies this enfolding, abyssal, feminine element. It is the “mysterious mama matrix” of *Finnegans Wake*. The mysterious mama matrix is the universe, and there is no escaping that fact, so I think that the engineering mentality, which will seek to change man into machines, will have to be counterpoised by the psychedelic, earth-oriented, imagination-oriented side of things, which will create, then, the potential for the spiritual marriage that will be the alchemical perfection of a new form of humanity. This is not far away. It *can’t* be far away. It must be now, and soon, and it is, as I said, a personal responsibility incumbent upon all of us to act. There is definitely an obligation to examine the possibility of action and to think clearly about self and other, language and world, past and future, because we have lived too much in the light of the idea that your ideology will be dictated to you essentially by geography: if you’re born in India, you’ll find out that the cosmos is one way, if you’re born in Brooklyn, you’ll find out it’s another way. What we need to do is transcend these localized grids of fate which make us what we are but don’t want to be, because you claim this higher level of freedom by the simple act of applying attention to being: the experience of being, the primacy of experience.

This is why I can get along with these people in the Amazon who do these drugs, because, though my Spanish is terrible, and often theirs is worse because they’re Indians, “*La experiencia, señor.*” “Yes, we understand, we know,” and he says, because we’re usually posing as scientists of some sort, “You’re from this or that university, you will return to this laboratory, you show me this paper which has the name of my friend in it because he helped you last year, but I say to you, experience is the thing,” and the only thing you can say to that is, “We know. It is.” We must begin to send out ideological visions rather than be the consumers of them. We need to turn off the metaphorical televisions which are hooking us into the network of cultural assumptions dictated from the Pentagon, Madison Avenue and what have you. We need, instead, to *turn on* our terminals and to begin to interact with like-minded people throughout the world and establish this new intellectual order which will be, then, the salvation of mankind, I firmly believe, because it is a collectivity. People will then feel the interrelatedness of their fates, feel that interrelatedness as a thing which transcends national and ideological divisions, feel the primacy of being part of the human family, and I think it will not be done without psychedelics, because we have drifted so long without them.

Surely, we are the culture that has gone longest without psychedelics in any cultural situation throughout the world. It’s been 2,000 years since the mystery was real at Eleusis, and in that 2,000 years, we have wandered far, far into

confusion, but we are the prodigal sons. We can redeem the ideal of shamanism from pre-technological social stasis and actually project it, perfect it and send it out to the stars. If we don't do this, everything is lost. There is no standing still. There is only risk and commitment to these millennia-long cultural goals that will restore meaning and direction to our civilization, or we will fritter it away into chaos and destruction and the horrors of the typical future scenario.

Thank you.