



*Terence McKenna*

## **The Importance of Human Beings**

Presented at ???

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What I wanted to talk about tonight, simply because it's the thing that is moving me to the edge of my chair at the moment, is – I called the talk Eros and the Eschaton, and what I could have called it is Eros and the Eschaton: What Science Forgot, because somebody asked me recently, "Is there any permission to hope?" More specifically, is there any permission for smart people to hope?! – I mean, it's easy to hope if you're stupid! – but is there any basis for intelligent people to hope? And I wanted to deal with that, because I think so. I mean, it was to me...

Eros and the Eschaton – these are the two areas that I think compromise the old paradigm and give permission to hope; and strangely, neither of these words is that well known, which gives you a measure of how completely the dominator position has squelched, subverted and downplayed any opposition to its worldview. Eros, we know about, in some kind of devalued, schticky kind of glitzy way, because we get it in the eroticisation of media and society. But really, what Eros means in the Greek sense is a kind of unity of nature, a kind of all-pervasive order that bridges one ontological level to another. This is not permitted in the official worldview of our civilisation, which is science. The world of inorganic chemistry is not thought to make any statement about the organic world, and the organic world is not thought to be extrapolatable into the world of culture and thought. There are imagined to be clear breaks in these categories. I had a biologist tell me once, "If genes aren't involved, it ain't evolution". So that means you can't talk about the evolution of the Earth as a physical body; you can't talk about the evolution of human social institutions; evolution is somehow a word appropriate to biology and appropriate nowhere else.

And this brings me, then, to the first factor easily discerned by anybody who has their eyes open, that compromises and erodes the hopeless existential view of the world that we're getting from science. And that is the idea that nature is in fact, across all scales and all levels of phenomena, a unity. It's not a coincidence that electrons spinning around an atomic nucleus and planets going around a star, and star clusters orbiting around the gravitational centre of a galaxy... it's no coincidence that these systems exhibit the same kind of order on different scales. And yet science would say that is a coincidence. You know, P.W. Bridgeman, who was a philosopher of science, defined a coincidence as what you have left over when you apply a bad theory! It means, you know, that you've overlooked something, and what jumps out at you as a coincidence is actually a set of relationships whose casuistry – whose relationships to each other, are simply hidden from you.

And what I've observed – and I think it is fair to give credit to the psychedelic experience for this – what I've observed is that nature builds on previously established levels of complexity. This is a great general natural law that your own senses will confirm for you, but that has never been allowed into the canon of science. What I mean by that nature builds on complexity is the following: When the universe was born, in the dubious and controversial circumstance called the Big Bang, it was at first

simply a pure plasma of electrons. It was the simplest that it could possibly be. There were no atoms, there were no molecules, there were no highly organised systems of any kind. There was simply a pure plasma of expanding energy. And as the universe cooled, simply cooled, new kinds of phenomena – we say emerged, out of the situation. As the universe cooled, atomic nuclei could form, and electrons could settle into stable orbits. As the universe further cooled, the chemical bond became a possibility. Still later, the hydrogen bond, which is a weaker bond, which is the basis of biology.

So as the universe aged, it complexified. This is so obvious that it's never really been challenged, but on the other hand it's never been embraced as a general and dependable principle, either. Follow it through with me. Out of atomic systems come chemical systems. Out of chemical systems comes the covalent hydrogen bond, the carbon bond, the complex chemistry that is prebiotic or organic. Out of that chemistry come the macrophysical systems that we call membranes, gels, charge transfer complexes, this sort of thing. These systems are the chemical preconditions for life. Simple life, the life of the prokaryotes, the life of naked unnucleated DNA that characterised primitive life on the planet. Out of that life come eukaryotes, nucleated cells, and then complex colonies of cells. And then cell specialisation, leading to higher animals; leading to social animals; leading to complex social systems; leading to technologies; leading to globe-girdling electronically based information transfer-oriented cultures like ourselves. (Someone said, "What's so progressive about media? It's the spreading of darkness at the speed of light". [laughter and applause] It can be... it can be.)

Well, so this is very interesting: that apparently, the way the universe works is upon a platform of previously achieved complexity – chemical, electrical, social, biological, whatever. New forms of complexity can be built that cross these ontological boundaries. In other words, what I mean by that is that biology is based on complex chemistry, but it is more than complex chemistry. Social systems are based on the organisation that is animal life; and yet it is more than animal life. So this is a general law of the universe, overlooked by science – that out of complexity emerges greater complexity. We could almost say that the universe, nature, is a novelty-conserving or complexity-conserving engine. It makes complexity, and it preserves it. And it uses it as the basis for further complexity.

