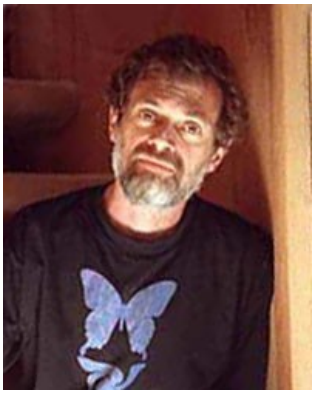

Terence McKenna

In the Valley of Novelty – Part 1

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The original prediction was that there would be a deep plunge into novelty in 1996. There would be the deepest plunge in the 1990s. But that was based on my mathematics before John Sheliak corrected it. Once his corrections were factored in, it showed that there was a deep plunge into novelty where I said it was, in 1996, but that it wasn't the deepest; it was the second deepest. The deepest was, I believe, in 1993, in Fall of 1993, which was right when the Internet was going public and the worldwide web was coming into being, and all that was happening. The plunge that I predicted in 1996 I felt pretty good about, because right near the place where I predicted the maximum amount of novelty we got within 10 days of each other: the announcement of the Martian meterorite with fossils in it, which has since been hassled over royally – I'm aware of that – but still, I think it was a watershed moment that the President of the United States felt the need to address the nation on the subject of extraterrestrial life, was a rare moment! [laughs]

And then within 8 days of that announcement was the announcement of Dolly, the cloning of the sheep in England – which again, if certain scenarios come to pass, that will be a moment – you know, the point the human race passed from which there was no going back, then, because basically if you can clone a sheep you can clone a human being; and these technologies are all rushing upon us. I mean, the body is being dissolved as much by advanced medical technology as it is by cyberspace and the Internet. I read this story, this amazing story, recently, set slightly in the future, and this guy has been in this very bad accident and virtually nothing has survived but his brain; but they have a medical technology that they can take a fragment of flesh and clone him, and then with hormones rapidly age the infant so that in 2 years there will be a brand-new adult body for his brain to be transplanted in. And these people have this fantastic medical policy that the fine print says that the brain can be kept alive, must be kept alive, by a medically approved method, that the insurance company reserves the right to choose the cheapest method, and the cheapest method is implant into the body wall of the cosignatory of the insurance policy. So this woman carries her husband's brain for 2 years inside her body cavity, while his body is being grown to manhood for the transplant. It's a dilemma we all may face some day!

> *Question from audience: I wanted to ask you about novelty and psychedelics, and the language that changes through the use of them. I remember reading Maria Sabina saying that the mushrooms spoke a different language to her after people like Wasson came down and began to use them – they went from Spanish to English, from Catholic mushrooms to – I don't know, Harvard mushrooms or something… I don't know; and having spoken with people who have taken DNA – I mean DMT, sorry! – yet the 1960s, very much, the people I talked to that did, they said it was so overwhelming they could not even understand the language. I haven't read about this, anyway. Maybe you can enlighten me.*

Well, one place – there aren't many places you can read about it – one place you can read about it is, there is a book edited by Michael Harner, called *Hallucinogens and Shamanism*, Oxford University Press, and there's an essay in there by Henry Munn called "The Mushrooms of Language," which is one of the most eloquent and beautiful essays ever written on psilocybin – it's wonderful. Henry Munn. Then, harder to get but equally interesting, is a doctoral study that a guy named Horace Beach did at CIIS, and it's called something like "The Perception of Audio Phenomena Under the Influence of Psilocybin". And he interviewed Bay Area psilocybin-heads about their experiences with language, and it's very interesting. This is a very interesting area of discussion.

On DMT, and on psilocybin – and they are closely related, psilocybin being 4-phosphoryloxy-N,N-dimethyltryptamine, the phosphorylated form of DMT, though they do not degrade into one pathway in the body – it's a parallel pathway: DMT is N,N-dimethyltryptamine. These psychedelics particularly seem to impact the language-forming portion of the brain, and this produces truly bizarre states of mind, because it's the language-forming part of your brain that is explaining to you moment to moment what is going on. You know: *Now I am eating. Now I am having sex. Now I am flashing on DMT*… and when that part of the brain gets foobarred, then you really do have a puzzlement on your hands, because the machinery of description itself has been caught up in the process.

