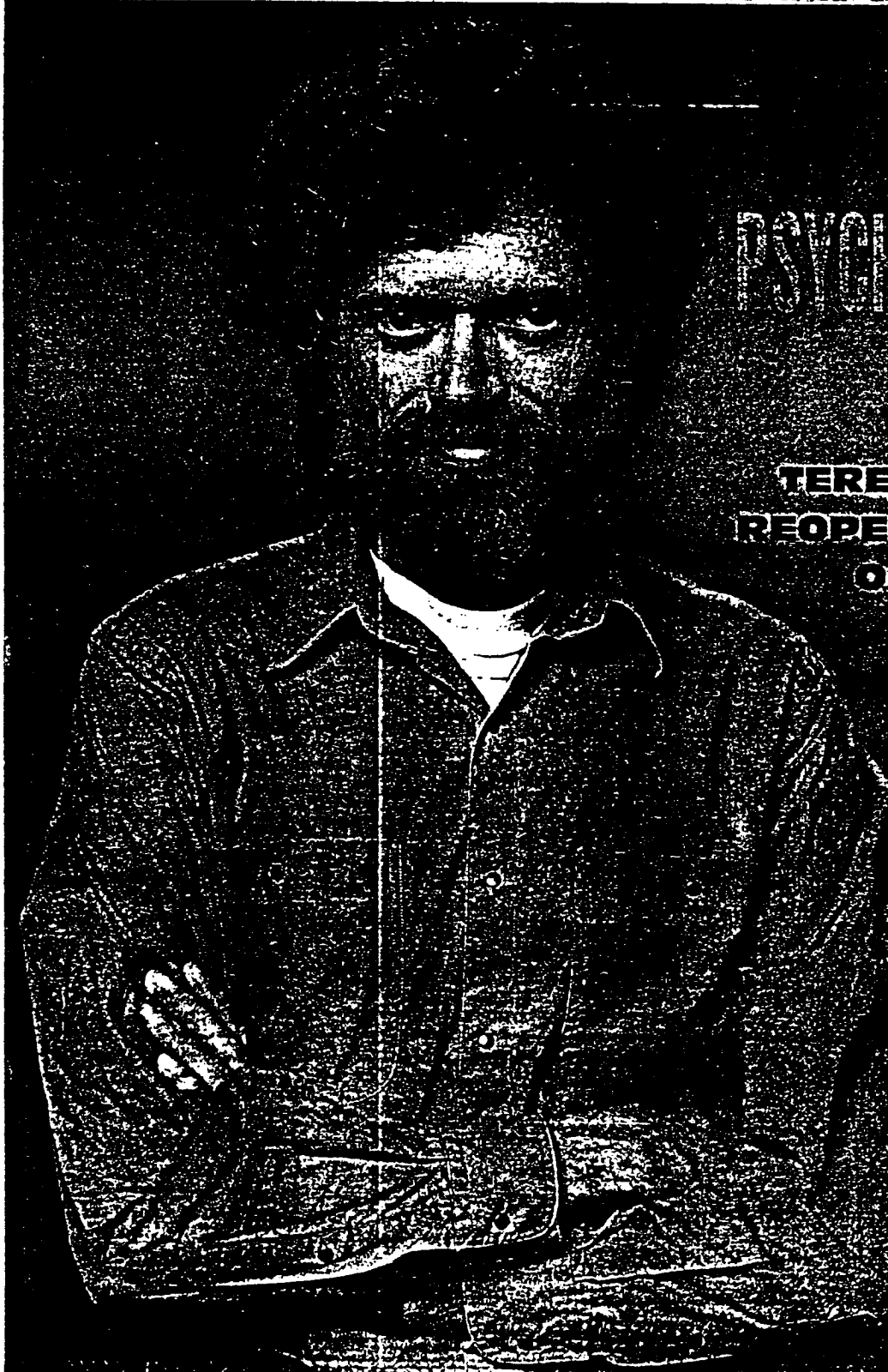


INSIDE: L.A.'S BEST AND BIGGEST ENTERTAINMENT GUIDE

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PSYCHEDELIC TRIP

**TERENCE MCKENNA
REOPENS THE DOORS
OF PERCEPTION**

BY JAY LEVIN

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Terence McKenna



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In Praise of Psychedelics

Rumbling up from the '60s comes one gifted Irishman with the message: The human race cannot afford to give up all drugs.

BY JAY LEVIN

Once upon a time, while on one of my rare excursions into hyperconsciousness (on this occasion via mescaline), someone played for me a Terence McKenna tape. I was transfixed. McKenna was one of the loveliest speakers I'd ever heard, with a lush Irish gift of the gab and an extraordinary ability to turn difficult intellectual concepts into verbal poetry. That his subject matter was the evolution of the consciousness of the human species, and particularly the role of psychedelics in that evolution, made the tape a particularly engaging experience in my elevated state.