Now, there's more to this than simply that. I think we all observationally could agree with what has been said so far. The added wrinkle, or an added wrinkle, is that each advancement into complexity, into novelty, proceeds more quickly than the stage that preceded it. This is very profound, because if accepted as a serious first principle it ends the marginalisation of our own species to the level of spectator status in a universe that knows nothing of us and cares nothing for us. This is the most advanced position that modern science will allow us: spectators to a drama we didn't write, shouldn't expect to understand, and cannot influence.

But I say, if in fact novelty is the name of the game, if in fact the conservation and complexification of novelty is what the universe is striving for, then suddenly our own human enterprise, previously marginalised, takes on an immense new importance. We are apparently players in the cosmic drama, and in this particular act of the cosmic drama we hold a very central role. We are at the pinnacle of the expression of complexification in the animal world, and somehow this complexity, which is concentrated in us, has flowed over out of the domain of animal organisation and into this mysterious domain which we call culture, language, consciousness, higher values. Each stage of advancement into complexity occurs more quickly than the stage which preceded it. After the initial Big Bang, there was a period of billions of years when the universe cooled, stars condensed, planetary systems formed, and then the quickening process crossed an invisible Rubicon into the domain of animal and biological organisation.

Well, you see, since the rise of Western monotheism, the human experience has been marginalised. We have been told that we were unimportant in the cosmic drama. But we now know, from the feedback that we're getting from the impact of human culture on the Earth, that we are a major factor shaping the temperatures of the oceans, the composition of the atmosphere, the general speed and complexity of speciation on the planet; so forth and so on. A single species, ourselves, has broken from the ordinary constraints of animal nature and created a new world, an epigenetic world – meaning a world not based on gene transfer and chemical propagation and preservation of information, but a world based on ideas, on symbols, on technologies, on tools, on ideas downloaded out of the human imagination and concretised in three-dimensional space as choppers, arrowpoints, particle accelerators, gene sequencers, space craft, what have you... all of this complexification occurring at a faster and faster rate.

And this brings me, then, to the second quality, or phenomenon, that science has overlooked, which is the acceleration of complexification. That the early history of the universe proceeded with excruciating slowness; then, life took hold, in the oceans of this planet. A quickening of process and evolution; but still things proceeded on a scale of tens of millions of years to clock major change. Then, the conquest of the land. Higher animals, higher exposure to radiation, faster change, species following species, one upon another. Then, fifty thousand, a hundred thousand, a million years ago – anyway, recently! – the cross-over into the domain of culture, tool-making, myth-making, dance, poetry, song, story... and that set the stage for the fall into history – the incredibly unusual and self-consuming process that has been going on for the past fifteen or twenty thousand years. A biological snap of the finger; and yet, in that time, everything that we call human – everything that we associated with higher values – has been adumbrated, elaborated, created, set in place, by one species: ourselves.

This acceleration of time, or complexity, shows no sign of slowing down. In fact, within the fabric of our own lives, we can almost daily, hourly, by the minute, feel it speeding up, taking hold. It's a cliché that time is moving faster and faster – a cliché of the mass media – but I want to suggest that this is not a perceptual illusion, or a cultural mirage: that this is actually happening to the space-time matrix, that time is in fact speeding up. That history – in which we are embedded, because our life of 50–80 years is so ephemeral on a scale of 10–15,000 years – but nevertheless, history, is a state of incredible destabilisation. It's a chaostrophy in the process of happening. It begins with animals kept in balance by natural selection, and it ends with a global internet of electronic information transfer and a language-using species purling its instruments toward the stars.

There is no reason for us to suppose that this process of acceleration is ever going to slow down or be deflected. It has been a law of nature from the very beginning of nature, that this acceleration was built in. What poses a problem, to us as thinking individuals, is that the speed of involution towards concrescence is now so great that we can feel the tug of it within the confines of our own lives. There has been more change since 1960 than in the previous several thousand years. There has been more change since 1992 than in the previous thousand years. Change is accelerating. Invention, connection, adumbration of ideas, mathematical algorithms, connectivity of people, social systems, this is all accelerating furiously, and under the control of no one – not the Catholic church, the community party, the IMF, no one is in charge of this process! This is what makes history so interesting: it's a runaway freight train on a dark and stormy night! This is why I'm not particularly sympathetic to conspiracy theory – because I can't make the leap of faith that would cause you to believe anyone could get hold of the beast enough to control it! – I mean, conspiracies, of course, we have conspiracies

up the kazoo; but none of them are succeeding! – they're all being swept away, compromised, astonished by new information, and endlessly agonised!

