

Another Green World: Psychedelics and Ecology

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I tend to view the naturally occurring psychedelics as emissaries from the larger community of life, bearing elder-species wisdom. As the herbalist Morgan Brent has proposed, it is almost as if the vegetal world assigned certain plants to be the diplomats and teachers to our young and confused species, to help put us on a different path than the one we have chosen, racing to ecological decimation and self-extinction. How else to explain the consistent messages received in mushroom, ayahuasca, iboga, and peyote visions, of a world out of balance, of the need to take responsibility, of the vast empathic sentience of the Gaian mind?

In the same way that we garden plants, teacher plants like ayahuasca seem to garden us, when we imbibe them. During shamanic sessions, people often get direct messages about how to transform their lives. Sometimes, their explorations lead to radical revelations and of their attachment to mediocre diets, relationships, jobs, and so on. In many cases, they eventually take the advice, and purge these negative influences from their lives.

There seems to be a link between the loss of shamanism and initiatory experience in the West, and the genesis of a human culture able to treat nature as something alienated, outside of itself. The recovery of psychedelic awareness in the 1960s coincided with the birth of the environmental movement, and perhaps helped to inspire it. Believing in an objective world of material facts whose apparent reality was constantly reiterated by mass media and science, modernizing humanity lost access to the primordial and participatory modes of awareness known to indigenous cultures. We denied our innate knowledge of our reciprocal relationship with the natural world that not only surrounds but also constitutes us, as even the interior of our bodies are dense microbial environments.

My first mushroom trips in college helped to decondition me from my socialized personality and called into question my naïve assumptions that the civilization surrounding me was enduring and inevitable, that the air-conditioned nightmare of the American empire would continue forever. Later journeys confirmed this understanding, stripping away layers of acculturation. In West Africa I underwent initiation into the Bwiti tribe,



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taking iboga, their visionary sacrament. I was taken through a life review during that trip. It seemed as if a benevolent spiritual intelligence was guiding me, revealing how my negative and compulsive behavior patterns were formed by patterns set in my childhood. I was also given the faith that these patterns could be changed, that the splinters in my soul could be removed one by one, if I found the will to do so.

Gregory Bateson famously coined the term, the “ecology of mind.” Along with the outer ecology we see in nature, there is an inner ecology that consists of our thinking process and emotional tendencies. It seems that that our inner and outer ecology reflect

and reinforce one another. On the macro level, our current society is a projection of the collective thoughts and ideas developed by past generations.

In order to change our society from imminent doom, we need to clear out the old garbage and evolve new pathways of thinking and feeling as quickly as we can--to revamp our mental and emotional ecology. Psychedelic substances--visionary plant teachers--seem to play a crucial role in this process. Several books have come out recently revealing the importance of psychedelics in the development of the personal computer and the Internet. Many crucial insights in biology and physics were psychedelically inspired. The almost stereotypical psychedelic gnosis of interconnectivity, unity of all being, and infinite fractal unfoldings may indicate the potential for a quantum leap in human consciousness, to a new stage of awareness that transcends and includes previous levels or what the philosopher Jean Gebser called “consciousness structures.”

I suspect that psychedelics play a part in the process of our species evolution – a movement from one structure of consciousness to the next. One hypothesis is that we might be on the threshold of a shift from the biological and physical phase of our evolution to the psychic phase. Whatever comes next, any future for our species will be ecologically strict, and the gnosis we gain from communing with our botanical elders can provide us with crucial insights. •