But what truly converted me into a McKenna fan was the levels on which he explored what had been for some time one of the major strains in my own thinking: that history as we know it and define it is ending. This was an awareness I'd arrived at early in my journalistic career while researching a magazine assignment on the new psychotherapies. On a mass scale, were people able to break free from the psychological patterns and deadlocks of history, I reasoned, then all our views of human affairs would change and history as we'd learned it — the battles of nation states, the struggles between classes, the endless fight for human equality — would in fact become mere footnotes in the annals of the species. It seemed only a matter of a couple of centuries.

To this view McKenna resonated in with extrapolations from molecular chemistry, physics, ethnobotany, anthropology, the "mathematics of chaos." Jung, McLuhan and much more. And what made his talk most compelling, at least during my own mescaline meditations, was his argument that the species' ability (eventually) to transcend our own sick history stems chiefly from the impact, throughout history, of what McKenna called "botanical shamanism." In other words, God's own given psychedelics — mushrooms, peyote, ayahuasca, morning glory, et al.

McKenna, as it turns out, has never met Tim Leary, whom, it seems, he is about to replace as the culture's foremost spokesperson for the psychedelic experience. Where Leary was brilliant and original in both his experimentation and his salesmanship, McKenna is brilliant, scholarly and priestly (in the best sense of the last word). In fact, though a child of the '60s, the 41-year-old McKenna came to his fascination with "ethnopharmacology," as he calls it, not through Leary but through the far more cautious and spiritual Aldous Huxley, whose *Doors of Perception* he read when he was 14. The son of a traveling salesman for heavy-duty electrical equipment and of a

"housewife-mother" in a small, largely fundamentalist Colorado town, Paonina, McKenna recalls that the book left him "completely swept away. I remember following my mother around our kitchen, telling her that if one-tenth of what this guy was saying was true, then this was what I want to do with my life." What in fact he has done is spend 20 years studying the philosophical foundations of shamanism, the use of hallucinogens in spiritual transformation, and the enormous impact and potential of natural hallucinogens on our evolving planetary culture and emerging "metacosciousness."

McKenna took his first psychedelic — LSD — in the '60s at Berkeley, where he was a student activist in the free-speech and anti-war movements. An art history major at first, he participated in a special program for gifted students in which "the literature, art, science, mathematics, what have you" of different historical periods were studied in depth. This laid the groundwork for what he calls his "broad-brush" approach to exploring the history of human consciousness.

Halfway through college, harassed by Reagan's cops because of his barricades-style political activism in the student strike of 1967, McKenna decided a sabbatical was in order and went off to work as an art historian in Nepal, where he tried to "integrate the psychedelic experience into a Buddhist model." This led him to the study of Tibetan shamanism. Both cultures, he discovered, used psychoactive drugs in their psychic explorations — hashish and a local herb called Datura. This began his investigation into the true nature of shamanism. He later finished his degree at the Department of Conservation of Natural Resources at San Francisco State, where, he says, he was a "self-organized major in shamanism."

Apart from his wide knowledge, what makes McKenna fascinating is that he has himself experienced virtually every form of psychedelic and psychotropic known to or devised by man, and yet, throughout all these experiences, has managed to retain the keen-eyed, scientific, intellectual observer part of his consciousness which, after the experience, is able to describe its nature in the most extraordinarily lucid detail. He has thus experienced levels of awareness described by some of the great mystics of the past, but unlike most of them can relate his experiences to the cultural and historical evolution of the species.

These experiences have led him to one profound and overriding conclusion: The human species has evolved to its present dominant state through the use of naturally occurring

hallucinogens and will not advance past its current primitivism and reach new dimensions of evolved consciousness without further use of these nature-given means of expanded awareness. According to McKenna, no fan of the pop drugs — crack, smack, et al. — or pop drug use, this pharmacology should be entrusted to specially trained psychotherapy professionals — the potential shamans of postmodern culture — and he is a happy crusader for the expanded legalization of the use of such materials by the profession.

These days, when not out lecturing or searching for new natural hallucinogens in the rainforests of the world, McKenna spends his time between his home in Marin and his Botanical Dimensions garden site in Hawaii — a non-profit effort at preserving the natural medicinal and psychotropic plants of the earth from the ravages of civilization. He lectures frequently to psychotherapists, and is a personal consultant to some of them. His books, *Psilocybin: Magic Mushroom Grower's Guide* (written with his brother Dennis) and *True Hallucinations*, as well as tapes of his remarkable lectures and computer programs of his "time warp" theories, are available from Lux Natura, 2140 Shattuck Ave., Box 2196, Berkeley, CA 94704.

What occasions this interview is McKenna's impending June 5 public appearance at the nearby Ojai Foundation, where he will give a seminar entitled "The Return to Eden." One day earlier, on June 4, he will co-lecture with Riane Eisler, author of *The Chalice and the Blade*, the ground-breaking anthropological study of male-female partnering, on "Technologies of Liberation." From June 3-5 the two will also conduct a seminar entitled "Man and Woman at the End of History." Contact the Ojai Foundation at P.O. Box 1620, Ojai, CA 93023 (805-646-8343). Those who know and enjoy Joseph Campbell's work will almost certainly appreciate McKenna.