So, two factors relating to Eros: the movement into complexity, and the fact that that movement goes ever-faster. And the second quality, the acceleration of the movement into novelty, leads me to the third point, which is I suppose more controversial – and I am frankly willing to admit that my sensitivity to this third point is based on my psychedelic experience. I mean, science is the exploration of the experience of nature without psychedelics. And I propose therefore to expand that enterprise and say we need a science beyond science: we need a science which plays with a full deck. And the reason the psychedelic experience is so important here is not some namby-pamby notion that it expands consciousness, or it makes you more perceptive, or something like that – I mean, that is all true; but it isn't strongly enough put.

A cultural point of view is like a crystal: you have an amorphous cultural medium which at certain temperatures will form a crystal of cultural convention, if you will, and within the geometry of that crystal certain things make sense and certain things are excluded from making sense. Science is a condensed cultural point of view that is a rigid crystal of interlocking assumptions – assumptions such as, Matter is primary. Mind is tertiary. Causality works from the past into the future – so forth and so on. What psychedelics do, in terms of impact on the physical brain and organism of human beings, is they withdraw cultural programming. They dissolve cultural assumptions. They lift you out of that reassuring crystal and matrix of interlocking truths which are lies, and instead they throw you into the presence of the great Who Knows? – the mystery... the mystery that has been banished from Western thought since the rise of Christianity and the suppression of the mystery religions.

Now, the model that attracts me to the psychedelic experience is not that it makes you smarter – a kind of simple-minded idea, paradoxically – or the idea that ([laughs] you are paying attention, huh?) ... the idea that it's some kind of magnifying glass into the personal unconscious – your trauma, your childhood memories, the satanic abuse your parents laid on you, so forth and so on... the model which I like is a geometric model, and says simply that since the rise of the Greek alphabet, print, linear thinking, and science, we have become imprisoned in a causal universe of material connectivity; and that this is a cultural myth, as much as believing that we are the sons and daughters of the great father who got out of his canoe at the second waterfall to take a leak; I mean, these are just cultural myths. What is revealed through the psychedelic experience, I think, is a higher-dimensional perspective on reality. And I use "higher-dimensional" in the mathematical sense: literally, you are lifted out of the plane of cultural assumptions and can look down, with a kind of god-like understanding that one obtains when one flies in an aeroplane over a landscape previously only viewed from the ground. In other words, from the vantage-point of the psychedelic experience, the cultural landscape is seen more nearly in its correct perspective. Seen as historically bounded, spatially and intellectually bounded.

Now, it's no coincidence that if you analyse biology, what it is, it's a kind of conquest of dimensionality. The earliest forms of life were probably slimes of some sort, stabilised on a clay surface: immobile, unable to perceive light, with no sense of time, merely a fingernail or a toehold in existence; and then if you look at the entire fossil record, what you see is the evolution of senses – sensory preceptors, and organs of locomotion. The preceptors – the eye, the hand – bring into the cognitive field the sense of things at a distance, and then language provides models for these things at a distance. Similarly, fins, legs, so forth – means of locomotion – carry us through space. This is a journey of dimensionality, and essentially what animals are that plants are not are life-forms mobile,

in a very conscious way, in a spatial dimension. This is why, from the point of view of evolutionary biologists, animals are somehow more advanced than plants.

Well, if conquest of dimensionality is the criteria, then notice that we again occupy a special and privileged position in nature, because we can not only run with the best of them, see with the best of them, but we can remember and anticipate like crazy; and other animals are not doing this. Other animals may imprint past situations of danger or opportunity, but they do not analyse experience and extrapolate it toward the hidden domain of the future. And consciousness is the generalised word that we use for this coordination of complex perception to create a world that draws from the past and builds a model of the future; and then suspends a perceiving organism in this magical moment called the Now, where the past is coordinated for the purpose of navigating the future. McLuhan called it “driving with the rear view mirror”, and the only thing good about it is it’s better than driving with no mirror at all!

Right, now... What this conquest of dimensionality comes to be, in the presence of psychedelics, is an anticipation of the future. We can anticipate the future: we know to within microseconds when the sun will rise; we know within a few percentage points where the prime rate will be in six months; some things we can predict fairly closely, some things with less precision. But the perception of the future is very important to us. When we marry the need to perceive the future with the psychedelic experience, I believe we come up with data that is very very difficult for science to come to terms with. And this is the third item, or really the second item, in the list: What Science Forgot. It’s what I call the Eschaton.