On DMT, these entities – these machine-like, diminutive, shape-shifting, faceted machine elf type creatures that come bounding out of the state – they come bounding out of my stereo speakers, if I have my eyes open – they are like, you know, they are elfin embodiments of syntactical intent. Somehow syntax, which is normally the invisible architecture behind language, has moved into the foreground. And you can see it! I mean, it's doing callisthenics and acrobatics in front of you! It's crawling all over you! And what's happened is that your categories have been scrambled, or something; and this thing which is normally supposed to be invisible and in the background and an abstraction has come forward and is doing handsprings right in front of you. And the thing makes linguistic objects; it sheds syntactical objectification. So that it comes towards you – they come toward you – they divide, they merge, they're bounding, they're screaming, they're squeaking – and they hold out objects, which they sing into existence, or which they pull out of some other place. And these things are, you know, like jewels and lights, but also like consommé and old farts and yesterday and high speed; in other words, they are made of juxtapositions of qualities that are impossible in three-dimensional space.

What they're like is – and in fact, this is probably what they are – what they're like is, they're like three- and four- and five-dimensional puns. And you know how the pleasure of a pun lies in the fact that it is… it's not that the meaning flickers from A to B; it's that it's simultaneously A and B, and when the pun is really funny it's an A,B,C,D pun; and it's simultaneously all these things… well, that quality, which in our experience can only occur to an acoustical output or a glyph which stands for an acoustical output – in other words, a printed pun – in the DMT world, objects can do this. Objects can simultaneously manifest more than one nature at once. And, something like a pun, the result is always funny. It's amusing! You cannot help but be delighted by this thing doing this thing.

Well, so these syntactical animals, or these linguistic elves, are pulling this stuff out and gesturing with it; pushing it in your face, saying "Look at this! Look at this!" And you are fascinated, you know – pulled into it. Because each one is [gasps] *What?* – you know, *How can this be happening?* We're not in the world any more. No artist, no matter how gifted, could make one of these objects. Because they have qualities extremely difficult to language, qualities that no object in this world has! And so you're trying to wrap your mind, and say, *My God*, you know, *what is it?* Because in spite of the fact that it's

just a little thing, you can tell by looking at it that its implications are earth-shaking. In other words, that if I could suddenly pull one of these things out of hyperspace, and we would all look at it, we would all realise that that was the ball game, right there. That somehow this proved it, was it, did it, ended it, started it, made it clear. How can this be? Well, I don't know – you had to be there, sort of.

And then what lies behind this, or as you try to analyse the situation, you realise that these objects that these things are making are made by the utterances; that sound is how this trick is done. And meanwhile these things are saying, or beaming at you – the general vibe is, strangely enough, "Do not give way to astonishment! Do not abandon yourself to wonder! Get a grip! Try to get a grip, and notice what we're doing! Pay attention!" – this is the mantra: "Pay attention! Pay attention!"

Question from audience

Well somebody once asked me, you know, "Is it dangerous?" And the answer is, only if you fear death by astonishment. But death by astonishment is entirely possible! I'm not kidding! I mean, you are so fucking astonished that you've never felt your astonishment circuits get a workout like that before! I mean, what is astonishment in this world? It's like, "Oh!" [politely surprised laugh, as though appraising something new]. This is a different form of astonishment, this is: [deep gasp of almost horrified amazement]. So. And then the whole notion that's being pushed here is: "Do this thing. Do this activity. Do as we do".

And you can sort of feel your intentionality, your inner something-or-other, reorganising; and there's this, like, heat. It's quite akin to heartburn – I won't metaphysicize it – but heat in your stomach; and it just moves up, and then your mouth flies open, and you do – this stuff comes out, which is a very highly articulated, syntactically controlled, non-English, non-European, language behaviour of some sort. Not, strictly speaking, though I call it glossolalia, it strictly speaking is not glossolalia: glossolalia has been carefully studied, and it's a trance-like state. On the floors of these Pentecostal churches in Guatemala, they measured pools of saliva 16 inches across from people who were in ecstatic glossolalia. This is much more conscious, much more controlled. It's almost like a kind of spontaneous singing. But your mind steps aside, and this linguistic stuff comes out.