...

WEEKLY: You've implied that LSD is not truly "shamanistic"; that is, that it doesn't induce the higher forms of "hallucinations" or visions or consciousness available from natural products like psilocybin mushrooms. How do you compare it to other psychedelics?

McKENNA: When I was young, I would take LSD once a month or so, but I wasn't that crazy about it. I found it abrasively psychoanalytical, and I also found it very hard to hallucinate. My interest in mysticism, art and that sort of thing had caused me to put a very high premium on hallucination.

Then I encountered DMT in early 1967.

DMT, which is a natural plant compound that's been synthesized in the laboratory, is the most powerful of the psychedelics and is extremely short-acting. After one exposure to it, I said: "This isn't a drug, this is magic! This is a dimension to reality that most people never even suppose exists."

It was really the DMT that empowered my commitment to the psychedelic experience. DMT was so much more powerful, so much more alien, raising all kinds of issues about what is reality, what is language, what is the self, what is three-dimensional space and time, all the questions I became involved with over the next 20 years or so.

And I saw the psychedelic experience as recovering our birthright. The number of people and cultures that have gone to maturity and then to death without an inkling of this is to me the most shocking thing about the human situation. Because you are not a fully matured human being in touch with the potential of reality unless you have had a psychedelic experience. You don't have to embrace it — or abuse it — but you have to know it exists. And there's only one way to know it exists, and that's to have it.

WEEKLY: Tim Leary was saying much the same thing in the '60s, and it got him into trouble. What's the difference with you?

McKENNA: You know, I am very much at variance with the wisdom of hindsight in looking back at how Leary and Alpert and Metzner handled it in the '60s. But to try to launch a "children's crusade," to try to co-opt the destiny of the children of the middle class using the media as your advance man, was a very risky business. And it rebounded, I think, badly.

I think Huxley's approach was much more intelligent — not to try to reach the largest number of people, but to try to reach the most important and influential people: the poets, the architects, the politicians, the research scientists and, especially, the psychotherapists. Because what we're talking about is the greatest boon to psychotherapy since Freud. I often make the metaphor that psychedelics are to psychology what telescopes in the 16th century were to astronomy. If a person is not willing to look through the telescope, he cannot call himself an astronomer. And if a person is not willing to learn the lessons of the psychedelic compounds, then any therapy he or she does — any thinking he does about the human psyche — is sand-

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MCKENNA continued from previous page

boxed. These are the most powerful agents for uncovering the structure and potential of the human mind there are.

WEEKLY: You've said psilocybin is the most important of the natural hallucinogens. What has been your experience with it?

MCKENNA: Actually, my first experience with psilocybin was when I encountered it in South America, in the Amazon. The DMT experience had acted like a compass. It said: "Ah-ha! That's where we want to go." But the DMT flash only lasts about three minutes, and we had the feeling — my brother and I — that if you could get in there for 45 minutes, you could really learn something that would astonish people. And in fact there's no end to it. It introduces you to a world of infinite beauty that is cognizable by human beings.

WEEKLY: What was your first mushroom experience like?

MCKENNA: What was amazing about the mushrooms, and it continues to be amazing, is that it's animate, that there's someone talking to you. This was actually a voice in the head, making sense, speaking in English and addressing the concerns that were most important to me personally. I was not set up for this.

WEEKLY: Did you recognize the voice as being different from the voice with which you normally talk to yourself?

MCKENNA: Yes, and I recognized that the information was not something that I could have come up with. That was the proof of the otherness of the voice. And I think what's really happening is that a dialogue opens up between the ego and these larger, more integrated parts of the psyche that are normally hidden from view. Ego may be a fairly modern invention — meaning the last 1,000 or 2,000 years — a fairly modern adaptation of the psyche to its environment. One of the things happening in the Amazon is people say they enter into a group mind when they take it, and only then make decisions about the tribe — where to hunt, who to make war on, where to move to, these kinds of things.

WEEKLY: On a visionary or an oral basis?

MCKENNA: Visionary and oral. Collective. They see collectively what is to be done. I think that this is a dissolving of the power of the ego, allowing it to contact what I call the "overmind," but which someone might call the "superego." In other words, this much larger, much wiser organizing force that we all carry around inside ourselves but, ordinarily, we can only access under situations of extreme psychological pressure or crisis. And then there's a little flash of wisdom. Like a chemical habit, we are hooked on ego. And the psychedelic dissolves that chemical or psychological dependency and replaces it with the facts of the matter: how the individual fits into the life and organization of this planet, the vast amounts of time all these things have been in existence and have worked themselves to their present status.

It was my reading in Jung, which happened very early, that put me strongly in touch with this notion of the self as a larger and more inclusive mode of being than what the ego provides. I don't care to get into questions about "Is [the voice] God?" or "Is it an extraterrestrial?" I don't think these things can be known at this stage. But what is important is that it knows more about one than one knows about one's self and, consequently, it is a source of stability, a source of gnosis, a source of information, and this is what most people lack. They are only superficially in touch with their own destiny, their own birth, their own death.