Now, Eschaton is a rare word, until very recently unheard outside schools of theology, which I understand were a dying enterprise. Eschaton comes from the Greek word *esch*, which just means the end. The Eschaton is the last thing, the final thing. And it’s very important to science to eliminate from its thinking any suspicion that this Eschaton might exist. Because if it were to exist, it would impart to reality a purpose, you see. If the Eschaton exists, then it’s like a goal, or an attraction point, or an energy synch, toward which historical process is being moved. And science is incredibly hostile toward the idea of purpose. If you are not involved in the sciences, this may come as somewhat of a surprise to you; if you are a workbench scientist or a theoretician, you know that this is what’s called the problem of teleology. It is because modern science defined itself in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the reigning philosophy was deism, and deism was the idea that the universe is a clock made by God, and God wound this clock and has walked away from it, and the clock will eventually run down... that theological construct was poisonous to evolutionary theory in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and so they said, “We must create a theory of reality that does not require a goal – does not require a purpose. Everything must be pushed from the past. Nothing must be pulled toward the future”.

The problem with this is that it does not fulfil our intuitions about reality. We can see that evolution, biological evolution, has built on chemical systems. We can see that social and historical systems build on biology. As people with open minds – or as open as they can be, inside this culture – we nevertheless have this intuition of purpose. And it is dramatically underscored by the psychedelic experience, which takes the raw material of your life, your culture, your history, and tells you this is not an existential mish-mash to be lived out with dignity because there’s nothing else to be done with it – some kind of Camusian “Why not?” affirmation – it says, *No*; it says, you know, *Your reality is a coherent cosmos*. And embedded in your own sense of identity, embedded in your own sense of purpose, is a microscopic reflection of the larger purpose that is built into the universe.

Now... and this is not just blowing smoke, in the sense of "it's a nice idea", or it's like a religious idea, like saying Jesus loves you, and so feel all right about yourself; it isn't like that – it's a theory about reality that has teeth, because reality is actually following the script that this particular version of reality dictates. Reality is accelerating toward an unimaginable omega point. We are the inheritors of immense momentum in our social systems, our philosophical and scientific and technological approaches to the world. Because we're driving the historical vehicle with a rear-view mirror, it appears to us that we're headed straight into a brick wall at a thousand miles an hour. It appears that we are destroying the Earth, polluting the atmosphere, wrecking the oceans, dehumanising ourselves, robbing our children of a future, so forth and so on. I believe what is in fact going on is that we are burning our bridges, one by one. We are burning our bridges to the past. We cannot go back to the mushroom-dotted plains of Africa, or the canopied rainforests of five million years ago. We can't even go back to the era of the Houston six-shooter [??] of two hundred years ago. We have burned our bridges; we are preparing for a kind of cultural forward escape.

And this question, you know, "Is there cause for optimism?" – the answer is, it depends on where you placed your bets! You know, if you placed your bets on male-dominated institutions based on consumer fetishism, propaganda, classism and materialism, then God help you, you should call your broker! If, on the other hand, you've recognised that a lifeboat strategy is involved here, that what is really important is empowering personal experience, backing off from consumer object fetishism, freeing the mind, empowering the imagination, then in that case I think you can feel pretty good about what is going on.

You know, there's a lot of talk about cultural death and disenfranchisement, and it's usually couched in terms of some happy naked people in the rainforest, or in Tajikistan making their rugs, or milking their camels or something, and isn't it too bad that their culture is being blown up and traded in for mall culture and shopping by remote; but in fact, all culture is being destroyed. All culture is being sold down the river by the sorts of people who want to turn the entire planet into an international airport arrival concourse! And that's not the victory of somebody's culture over somebody else's culture; nobody ever had a culture like that! That's just the victory of schlockmeisterism and crapola over good taste and good sense!

Well, if I were dependent on the notion that human institutions are necessary to pull us out of the ditch, I would be very despairing. As I said, nobody's in charge – not the IMF, the Pope, the communist party, the Jews, no, no, no, nobody has their finger on what's going on. So then, why hope? Isn't it just a runaway train, out of control? I don't think so. I think the out-of-controlness is the most hopeful thing about it! After all, whose control is it out of?! You and I never controlled it in the first place! Why are *we* anxious about the fact that it's out of control? I think if it's out of control, then our side is winning!