And you can see it – that's the amazing thing. It is not to be heard, even though it is carried as an acoustical signal; its meaning resides in what happens to it when the acoustical signal is processed by the visual cortex. That's the important thing. It is a new kind of language. It's a visible, three-dimensional language. It's not something I ever heard about, or any mystical tradition I ever heard about, anticipated. But it's as though the process, or the project, of language – which according to academic linguists began no more than 50,000 years ago – the process of doing language, in us, is not yet finished; and this thing we do with small mouth noises, and each of us consulting our own learned dictionary and quickly decoding each other's intent, this is a stumblebum, cobbled together, half-assed, way to do language; and what we're on the brink of, or what these psychedelic states seem to hold out, is a much more seamless kind of fusion of minds by generating topological manifolds that we look at rather than that we – you know, localise into designated meaning.

And I didn't mention ayahuasca in this rap, but ayahuasca, being – along with the mushrooms – a natural and shamanically used for many millennia doorway into these places, and what you find in ayahuasca groups in up-river tribal situation is people – the whole way the ayahuasca-taking is set up is to facilitate singing. The shamans get loaded; then they sing; then they go outside and take a leak, and smoke, and talk. And in those intervals, you hear people say things like, you know, "I liked the violet and yellow part, but I thought the olive drab with the silver spattering was way over the top",

and you think, you know, what kind of a critique of a song is that?! Well, it's the critique of a song that is designed to be looked at. Nobody talks about the sound; everybody talks about the visual impression left by the sound, and it was these groups – these ayahuasca-taking groups – that, when the German ethnographers got into the Amazon in the early part of the 20th century, they called this chemical telepathine. They recognised, you know… and the reputation of ayahuasca is group states of mind. Well, if you're naïve, then you think you're going to hear everybody thinking. No: you're going to *see* everyone thinking. You know, you're going to *see* what people *mean*.

And it's not that surprising, when you think of it, because obviously the world arrives at the surface of our skin as a seamless body of electromagnetic and acoustical and pheromonal data. It's just that our eyes, our nostrils, our ears, our skin, we break up this incoming flow of data. And now we're close to McLuhan country here: I think what this hints at is that print skewed our perceptual apparatus, our style of parsing perceptual data, toward the acoustic space. So that for us, thought became a voice… you know? And very early in the Western tradition, this is so. Jehovah is a voice in the Old Testament; the Logos is a voice. In Hellenistic philosophy, we are the People of the Voice. But apparently, you know, there is a passage in Philo Judaeus where he talks about the etymology of the word Israel, and he says "Israel means *He who sees God*" – he who *sees* God. And then he poses the question to himself: "What is the more perfect Logos?" And then he says, "The more perfect Logos is that Logos which goes from being heard to being seen, without ever passing over a moment of noticeable transition".

Well, I've actually seen this happen in psychedelic states, where you will be lying in silent darkness; you hear distant music; and as the music gets closer, it's like a band with lights and drums coming over a hill. As the music gets louder, it seems to physically approach and a confusion of light turns into, you know, oom-pah-pah, brass band, dancing elves, cavorting harlequins, and less easily described denizens of the imagination… and then it all goes thumping and marching past, and disappears; but it's a perfect example of light and sound arriving together in the hallucinogenic space. The fact that we've talked here, or mentioned, that we have DMT in our pineal glands, in our brains – what we haven't said is that we also have compounds in that same organ very much like what's in ayahuasca. Occurring in the human pineal gland is a compound called adenaroglumerotropine [??], but when you give it its physical chemical nomenclature, it turns out it's 6-methoxy tetrahydroharmine; it's a very near relative of harmine and harmaline. So I'm, you know, it doesn't strain me to believe that perhaps in looking at this phenomenon we have actually put our finger on the place, the cutting edge, of the evolution of consciousness, right now, at the biochemical level: what's happening is, there is a shifting, or an acceleration of the concentration, of harmine-like alkaloids and DMT in the human pineal, and it's affecting our ability to process language, and it's pushing and exacerbating a bias toward visual understanding.