WEEKLY: Let's go back to the ego structure.

What's the empirical evidence of its being only 1,000 years old?

MCKENNA: You must know this book by Julian James called *The Evolution of Consciousness and the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*? Well, he makes a very interesting case. He says that even as late as Homeric times, people wandered around rather automatically, and when they got into a very tight spot, suddenly there would be a voice in their head saying, "You're in a tight spot. Here's what you should do." They called this God, or a god, or the king (living or dead). This ego, the voice we now call "me," is something that has been assimilated in the wake of civilization as a necessary means of adapting to socialization. Now, coming out of the linear and dualist kinds of structures that were put on us by Christianity and print media and a number of cultural factors, we need to again reconnect with the

mysticism, what you're always talking about is the unspeakable. The unthinkable. The unimaginable. And psychedelics propel you through your local language and into this unimaginable realm.

People need to be empowered, and you're not empowered by placing your spiritual development in the hands of a guru. You're spiritually empowered by taking responsibility for your spiritual development, by looking around and seeing what can be done. In a way, I see the entire New Age as a flight from the psychedelic experience. People will do anything other than take a psychedelic compound. Be rebirthed, Rolfed, this, that and the other thing. Because they instinctively sense that the psychedelic experience is real. It puts you on the line. It isn't like a five-hour drumming session, or deep-tissue work.

So the issue finally comes down to: the citizen versus the self. The citizen is an ex-

everything into agendas, turn the opposition into the enemy, then embark on the old-style primate politics that have led us into this impasse.

WEEKLY: Patriarchal politics?

MCKENNA: Patriarchal politics. The politics of propaganda. The politics of money. The politics of hopelessness. I am a political activist, but I think the first duty of political activists is to psychedelicate themselves. Otherwise, you're not making your moves with cognizance of the entire field of action. This is the thing. The importance of human values has to be brought back into the discussion of political priorities. This was attempted in the '60s; now it's presented as a joke that people would ever stand up and say love is the answer. It's inconceivable in the present milieu.

WEEKLY: It would be useful at this point if you would define "shamanism."

MCKENNA: Okay. Shamanism is the archaic techniques of ecstasy that were developed independent of any religious philosophy — the empirically validated, experientially operable techniques that produce ecstasy. Ecstasy is the contemplation of wholeness. That's why when you experience ecstasy — when you contemplate wholeness — you come down re-made in terms of the political and social arena because you have seen the larger picture.

WEEKLY: How is it manifested in shamanistic acts?

MCKENNA: Through the ability to cure, the shaman can confer psychological wholeness on the people who come to him with problems. He acts as an exemplar. He is like a superhuman person, simply by virtue of the fact that he is together. He is not confused. He knows when to hang on and when to let go. See, what erodes hope is inertia, and the momentum of negative psychological activity. What the shaman sees is that the momentum of negative activity is, in fact, an illusion. And by simply changing your mind, you just step aside and the momentum sweeps past you and you are transformed. So it's with the malleability of mind that the shaman works, and he has a larger view because he is not really in his culture, and I found this over and over again. Each culture has its own peculiarities and assumptions and phobias and faux pas. The shaman may appear to be a member of the culture, but he's broader, deeper, higher and wider than the culture that creates him.

A great psychotherapist to my mind would be a great shaman — and there are some very good ones. I don't want to name names 'cause I don't want to leave anyone feeling hurt. I admire psychotherapists. I think they are trying to remake the shamanistic institution in a modern form. What they have to realize is that they're wasting their time unless they use the shamanistic tools. And the foremost tool of the shamans is the technique of ecstasy, and that means the hallucinogenic plants. If you suggested to a South American shaman that he could do it without the plants, it would be absurd, like suggesting to a stunt flier that he do it without an airplane. And we are moving toward the brink of global catastrophe without using the tools present at hand that might save us. That's stupid. Plain and simple, stupid.

WEEKLY: What's your sense of Western culture now?

MCKENNA: Well, I think we're entering into a further narrowing of options. Eager as I am to put the Reagan area behind me, the first half of the '90s will be a further exploration of these screwy cultural modes: fundamentalist religion, sexual repression. The AIDS epidemic is playing right into the hands of the people who want to re-

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"The most extraordinary thing about the DMT experience is you see entities. You encounter beings, whom I've described as self-transforming machine elves. They are obviously, in fact, the basis of the idea of elves, and they are the denizens of this other dimension. They are trying to teach something. Well, if I'm not completely mad, then it's big news."

next level of the overmind — this globally conscious, ecologically sensitive, balanced, humane, caring kind of consciousness, which we can access only with considerable effort, through self-discipline, psychotherapy, psychedelics, this kind of thing.

WEEKLY: In studying spiritual systems and drugs, did you find drug-taking among the Tibetan Buddhists?