To me, the most confounding datum of the psychedelic experience is this thing, which I call the Eschaton. And I want to talk about it a little bit this evening, because I think it is the hardest thing for people to grasp about my particular rap. And, you know, sometimes I've talked to many of you about psychedelic plants, shamanism, techniques, chemistry, approaches, so forth and so on... I'm approaching this this evening as a graduate seminar: I figure everybody has their little mojo kit, and their particular way of approaching these things, and then the question is, you know, what kind of conclusions can we draw? And the conclusion I draw is – and this is sort of pulling together what I said before – we are central to the human drama, and to the drama of nature and process on this planet.

The opposition, which is science – well, first let me say this: Every model of the universe has a hard swallow. What I mean by a hard swallow is a place where the argument cannot hide the fact that there's something slightly fishy about it. The hard swallow built into science is this business about the Big Bang. Now, let's give this a little attention here. This is the notion that the universe, for no reason, sprang from nothing in a single instant. Well, now before we dissect this, notice that this is the limit test for credulity. Whether you believe this or not, notice that it is not possible to conceive of something more unlikely or less likely to be believed! I mean, I defy anyone – it's just the limit case for unlikelihood, that the universe would spring from nothing in a single instant, for no reason?! – I mean, if you believe that, my family has a bridge across the Hudson River that we'll give you a lease option for five dollars! It makes no sense. It is in fact no different than saying, "And God said, let there be light". And what these philosophers of science are saying is, give us one free miracle, and we will roll from that point forward – from the birth of time to the crack of doom! – just one free miracle, and then it will all unravel according to natural law, and these bizarre equations which nobody can understand but which are so holy in this enterprise.

Well, I say then, if science gets one free miracle, then everybody gets one free miracle. And I perceive that it is true, when you build these large-scale cosmogonic theories, that you have to have a kind of an umbilical cord, or a point to start from that is different from all other points in the system. So if we have to have a singularity in our modelling of what reality is, let's make it as modest and as non-unlikely a singularity as possible. The singularity that arises for no reason, in absolutely empty space, instantly, is the least likely of all singularities. Doesn't it seem more likely, if we have to have a singularity, that it occurs in a domain with a rich history, with many causal streams feeding into the situation that nurtures the complexity? In other words, to put it simply, if you have to have a singularity, doesn't it make more sense to put it at the end of a cosmogonic process, than at the beginning?

And I think this is the great breakthrough of psychedelics and shamanism, that science got it absolutely wrong: the universe didn't begin in a singularity – who knows how the universe began, or would even presume to judge? – but the universe *ends* in a singularity. It has been growing more singular, more complex, more unique, more novel, every passing moment since it burst into existence. And if that's true, then we represent a kind of concrescence of universal intent. We're not mere spectators, or a cosmic accident, or some side show, or the Greek chorus to the main event: the human experience *is* the main event. The coordination of perception, of hope, of dream, of vision, that occurs inside the human heart/mind/body interface is the most complex phenomenon in the universe.

Now, even the physicalists will agree that the human neocortex represents the most densely ramified matter known to exist in the biological world; and you don't have to be a rocket scientist to see that human society, human history, human art, human literature, represent things for which there is no analogue in the world of wasps, groundhogs, killer whales, and so forth and so on. In our species, complexity has turned inward upon itself. And in our species, time has accelerated; time has left the gentle ebb and flow of gene transfer and adaptation that characterises biological evolution, and instead historical time is generated. And so I believe that science and its reluctance to deal with the psychedelic experience, and the way in which science has used, then, law, to suppress its rival – in this case, arises out of a profound discomfort on the part of science about this future state of complexification that is clearly the grail, the dwellpoint, the endpoint, of the human historical process.

No one of us, I think, can imagine that history could go on for another thousand years. I mean, what would it look like? At the current rate of population growth, spread of epidemic disease, rate of

invention, connectivity, depletion of resources, the atmosphere... it is impossible to conceive of another thousand years of human history. History, then, is ending. History is a kind of gestation process; it's a kind of metamorphosis; it's an episode in the life of a species. If you think of the simple example of metamorphosis – that of caterpillar to butterfly – we all know that there is this intermediate resting stage where the caterpillar is, for all practical purposes, enzymatically dissolved, and then reconstituted as an entirely different kind of organism, with different physical structures, different eyes, different legs, a different way of breathing; with wings, where no wings were before; with a different kind of feeding apparatus – this is what's happening to us! History is a process of metamorphosis. It's a pupation stage. It begins with naked monkeys, and it ends with a human machine planet-girdling interface capable of releasing the energies that light the stars! And it lasts about fifteen or twenty thousand years, and during that period the entire process hangs in the balance. It's a period of high risk. It's like what a butterfly is doing in a cocoon, or what is happening to a child in the womb: it's a gestation process, where one form of life is being changed into another.

