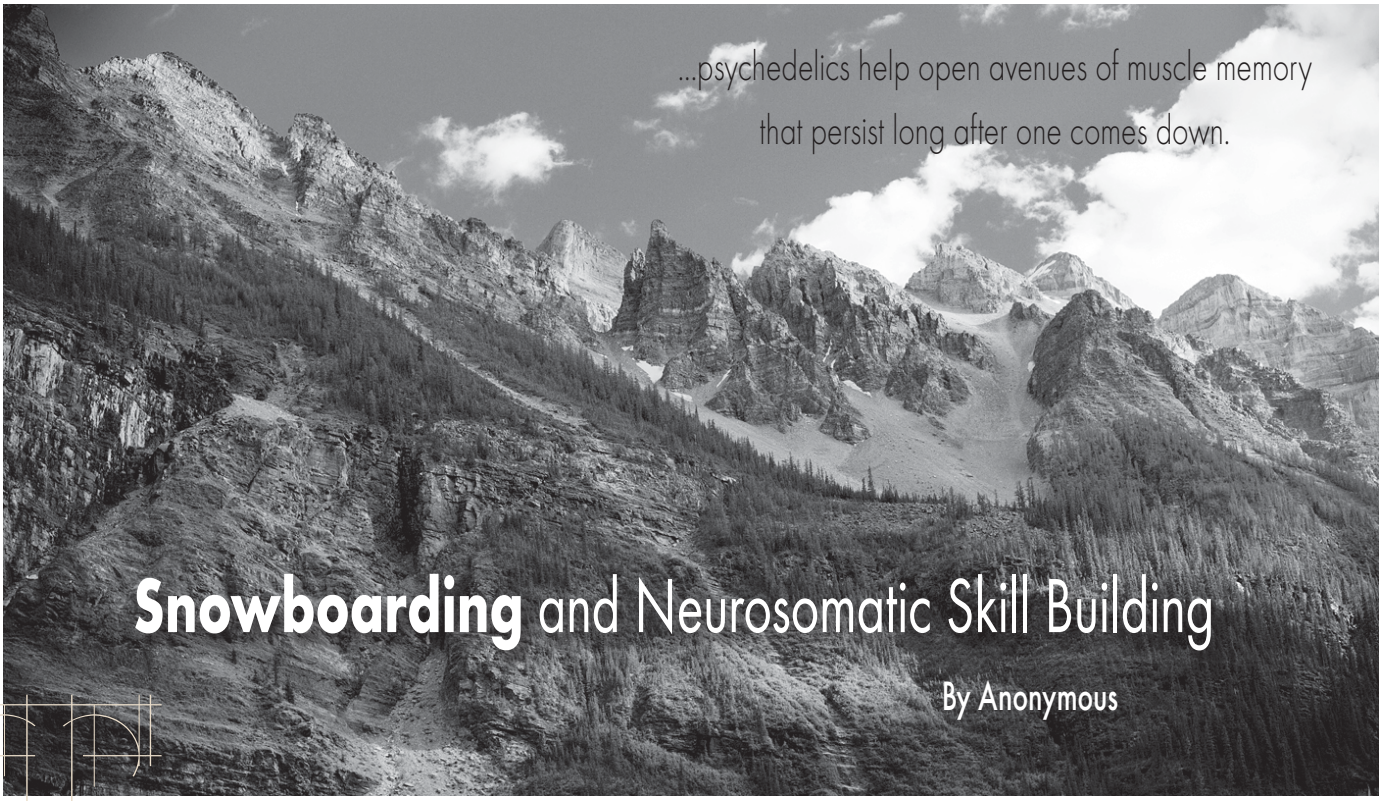

Snowboarding and Neurosomatic Skill Building

By Anonymous

There is great feeling in moments of hyperawareness. For me, these moments occur at the peak of physical exertion, on the line between fear and clear calm, in a background of nature's raw beauty. It is the moment when I am 100 feet up a cliff, and my fearful grip that is about to give turns into resolve, as I make the next move to climb to the anchor. It is the moment when the violent turmoil and confusion of being upside down in white water rapids gives way to the perfect hip snap that will turn me right side up–and allow me air. It is the motion of my snowboard seamlessly floating from side to side, while mounting speed through fresh snow. It is the grace and strength of moving through vinyasas of a physical yoga practice with the mind only on the breath. Stillness through motion; these are the times where I am drawn absolutely into the present.

But sometimes I need a jump start, a change in perception, and an entirely new way of experiencing. Experiments with psychedelics in a safe and purposeful way have allowed me to solve problems, and have helped me to overcome barriers, by disconnecting the fear in my mind that says "I can't" from the body that intuitively knows that it can. Psychedelics can augment the feeling of movement and allow one to experience that movement–the exertion, the breathing, the stretching, the power–in entirely new and exciting ways. Mind-enhancing drugs can open doors and even instruct.

The greatest gift of psychedelics is the power of lasting positive change. Alcohol may give a false sense of confidence that leaves one regretting the next morning, but psychedelics help open avenues of muscle memory that persist long after one comes down. Realizations while high become seminal ideas that materialize when applied with the rules and logic from the sober world.

Snowboarding for me was at first a frustrating sport. I knew how to balance and how to turn, and I knew that if I just pointed my board down the mountain that I would be fine, and yet I couldn't make myself. I was stuck snow plowing and using disjunctive turns to make wide lateral and slow vertical gains down the mountain. Throwing my weight back in caution caused me to fall, and I was starting to get pretty sore.

And so I tried getting high. My irrational fear loosened its grip, and I began to let myself go–literally. I pointed down the mountain, and I felt what it was to be snowboarding–really snowboarding. The movement is intoxicating. Hips moving methodically from side to side, shoulders and calves pushing and pulling this side, then the next … toe, heel, toe, heel … carving and floating at the same time. Knees bent, tail tucked, heart open. Crisp wind on the face, warm glow from a working body. It's mostly too quiet to hear, but you can feel the sound, a rhythmic swish, swish, a soft glide over powder and a satisfying crunch through the snow, just like stepping on dry leaves on a fall day. I did not hesitate, and I did not fall.

Night fell and I rode the lift one last time to the top. I passed over an unlit area of trees; their blackness and the nearly empty lift made me feel the cold. I twisted to look behind me and saw the mountain town glittering with lights, its cozy warmth dwarfed by the vastness of stars and the great mountains illuminated behind it. I took a deep breath and a stretch. My muscles and mind felt good.

I have not used this approach to snowboarding since; I haven't needed to. Each time I go down the mountain I feel high through the motion, the speed, the exhilaration. I would have, of course, eventually have come to speed with snowboarding without the use of mind-enhancing drugs, albeit not quite as rapidly. Drugs do not magically give us skills and qualifications that we do not already possess, but they do help to reveal a different pathway to what we do have. I will always look back at this memory in fondness, and I admit I wonder … perhaps psychedelics do give us an added spark through the memory of the feeling.

I like to think so. •