MCKENNA: Not so much among the Buddhists, but I found myself spending more and more time with the pre-Buddhist shamans. And then I went to India. I had studied yoga, but what the yogic texts don't tell you is that almost all *sadhus*, all yogis, are inveterate hash-smokers and/or users of Datura and were at that time, in the late '60s, absolutely fascinated by LSD and the psychedelic drugs coming from the West.

WEEKLY: Among the pre-Buddhist shamans, was there drug use?

MCKENNA: Well, I don't think that there is really any difference. That is, if you study shamanism carefully, most shamanism that is vital is hallucinogenic-plant shamanism.

WEEKLY: How did the level of mystical awareness and manifestation of the shamans compare with the ashram gurus of India?

MCKENNA: As an anarchist and skeptic, I saw India basically as a very stratified kind of con game. I am no fan of gurus. I think they've done quite enough for us, thank you, and that it is nothing that sophisticated people need to have anything to do with. Now I'm not saying that there aren't people who have the wisdom that life confers, who can tell you how to live, how to die, how to carry on a relationship, have a child, and so forth and so on. But psychedelics address the unseen side of reality, the utterly other, the transcendently alien, and that is what interests me. Because if you look at classical descriptions of God, whether you're talking about the kabbalah or Christian mysticism or Sufi

extremely limited definition of human potential. The self is a definition of human potential so broad that it threatens the obligations of the citizen.

WEEKLY: What does life look like to the fully self-realized person?

MCKENNA: Well, I certainly don't consider myself to be one, so I can only begin to answer: What life looks like is extremely hopeful. The human potential is so vast. We don't have any problems that we can't solve by applying ourselves to them with open minds. Now, you see, the current theory of problem-solving is that we must solve all our problems with solutions that make the buck. Well, it just may not be possible to solve the problems of the 20th century and make a buck at the same time. But if we're willing to put aside the notion, then the human future appears endlessly bright, because the human mind appears to be a much more open pipeline to God than anyone who is outside the psychedelic experience could ever imagine. And God appears to be a much more benevolent and involved force in human affairs than the kind of image we have inherited from Western religion.

Now, why should taking a natural psychedelic drug compound like psilocybin give you hope? It's because it connects you up with the real network of values and information inherent in the planet, the values of biology, the values of organism rather than the values of the consumer.

WEEKLY: What are those planetary values?

MCKENNA: Well, life comes first. Death is nothing to be afraid of; it's a natural part of the process. Sexuality is the glory of the living experience, and so forth and so on. They are, in fact, the humane, caring, ecologically sensitive values which are attempted to be communicated by the New Age, by the ecology movement, et cetera. The problem is that these movements politicize everything immediately, turn

press and distort human misery. I think that there is a New Age about to dawn. I think it will come, but I think it will come in the late '90s, that we still have much to go through. Because the cultural institutions will not reach for the emergency brake until things are really cracking to pieces. Because, you know, the [present forms of civilization] represent a sinking ship.

WEEKLY: *On the other hand, one could argue that the collective mind has already made collective decisions about collective healing, that the healing process and the climb toward collective consciousness is already going on. In other words, the psychoanalytic movement, the*

spiritual movement (such as it is), the ecology movement, the cultural rebellion — all this, in fact, is the basis for profound positive change. Psychedelics played a part in this, and they continue to play a role, but you can't expect this culture to move into mass psychedelia.

McKENNA: I think that's true. I'm not concerned. I think we're fine. Everything is right on track, developing the way it should. The trick is to know that, so that one can contribute to it, rather than being frozen by anxiety. I make the analogy to a birth. A birth looks like somebody's being split apart, and there's a lot of blood, guts and gore. You'd swear that this is death, not life. But in fact, it's a completely natural process. The goal then is to reassure the mother so that she realizes, you

know, that this is natural, this is going to have a termination and it is part of the plan.

WEEKLY: *How many times have you taken LSD?*

McKENNA: Well, if you put them all together . . . I don't know, maybe 150 times when I was young. Not a lot. I think if you do these drugs right, they give you plenty to think about. One thing people do, that I'm definitely opposed to, is *diddle* with it. If you're not taking so much that going into it you're afraid you did too much, then you didn't do enough. Not the way people will take it to go to the movies, go to the beach, this and that. No, I talk about what I call "heroic" doses, "committed" doses. And if you only do committed doses, then every

trip will count. You won't have to do it more than three or four times a year to feel fully psychedelic.

WEEKLY: *What's a committed dose of psilocybin?*

McKENNA: Five dried grams. Five dried grams will flatten the most resistant ego.

WEEKLY: *And mescaline?*

McKENNA: 800 milligrams. I'm less fond of mescaline because it's an amphetamine. And it's rough on you.