Well, this would all happen naturally, and with a great deal of anxiety I imagine, as history builds to its ever more climactic and horrifying crescendo, and we would all be ignorant, or very baffled, about what's going on, were it not for the institution of psychedelic shamanism. Remember, I said that what is dissolved are the crystalline structures of cultural assumption? Well, one of the strongest symmetries in our cultural crystal is the symmetry that gathers around the concept of past and future. The shaman actually rises into a domain where past and future are different areas on the same topological manifold. This is not a metaphor; it's what's really going on. If you think about shamanism in its classical guise for a moment, it is about predicting weather; predicting game movement; and curing disease. If you had a prescient or extraordinary understanding of the future, each one of us would be able to do these things. Predicting the weather? – you just look into next week, and there it is. Predicting the movement of beings? – same deal. Curing the sick actually involves very judicious choice of your patients, with a pre-knowledge of who will get well and who will not get well.

So it's as though the members of a culture are imprisoned in linear time, and the shaman is not. And why not? Because the shaman has perturbed the brain states sanctioned by the culture – sanctioned by its educational processes, its habits, its attitudes. And into that vacuum created by the perturbation of these cultural values rushes the raw, unanalysed datum of reality. This is what Aldous Huxley called removing the reducing valve of consciousness. And suddenly, culture is seen to be a relative phenomenon, the stockbroker no different from the rainforest shaman, each somewhat similar to the Trobrian islander, or the Eskimo. Culture is simply clothing upon the human experience; but the human organism, outside the confines of culture, in a direct relationship to nature, transcends time and space. This was a fact, I believe, that was known in prehistory, and in fact was the source of paleolithic values, which were not material, not linear, not surplus-oriented, not class-oriented, not power-oriented; but rather, oriented toward a kind of egalitarian partnership in an environment of great material simplicity. And human beings lived like that for probably half a million years – with poetry, with dance, with mathematics, with magic, with story, with humour; but not with the paralysing and toxic artefacts of the late-evolving, machine-worshipping, monotheistic, linear, phonetic-alphabet tight-assed straight culture that we are a part of.

So now, at a kind of moment of great cultural challenge and dynamic for Western civilisation, which has for a thousand years called all the shots and shoved itself down everybody's throat whether they liked it or not, - in the last hundred years, through the science of anthropology and ethnography and



ethnomedicine and botany, the news has arrived that these “primitive” people are in fact master technicians of journeying into a world of the neurological imagination – a world we didn’t even know exists; a world that is as distant to us as the world at the heart of the atom is from the rainforest fishermen. And because our own cultural values seem a little shoddy at this moment, those on the fringes of Western civilisation have begun to seek alternatives, begun to look at alternative religions (yoga, tantra, Buddhism, Zen, whatever), alternative approaches to diet (vegetarianism, macrobiotics, so forth and so on) and alternative approaches to authentic experience, which means psychedelics.

In the early stage of psychedelic involvement, everyone was sort of flying under the banner of hands-on Freudianism, or hands-on Jungianism, you know: *We’re gonna see those archetypes. We’re gonna confront those sexual repressions. We’re gonna journey into those traumatic childhood memories.* Now, it’s understood, I think, that those metaphors were fairly inadequate, and that actually we stand on the brink of an unexplored landscape of planetary size: the world of the high paleolithic, which is a Gaian world, a world of feeling – not analytical intellectual constructs, but a world of empowered feeling – empathy; and intuitive understanding, an understanding that doesn’t arise in a context of Greek logic, but in a context of animal knowing in the authentic mode of the body.

So, just to bring it all around here, the great exhibit which we must always keep in front of ourselves and our critics, is the mystery of the human mind and body. No one knows how it is that I can command my hand to make a fist and that it will do that. I mean, that’s mind over matter: that’s the violation of every scientific principle in the books. And yet it is the most trivial experience any of us have; we expect to command our body. We expect the mental will to order the monkey flesh into action, and it will follow. The body is the nexus of the mystery of life. And our culture takes us out of the body, and sells our loyalty into political systems, into religions, into inanimate objects and machines, collections, so forth and so on. The felt experience of the body is what the psychedelics are handing back to us; that’s why it’s called *escape*, because it’s escape from HBO, from walking the mall, from seeing what’s on the tube, from consuming trash media – it’s escape from all of that, into the authenticity of the body. This is why sexuality is so... edgy in this society. They’d make it illegal if they could but figure out how! It’s the one drug they can’t tear from our grip, and so they lay a guilt trip about it.