And I see this, then, also reinforced and accelerated by the evolution of media, you know? In the last 150 years, we go from photography to colour photography, to moving coloured photography, with sound, with stereophonic sound, and – you know – pointing toward virtual reality, with more and more money to be made at each step of the way; and clearly, with amounts of money now, we're outspending defence for entertainment, we will produced simulacrums of imaginary worlds; and engineering bench tests will be to make it as much like Hawaii as possible, or as much like Tibet as possible… but what people will really want to do with these things is make worlds as strange as we can stand, that are in these virtual places. So whether it comes through a natural evolution of the human nervous system, or the evolution of an advanced interface with prostheses that create virtual

realities… I think the transformation of how we do language is part of this acceleration into singularity.

> *I believe you made a reference in one of your books to Julian Haines's book,* The Origin of Consciousness, *[…] and the way we evolved in the […] was like an auditory hallucination before, I guess, our consciousness really developed; and we were thinking human beings…*

Yeah, Julian Haines, it didn't win him too many friends, but he wrote a big book and had this theory that this thing which we call the ego is so recent in human beings that it actually didn't exist at the time of Homer. And he goes into Homer, and he shows that the god always breaks through in situations of crisis and danger; and he felt that before Homeric times, people were essentially like ants or something; that their behaviour was largely instinctual, and that the only time they encountered this phenemenon of free will, the interrupting of the instinctual pattern, was in situations of great crisis and impending danger… and then this thing would literally almost come out of the sky and say, "Get your ass out of there! Save your self!" Well, then, over time, this ability to access this higher informational thing was like, again, the metaphor of *encysted*, closed over with the membrane of the self, and made part of the machinery of the self – and that this is what the ego is. The ego is a Greek god that you have frozen like an ice cube behind your eyes, and that you think you are this thing and … this is just a cultural myth, a necessary weird idea, no more a true statement about the nature of the mind of the hominid than anything else.

One of the conclusions that novelty theory leads to, in terms of its feedback into social here-and-now stuff, is the idea that culture is not your friend. That culture is an impediment to understanding what's going on. That's why, to my mind, the word "cult" and the word "culture" have a direct relationship to each other. Culture *is* a cult! And if you feel revulsion at the thought of somebody, you know, offering to the Great Carrot, or tithing to some squirly notion, just notice that your own culture is an extremely repressive cult that leads to all kinds of humiliation and degradation and automatic and unquestioned and unthinking behaviour. There is a tendency to want to celebrate culture, springing both from the French deconstructionists and their fascination with culture, and then the effort to build pride through ethnicity, thing… well, that's all very fine, but I think the cultures we should all revere are our ancestral cultures; the cultures most of us have our roots in, the actual culture we came from, was probably fairly squirly. I mean, the American family is what keeps American psychotherapy alive and well! This is a cauldron for the production of neurosis, and in some cases little else.

So, you know, part of what psychedelics do is they decondition you from cultural values. This is what makes it such a political hot potato. You know, if there is anything… since all culture is a kind of con game, the most dangerous candy you can hand out is candy which causes people to start questioning the rules of the game. So you can have a Stalinist state, a parliamentary democracy, and a theocratic state, and they all can agree on one thing: that psychedelics are just *terrible*, because then citizens start asking all kinds of hard questions and the devotion to the values of the Fatherland become mired in pseudointellectual discourse, and the next thing you know somebody has to be shipped off to the camps in order to right the situation.

> *Audience comment: Well, even our own structures are dissolving in the […]*

Oh yeah – no. It definitely works in the personal life. Like, you know, I've been building a house in Hawaii, and while I've been building it I've definitely cut back on my intake of psychedelics, because I don't want the answer to the question, *Is this a good idea?* – until it's too late to do anything about it! [laughs] It's like St Augustine's prayer, *God grant me chastity and continence, but… not yet!*