WEEKLY: *And peyote?*

McKENNA: Well, I can give it to you in a nutshell. There are three questions you should ask about a drug you're considering taking. Number one, does it occur naturally in a plant or an animal or something? Because nature has use-tested these compounds over millions and millions of years. Something that came out of the laboratory four or five years ago — who knows? So it should be a product of the natural world. Secondly, does it have a history of human usage? Mushrooms do. Mescaline does. LSD doesn't. Ecstasy doesn't. And thirdly, and most important, it should have some affinity to brain chemistry. It shouldn't be just like landing on the moon; it should be related to what is driving ordinary consciousness. This last criteria is the narrowest, because mescaline won't get through that. LSD won't get through that. I think the drugs should be as non-invasive as possible, and I know I'm on the right track because the strongest psychedelic drugs there are are the ones that last the shortest amount of time. Now, what does that mean? It means that your brain recognizes the compound and within a few minutes can completely neutralize it. DMT is the strongest psychedelic there is, yet it lasts only five minutes. Twenty minutes after you do it, it's like you've never done it.

Nature is the great guideline in all of this. The natural chemistry of the brain. The natural history of the planet. The naturally evolved social institutions of small groups of human beings that are still in touch with reasonable social values.

WEEKLY: *Let's talk about schematic definitions of your various experiences. I've heard you speak about something that brought you closer to what gnostics and kabbalists call the "logos," the ultimate source of knowledge. If you made a chart of the levels of the unconscious you've experienced, how would you schematize it?*

McKENNA: I guess the way I'd schematize it is: Psilocybin "speaks." The speaking voice of psilocybin is absolutely extraordinary. DMT combines the speaking voice and the seeing eye — the most extraordinary thing about the DMT experience is you see *elves*. You encounter beings, whom I've described as self-transforming machine elves. They are obviously, in fact, the basis of the idea of elves, and they are the denizens of this other dimension. They are trying to teach something. Well, if I'm not completely mad, then it's big news. Straight people — skeptical people — if given DMT will be conveyed to, essentially, the hall of the Mountain King. We're not prepared for this. We expect everything to fall into the rational maps that science has given us, and science doesn't describe a hyper-dimensional university, teeming with alien intelligences that can be contacted within a moment if you have recourse to a certain chemical compound. Science is hard-pressed to admit that, light years away, there might be beings around another star.

WEEKLY: *What already-existing metaphysical map would describe this? Would the Sufi experience be close to it?*

McKENNA: I think Maharani Buddhism, the

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multileveled, many-inhabited, demon-haunted, Buddha-haunted realms of peace and joy. The insistence of Maharani Buddhism that there is really no center, that everything is a construct of time and space, is the most sophisticated psychology. But I'm not willing to climb aboard the Buddhist ethics because Buddhism says suffering is inevitable. That's not a psychedelic point of view. I think that the psychology of Buddhism is the older strata, and that arises out of shamanism. Shamanism worldwide insists that the universe is multileveled, populated by beings that can do you great good, do you great harm. And beings who don't give a hoot about you one

way or another.
WEEKLY: While we're on the track of exploring existing cosmologies, how do you see the Christ mind? I'm talking about the Christ mind as the Heart mind.
McKENNA: This is sort of a problematic area for me. I would think that if you want to talk about the heart thing, the rebirth of the Goddess is a more viable metaphor. The problem with Christianity is it's the single most reactionary force in human history. I don't even know what's in second place, it's so far behind. And I believe that the destruction of paganism was probably the greatest disservice to the evolution of the human psyche that's ever been done. The repression of witchcraft is really the repression of botanical knowledge, of

shamanism. So I see Christianity as part of this paternalistic shell game.
WEEKLY: You seem to infer that the highest shamanism is plant shamanism, and that paganism represents a higher form of consciousness because it's in touch with beings of another level. But in Jewish spiritual practice, through combined study of the Kabbalah and Torah, there's demonstrable evidence of the ability to attain high degrees of shamanistic power without the use of drugs. Kabbalists also recognize the pagan level as one level of higher consciousness that, while achievable and while real, is not the highest or most transcendent or closest to God. The promise is that combined Kabbalah-Torah study can take you to a much greater dimension than drugs — or any form of Buddhism.

McKENNA: I'm not familiar with Jewish mysticism, but I do know it is powerful. My feeling is that abstractions of that kind represented by Kabbalistic theory suck immediacy from experience and are part of the historical movement that has brought us down the track of modern science. Aristotelian theory, dualism, materialism and so forth.
WEEKLY: You think you've gotten from your visions some sense of the nature of where we are going. But is there, in fact, a "choice point" — a moment when the individual — or the species collectively — has to make a choice about this direction rather than that? Or is it simply that you see there is a direction of history in which we are naturally going?

McKENNA: The thing is, reality itself is not static. This is one of the things that the psychedelic is trying to put across, that the reality we're imbedded in is itself some kind of an organism and it is evolving toward a conclusion. So 20th-century history is not simply a fluke or an anomaly, it is the culmination of a process that has been in motion for as long as the planet has been in existence. We are not alienated and outside of nature; we are somehow the cutting edge of it. And this vast output of building and highways and all the things that characterize the modern world is actually a feature of the natural world. Similarly, the evolution of technical intelligence on the surface of the planet, while new, is not unnatural.