But sexuality and psychedelics are carrying us back to an authentic sense of the body. Carry us back to the domain of authentic values. And more and more, the message that people are getting as they avail themselves of the psychedelic experience is that it is not a journey into the human unconscious, or into the ghost bardos of our chaotic civilisation; it’s a journey into the presence of the Gaian mind, that the Earth is a coherent whole: it is a thinking, feeling, intending, being – that in terms of our value structures, it would be foolish to image as anything other than female. And when cultural values created by male dominance and science and linearity and so forth and so on – when those values are dissolved, what is waiting there is this incredibly poignant experience of the matrix – what James Joyce called the *Mama Matrix Most Mysterious*: nothing more than our bodies and the earth out of which our bodies came.

History, as we have lived it in the West, has been a turning of our back on that; and now history has failed. Western cultural institutions, having become global institutions, now show themselves to be inadequate to inspire, lead or carry anyone into a future worth living in. At this moment, then, this reconnecting to the Gaian mind becomes a kind of moral imperative. So this whole drug issue is not an issue even about criminal syndicates or about untaxed billions, or about the mental health of our youth, or any of that malarkey; I mean, God, the most destructive drug that’s known to the species is

peddled on every street corner, without restriction. The real issue is what kind of mental world shall people inhabit? What kinds of hope shall be permitted? What kind of value systems shall be allowed? And the value systems that aggrandise the possession of things, the tearing up of the Earth, competition, classism, racism, sexism, have led us to the brink of catastrophe.

Now, I think we have to abandon Western cultural values and return to the deeper wisdom of the body in connection with the plants. That's the seamless web that leads us back into the heart of nature; and if we can do this, then this very narrow neck of cultural crisis can be navigated. Very little of the past can be saved. The architectonics, the machines, the systems of monetary exchange and propaganda, the silly religions, the asinine aesthetic canons, very little of that can be saved. But what can be saved is the sense of love and caring, and mutuality, that we all put into and take from the human enterprise. You know, there's a Grateful Dead song that says "You can't go back and you can't stand still. If the thunder don't get you, then the lightning will." And we now hold, through the possession of these psychedelics, catalysts for the human imagination of sufficient power that if we use them we can deconstruct the lethal vehicle that is carrying us toward the brink of apocalypse. We can deconstruct that vehicle and redesign it into a kind of starship that would carry us and our children out into the broad starry galaxy we know to be awaiting us.

But it's a cultural test. Nature is pitiless. Intelligence is a grand experiment upon which a great deal has been writ; but if it proves inadequate, nature will cover it over with the same kind of cool impunity that she covered over the dinosaurs and the trilobites and the crossopterygian fishes, and all those other folks that came before. So what we must do, I think, is see our future in the imagination. Catalyse the imagination. Form symbiotic relationships with the plants. Affirm archaic values. And spread the good news that what is out of control, what is in fact dying, is a world that had become too top-heavy with its own hubris, too bent by its own false value systems, and too dehumanised to care about what happened to its own children. So I say, good riddance to it! Bring on the archaic revival, and let's create a new world! That's it! And – [applause] – if this wasn't perfectly clear, I'm sure the questions and answers will make it so. Let's take a half-hour break – I'll sign books if anybody wants me to, and then we'll get together here for the hard core. Thank you very, very much.

*Question from audience*

Good question. Well, the answer is, I think, pretty obvious. Yes: how do we emancipate people from the foolishness of the drug war? How do we, as a community, as a point of view, how do we gain legitimacy? This is a really important question. I mean, if you look around yourself tonight, you don't see the uneducated, the unhealthy, the demented or the deluded; and yet this is the stereotype of our subculture. Instead, what you see are well-dressed, creative people holding down positions in society, the parents of children, the heads of departments, the authors of books, the painters of paintings... you may not have noticed, but in this society they're not handing out rights. Ask black people! Ask the members of any sexual minority! They don't hand out rights in this society. And we – meaning we psychedelic people, by and large, this isn't always true but by and large we tend to be white and middle-class. A translation of those two terms into "gutless" would not be inappropriate. We have the most to lose; and so we're not given to hurling ourselves into the breach or building barricades in the street to hurl our bodies against the machine. Nevertheless, if you don't claim your political birthright, it will never be given to you; and black people and gay people and American Indians, Native Americans – all of these people have learned that you don't go on bended knee to petition the official culture for your rights. You have to take them.