Question from audience: One of the big ideas that seems to be in the notion of the Archaic Revival is that the whole big thing is really conscious and alive – the universe, the galaxy, the larger entities – and that's interesting, because it's a traditional belief that's held by non-modern, non-scientific, cultures. And if in fact our belief systems are taking us in that direction, such that that makes sense to us, it's really interesting but it also sort of upsets the current description of evolution within, say, the Darwinian dogma. Because that seems to be, you know, based on the idea that it's all very random and it's just all material and life is a big accident, that's moving forward. So I think that one of the ideas you're talking about today is teleology, that whether or not we really want to talk about evolution and how evolution as a theory is going to get self-involved and absorb this idea, comes down to whether or not these larger things have in fact some kind of direction behind it, which is I think what your work and observations imply. And so I thought one day about how to understand that, and I have a question, which is whether or not you can talk about creativity as having a fractal nature? – since self-similarity shows you at various levels similar principles, and since on our level as human beings anything that we make we first think about – it begins as thought, and then it becomes matter. And so if creativity can be seen as having a fractal dimension, it would be a way to talk about all kinds of creation by simply understanding it at the level at which we see it. And it would suggest that, to modify the Big Bang theory, that before there was a Big Bang there would have to be a Big Thought; and you kind of move along with that idea… so I want to ask you to comment on that, but also in relation to the idea that was also contained in evolution about the origin of language, because some of the things you're speaking about from your DMT experiences have a funny resonance with Creation stories, like Adam and Eve naming the animals. I mean, I've never really been all that comfortable with the idea that language would evolve out of grunts and groans when guys like Chomsky say it's all [??], it's a big system in language and all kinds of languages can be very different, but inside they always have these structures. And nature, and ecosystems, and languages, always tend to pop out fully formed and integrated. So is there any possible way that you could think that language, rather than evolving from grunts and groans, evolved in the opposite direction? That the first time language was used, it was used with the power that you ascribe to the machine elves? That is was something that was done carefully and precisely because it could manifest form? Or something like that? In terms of how new species come into being. The only idea that we ever get to allow into the theory of evolution is that it's an accident, that there will be a mutation and a new species similar to another species will be born, and it will survive, and that will lead to a new species. But I have a logical problem with that, in that any female creature which gives birth to a new species is going to perceive that species as a birth defect, and this is a baby they're not going to want to survive. And then there's only one. And so that Barbara Klar [??] book I read talked about nine dimensions, and said the sixth dimension was the morphogenetic field from which all species and organisms evolve. So I was kind of thinking, maybe along the lines of the metaphor of a computer, there's a software program through which new species are developed and designed, and the whole way in which they integrate themselves into existing ecosystems, etc, somehow or other it all gets worked out, and there's a mystery then, we don't see and don't understand, by which these new forms come into being. Maybe they all come into being at once, with a thousand or a million creatures, instead of just one that's having to struggle.

Well, all this raises a lot of stuff, most of which I can't remember because of my devotion to cannabis. But let's go back to the thing about language, and – yeah, the origins of language, let's talk about that for a minute. I think that – I've been thinking about this, because I've been writing about it, and here's what I've come up with. Part of what makes it difficult for us to think about language clearly in English is that this word, language, is used by us to mean spoken language; and it also means the

general class of linguistic activity, as in computer language, body language, so forth and so on. And to think clearly about language, we need to have a clear distinction between spoken language and the general syntactical organisation of reality.

Language. Because that is old. Honeybees do it, dolphins do it, termites do it, they all do it different ways… octopi do it. There is much of language in nature; in fact, you could argue that all of nature is a linguistic enterprise, because the DNA essentially is a symbolic system. Those codons which code for protein are arbitrarily assigned – assigned, in other words, by convention. There is no chemical relationship between the codons and the proteins they code for, any more than there is a relationship between an English word and the thing it intends. Those are just conventionalised by probability over time. So language is deep in nature.

What is not deep in nature is speech. Speech is as artificial as the water wheel, the bicycle pump, the Tessler coil and the space shuttle. Somebody figured this out somewhere. Well, so then people say, "But this is hard to understand. It's hard to picture how it could happen." Well, here's how I think it happened. My little example about the songs earlier was a stab at this, but here's more. It's that all kinds – all non-genetic behaviours (which are called, reasonably enough, epigenetic behaviours) are nevertheless… they're not simply expressions of free will; they are under the control of a looser system of rules than the genetic rules, which are chemical and absolute. The epigenetic behaviours are under the control of syntactical constraints. In other words, we need to expand the concept of syntax from the rules which govern the grammar of a spoken language to the rules which govern the behaviour of any complex system.