Human beings are therefore the natural agents for a compression that is building up in the temporal world towards transition into some higher dimension of existence. History is going to end. This is the astonishing conclusion that I draw out of the psychedelic experience. And all the scenarios of history's ending that haunt human thinking on the matter, ranging from the apocalypse of John down to the latest prophecies of the flying-saucer cults, are attempts to grasp or come to grips with an intuition of transcendental departure from business-as-usual. And I think with things like the Harmonic Convergence and all this New Age stuff, these prophecies are building more and more rapidly.

Looking at present cultural trends and extrapolating them, it's reasonable to suggest [as the Harmonic Convergence theorists predict] that by the end of the Mayan calendar — which is in 2012 A.D. — we will be unrecognizable to ourselves, that what we take to be our creations, which are these computers and technology, are actually another level of ourselves. And that when we have worked out this peregrination through the profane labyrinth of history, we will recover what we knew in the beginning: the archaic union with nature that was seamless, unmediated by language, unmediated by notions of self and other, of life and death, of civilization and nature. These are all dualisms that are temporary and provisional within the labyrinth of history. When we arrive there it will be seen that all our religions were pale imitations of the mystery itself. Then everybody will say, "Now I understand! Now I understand why the pyramids, why Rome fell, why Auschwitz, why the H-bomb." All these things are signposts on the way to the transcendental object. And once we reach it, meaning will flood the entire human experience.

WEEKLY: But to see people so transformed, so back in tune with nature on such a mass level, would mean we were collectively prepared to put such low-consciousness matters as planetary pollution or the Arab-Israeli struggle behind us virtually overnight. For that to happen, wouldn't there have to be some kind of transcendent event? A visit from a flying

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saver? Nuclear warfare? I don't know, I'm trying to remain a rationalist.

McKENNA: It seems highly improbable such a thing would occur. However, look at something like the phenomenon of language in our species. How probable was that before it existed? It represents some kind of intersection of the monkey species with a transcendental force of some sort. And yet, once it came into existence, it is seen to be inherent in our biological organization.

WEEKLY: Nothing in your drug experiences has shown you what that single shamanistic event might be?

McKENNA: I think that it could be something like this: The transcendental object, which has been well-described since the 16th century, is the union of spirit and matter. It is entirely spirit and it is entirely matter. The transcendental object is matter that behaves like thought, and it is a doorway into the imagination. This is where we're all going to live. This is why the psychedelic experience is so important, because it anticipates a life lived entirely in the imagination.

Now, you ask, "How could such a thing be?" Well, as just one hypothesis: Suppose a way were found to integrate human and machine intelligence to create a culture in which man and machine were indistinguishable. This would allow us to influence the dimensions of that interaction. Well, if we're creating another dimension, it might as well be paradise. So what today we contemplate as a transcendental object may be a salable technology by 2012.

WEEKLY: In other words, you're saying that the transcendent event might conceivably be the creation by 2012 of a computer program that we would interact with to bring us to a heightened state of existence? Maybe one created by a genius computer programmer and metaphysician while tripping on psilocybin?

McKENNA: Yes, a computer program. The two concepts, drugs and computers, are migrating toward each other. If you add in the concept "person" and say these three concepts — drugs, computer and person — are migrating toward each other, then you realize that the monkey body is [still] holding a lot of our linguistic structure in place.

But if the monkey body were to be dissolved, then we would be much more likely to define ourselves as pure information. I think this is what is happening. That beyond 2012, everybody becomes everything. All possibilities are realized, even possibilities which are mutually exclusive. Because the resolution and the realization of this possibility occurs in a different kind of space — "nanotechnological" space or psychological space, or a true hyperdimension. It's very hard to imagine what it will be like, because we simply do not have the metaphors and the experience to cognize what we are moving toward.

WEEKLY: I assume you don't mean a literal end to the monkey body but a transcendence of the way we see and use the body. I assume you don't think we won't have sex and procreation?

McKENNA: Of course. We'll have everything we have now.

WEEKLY: Can you conceptualize — or visualize — the nature of a computer program that would facilitate this higher-consciousness processes?

McKENNA: Well, I have actually developed a piece of software that I call "time wave zero." It is a fractal wave, a mechanical description of time which shows that all times are actually interference patterns created by other times interacting with each other, and that all of these times originate from a certain "in" state. And I see that the technology is in already place: supercomputers, superconductors, et cetera — to do it in the 24 years we have left until 2012.

This isn't something human beings have to decide to do; this is something that is happening! The trick is to figure out what's going to happen. That allows you to relax. The psychedelics help to do this because they anticipate the transcendental object. All religions anticipate the transcendental objects. All great spiritual personalities, somehow, anticipate and embody the transcendental object. The point is that this is not any longer centuries or millenia away. It is right here, right now. It is what explains the precipitous drop into novelty that the 20th century represents. The 20th century does not make any sense whatsoever unless it ends in a complete transformation of the species. And the nuclear death and the life-affirming factors are so inextricably intertwined that it's a horse race right up until the last moment.

In one of my lectures, I asked, "What mushroom is it that blooms at the end of human history? Is it the mushroom of Teller and Fermi and Oppenheimer, or is it the mushroom of Hoffman and Wasson and Schuites and Leary and those guys?" I believe that it will be very hard for people who are not insiders to figure out where to place their bets. But the very fact that you and I can have this conversation is proof of the nearness of this event. People couldn't say these things even 30 years ago — no one would understand. You know, in testing high-performance aircraft there's an expression, "stretching the envelope," meaning pushing the performance capabilities to the absolute outer limits. This is what the 20th century is doing to the planet and the human organism. We are stretching the envelope as we approach, not the sound barrier but the . . . call it the "mind barrier," the "social barrier." We will not disintegrate when we reach it and fall out of the sky. Instead, if we've designed our space ship correctly, we will slip right on through into an infinite realm of potential human becoming.

WEEKLY: Certainly urban culture isn't going to disappear.

McKENNA: No, but a new design process [of

that culture] that will arise out of the clear perception of human needs, rather than the [present] unclear and politically arguable perception of human beings. We're basically bumping along not in a Model-T Ford, but in a Roman chariot. And we have 24 years to turn that into a starship. That's why it's so important to communicate, for all of us to put our best foot forward, to put our best metaphors on the table. Because we can move no faster than the evolution of our language. And this is certainly part of what the psychedelics are about: They force the evolution of language. And no culture, so far as I'm aware, has ever consciously tried to evolve its language with the awareness that evolving language was evolving reality. And yet, we are on the brink of that. Madison Avenue understands that, but in a perverse way. If we can get away from the idea of making a buck, get into the idea of using this idea to save our skins, then the transcendental object moves that much nearer.

The strange thing about psilocybin, my career, this conversation is that it has to do with the empowerment of language. That's what gives me my cachet, that people say, "You say things that nobody else ever says," "You speak clearly." The social consequences of the psychedelic experience are clear thinking — which trickles down as clear speech. Empowered speech.

WEEKLY: What if you're wrong and the world still has so much sickness in 2012?

McKENNA: Well, at least I had the courage to make a specific prophesy. I'll be 65 in 2012, time to cash it in anyway.

WEEKLY: Speaking of empowered speech, one of your raps that I found particularly perspicacious was about the octopus as the symbol of the dawning age. Want to explain?

McKENNA: What is not well known is the communication model that is happening in the octopus. Octopi change their color not for camouflage purposes, as might be supposed, but as a mode of communication. The blushes, spots and traveling bands of color that an ordinary octopus can manifest are reflective of its linguistic intent. Its language appears on the surface of its skin.

Ordinarily, telepathy is imagined to be you hearing me think, then me hearing you think. But a richer notion of telepathy would be if you could see my words, rather than hear them — if they were actually sculptural objects where I would make an utterance, then you and I would stand and regard this utterance from all angles. There would be no ambiguity. And this is exactly what is going on with the octopi. Shamans do the same thing. These shamanist songs that are sung are not intended to be heard, they're intended to be seen by other people who are intoxicated. This crossing from the heard to the seen is a very important part of the revelation of the transcendental object.

Philo Judeus, the second-century Alexandrian Jew and polymath [a person knowledgeable in many fields] who wrote encyclopedic tomes on the religions of his day, talks about what he calls a more perfect logos. And he asks, what would be a more perfect logos? And he answers his own question by saying, "The more perfect logos is a logos that goes from being heard to being beheld without ever crossing over a quantifiable moment of transition." And I think this is a perfect example of the kind of historical development that I am trying to indicate by talking about the transcendental object. That we are going to go from a linguistic mode that is heard to a linguistic mode that is beheld, and when this transition is complete, the ambiguity, the uncertainty and the subterfuge that

haunts our efforts at communication will become impossible and obsolete. And it will be in this environment of beheld communication that the new world of the logos will be realized.

WEEKLY: And MTV and the computers are just rushing us there?

McKENNA: Yes, they're pushing us right there.

WEEKLY: The metaphysical experiences always promise that once the ego is dropped, and true knowledge is arrived at, that in fact you begin to experience reality through the embodiment of God — which is supposedly yourself. And that that embodiment is joy and love, a profundity of pleasure, experiential awareness, consciousness and radiance beyond what most people have ever experienced on the most profound levels. How does that integrate with your sensibility?

McKENNA: My notion of the post-transition felt experience is that it is that domain where appropriate activity is the path of least resistance. In other words, in this current realm Tao and ego seem impossibly opposed. Things are either one or the other. In the post-transition world, it's possible that there will appear to be only ego, and there will actually be only Tao. And that's a good working definition of what a telepathic society would be like: appropriate activity. It's nothing more than that.

Imagine if every problem were solved appropriately, if every relationship evolved appropriately, if every act were an appropriate one. That alone would be the kingdom of heaven. And that is, I think, what we're pushing toward. Not cosmic fireworks or the descent of alien beings in flying saucers, but simply appropriate activity — empowered, felt, experienced — and the abandonment of the illusion of separateness. ■