So, for example, before speech among human beings, I think it was probably very touchy-feely. If you watch monkeys, you see this: they touch each other. They stroke, they grunt, they groom, they goose, they push, they do all of these things. The repertoire of this kind of behaviour, if you're good at it, may be on the order of having four or five thousand words in your vocabulary. Well, when we watch primates do this kind of behaviour, we don't think of it as a language. But in fact it is; it's a gestural language. A couple of years ago, some research was done where these people took preverbal infants, and they taught them standard American sign language, before they could speak. So these little tiny children could sign "Pick me up", "Please change me", "Where is Daddy?", "I'm hungry", "I want to watch TV", der-der-da-da, before they could ever utter a word. Well, now what we're always told about spoken language is, it's this miracle, and that we're genetically hard-wired for it. Well, these experiments seem to imply we're even more genetically hard-wired for standard American sign language, which is something very few of us will ever learn to use.

What does this mean? Well, it means that the gestural capacity is deeper than the ability to verbalise, and hence probably older. So I think there was a gestural language as complex as standard English, probably, in place before anyone ever uttered a word. Now, what the psychedelics seem to suggest is that you can get so hyped up on tryptamines that your body goes into some kind of almost convulsive shock, and the normally acoustically modulated processing of language flows over into the voicebox and you begin to literally articulate syntax. You begin to make a noise which is a tracking noise for this ongoing syntactical stuff that's organising gestural intent. And it's like going from carving in stone to colour TV: your listener immediately transfers loyalty to this much more spectacular form of behaviour. And so it's like literally that the word burst forth full-blown, based on a platform of gestural syntax that had been maybe millions of years in its formation. It was just this ability to redirect the energy of syntactical intent through the body, so that instead of coming out of the end of the fingers, it came out of the end of the tongue, flapping in the airstream, and this thing happened.

It's amazing to me that the straight linguist, you know, if you go to an academic university and study linguistics, will teach you that language is no more than 35-40,000 years old. I mean, that's like yesterday! I mean, we – fire is half a million years; chipped flint, a million and a half years; language, 35,000 years old – language is everything we are, everything we do; you can't think without it, you can't do anything without it. And yet, if it's that new, then what it represents is simply a technology, a form of media, that's squeezed out other forms of media. And it's not hard to see why: after all, it works in the dark, that's good; it allows politics, you can make speeches to large groups of people; and it's – well, it's just very portable. It's the cleanest technology ever put in place. When you think about it, it's one of the weirdest abilities human beings exhibit. And when you go forward to reading, you realise this is an animal in some kind of an informational tizzy. I mean, the idea that you would make marks in clay which signify tongue noises which signify designated objects, so that these pieces of clay can be lugged hundreds of miles so that other people can reconstruct your thought by looking at these pieces of clay, this is bizarre! For animal behaviour, this is absolutely – it's… how they managed to do that?!

And of course, the picture-writing, we understand; but similar to the breakthrough to speech, is the breakthrough to a phonetic alphabet, where you see: "Ah! We don't have to portray the thing we intend; all we have to portray is the sound of the word that signifies the thing we intend!" And then, you know, you're just roaring forward; and from there to the printing press, what is it, a couple of thousand years or something – and then there's no going back. So that's the part about language. Now, what was the second part after that?

> *Just whether you could think about creativity as a principle that could have a fractal dimension, and that would be a way to think about design, or a larger universal order, having some consciousness… [??]*

Well, if you think of the universe as an engine which produces and conserves novelty, and you think of it as a fractal thing, a fractal hierarchy, built up and build downward of subsets of itself, then in a sense every creative act is the paradigmatic act of the Big Bang. I mean, it always struck me, you know, that the end of the novelty wave, which is: Up, Down, Oscillate, Zero, it's like it's a general map of all process. We could be describing the life of the energy output of a star, or the firing of a single neuron, or the birth and death of an economy; in a sense, you get down to a fractal level where you can say all processes are the same: they have a beginning, a middle, and an end… and if you know where you are in this concatenation of process, you can sort of locate yourself in the cosmic domain.

The thing that I tried to talk about this morning, that we need to map into our maps of reality, is the acceleration. I think it's a really weird idea to talk about a thousand years in the future; I mean, good grief! A thousand years in the future, what do you imagine will be left standing that you call home? What – cast your mind back a thousand years: King Canute was taking charge of things across Northumbria, and the Anglo Saxons were making forays along the coast of Norway, and, you know, very few of the concerns of the day have survived to this moment; and that was the slow-moving part of the process! We're going to move, you know, in the next 10 years, further than we've moved since the time of King Canute to this morning. So it seems to me the most unlikely future scenario is one which assumes things will stay more or less the same. Because we've put in place all these processes designed to make sure that does not happen. You know – rapacious capitalism, technological innovation, bourgeois social aspirations in the hearts of every man, woman and child on the planet, urbanisation, connectivity – all of these processes are designed to erase reality as we know it.

I'm wondering what you think of the kind of Vedic paradigm involving the states of consciousness, the waking state, the dreaming state and the sleeping state, and the transcendental force state, and they used that on an individual basis, but also with regards to [??] genesis. And that criticism of the West, that the West has taken the waking state as standard, and evolved its philosophical views without accounting for these other states of consciousness?

Well, certainly the West has built its house on a narrow foundation, denying these other possibilities. On the other hand, if… well, you get into all kinds of difficulties here. How do you judge whether or not a civilisation has assimilated or explored the domains it's named its own? One way is by looking at the technological applications that it's created. And for all this talking about these other states of mind, they seem actually as mysterious to the East as they are to the West. I don't get the feeling they're really navigating through what they're talking about. In the past, there may have been levels of understanding. It may be, see, that psychology – though it's a mystery to us – it may be that it's an easier nut to crack than the nut of matter; and so I don't have any trouble believing that Vedic India of 3500 BC may have known all kinds of things about how the mind works and how to navigate through these imaginal spaces that we've lost; but the spirituality of modern India is thoroughly contaminated by a thousand years of commerce with Islam and the West. It isn't that different, really. I mean, Vedic theology and German idealism are strikingly similar cousins.

…a number of things of conflict, when you talk about the archaic revival and then the current cultural and technological revolution. It seems to me that a lot of the stimulus for novelty that was generated by the psychedelic experience now may be generated without that experience, such as through virtual reality, technological advancements, and perhaps would maybe make the psychedelic experience less necessary in order to […] observe and [??]

Well, definitely, what you're getting at is that technology itself is a kind of psychedelic drug; that, you know, by chance or design, the proponents of psychedelica have figured out that it's totally acceptable to this culture if you disguise it as electronic entertainment and put it out that way. So the web is incredibly subversive! Simply the fact that all that information is there and available, in a world where control of access to information has always been the game. So, yeah – the way I see it is that the psychedelic people need to use the new information technologies to build art of a type more powerful and more compelling than the world has ever seen. Call it virtual reality, call it multimedia, call it whatever you want, but it's basically walk-into, walk-around, art – and then the boundaries will fall for ordinary people, because you see when you build a virtual reality, in a sense what that technology is allowing you to do is it's allowing you to show people the inside of your own head! We have never had a technology that would do that.

We think the inside of our heads are all the same, but you know when I say to you that when I smoke DMT it unleashes a Niagara of alien beauty, if I had spent the last 30 years building that Niagara of alien beauty so that you could just strap on the goggles and go, then we would have a very different kind of dialogue and relationship going. And so I really see art as the great searchlight that illuminates the historical landscape just ahead, and I think that art is about to get teeth for the first time in human history. I mean, it's all very fine, scratching on cave walls, and film, and video, and all that, but it's always artifice, you know – you never are convinced, or only for seconds, that you're in the presence of reality when you're in the presence of art. But we will build art that will literally stand your hair on end. And the amount of creativity in a single human mind, as I said, more than fills all the museums on this planet. So what we need is to figure out how to get a spigot into that, and get this stuff out! And then, as James Joyce said, man will be dirigible!