And people ask me, you know, how can you stand up and say the things you do? Why don't they take you away? They don't take me away because they're more chicken-shit than you think! They're more off balance than you think! They're more uncertain of themselves than you think! The legitimacy of this point of view is established in their minds. The reason drugs are illegal and suppressed, and bla bla, is because you can make a shitload of money off them in that context. It's a money issue. Do you think a loving government is trying to keep you from jumping out of third-floor windows and that's why LSD is illegal?! – I mean, give me a break! – for crying out loud, if this government felt strongly enough about certain issues, all of us between 18 and 26 would be sent off to die for that policy decision; so the government is not interested in your health. The government is artificially interested in inflating the prices of certain substances in order to create a focus for clandestine money that is used then to destabilise unfriendly governments, murder labour union leaders, kill and blackmail the editors of left-wing newspapers, so forth and so on.

Drugs are enormous big business. But not the psychedelic drugs. Psychedelic drugs – the only one that ever amounted to anything as a financial enterprise was cannabis. And cannabis is many things besides psychedelic. The deep, dramatic psychedelics, which are all Schedule 1, the most repressed Schedule – don't produce great amounts of money at all. What they do produce is questioning minds. They cause people to ask questions. They cause people to ask for clarification. They cause people to challenge cultural values, because they decondition you. It doesn't matter whether you're a Hasid, a communist apparatchik, a rainforest shaman, if you take psychedelics you will question your first premises; and that is a business that all governments – right, left, middle – are in the business of repressing. They don't want to have to explain why things are done as they are. But if we don't begin asking for that explanation, they're going to run this planet right into ruin.

And we are the generation responsible. *You* are the generation that is responsible. You can't claim that you grew up in a village in Nigeria and you didn't know. You can't claim that you are the child of poor Bangladeshi parents and you had no opportunity. The responsibility rests upon the educated and the financially capable of doing something about it; and by that measure, you and I are probably in the upper 3% of people on this planet, and if we don't take responsibility then that responsibility will devolve to others – beady-eyed others, with an agenda that would stand your hair on end.

Yes, over here. This will be the last question, so make it hit.

*Question from audience*

Well, let's go back and talk about schizophrenia for just a second. The question is, you know, schizophrenia involves basically breaking with ordinary value systems, and how does it relate to the psychedelic state; and people who have schizophrenic relatives in their family tree, how should they relate to the psychedelic experience, and so forth, I mean I'm extrapolating, but that's the basic thing.

Well, there are different things to be said about this. I mean, first of all, how many psychiatric residents – who are the people who come most in contact with schizophrenics, whatever that means – how many psychiatric residents have ever seen an undrugged schizophrenic? Very, very few. Because the very first thing that happens is, for the convenience of physicians and the nursing staff, some outlandish drug is brought into the picture, which then deflects this healing process from ever reaching any kind of natural conclusion. Schizophrenia is just a catch-all term for forms of mental behaviour that we don't understand. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was a term "melancholia", which we would now call bipolar depression, so forth and so on. But all forms of sadness, unhappiness, maladaptation, so forth and so on, were poured into this label "melancholia".

Now, schizophrenia is a similar thing. I can remember an experience I had years ago, it was in the Tolman Library at the University of California, which is the psych library, and I was looking up some drug or something, and I just saw a book and I pulled it off the shelf, a book about schizophrenia. And it said, *the typical schizophrenic lives in a world of twilight imagining, marginal to his society, incapable of holding a regular job, these people live on the fringes, content to drift in their own self-created value systems.* That's it! That's it! Now I understand! We have no tradition of shamanism. We have no tradition of journeying into these mental worlds. We are terrified of madness. We fear it because the Western mind is a house of cards, and the people who built that house of cards know that, and they are terrified of madness.

Tim Leary once said – or I gave him credit for saying; he later told me he never said it – but whoever said it, this was a brilliant statement; someone once said, “LSD is a psychedelic substance which occasionally causes psychotic behaviour in people who have not taken it.” – right? And I would bet you that more people have exhibited psychotic behaviour from not taking LSD, but just thinking about it, than ever exhibited it from taking it – certainly in my family. I watched my parents both go psychotic from the mere fact that LSD existed; they would never have taken it. There is a great phobia about the mind: the Western mind is very queasy when first principles are questioned. Rarer than corpses in this society are the untreated mad, because we can't come to terms with that.

A shaman is someone who swims in the same ocean as the schizophrenic, but the shaman has thousands and thousands of years of sanctioned technique and tradition to draw upon. In a traditional society, if you exhibited “schizophrenic” tendencies, you are immediately drawn out of the pack and put under the care and tutelage of master shamans. You are told, *You are special. Your abilities are very central to the health of our society. You will cure. You will prophesy. You will guide our society in its most fundamental decisions.* Contrast this with what a person exhibiting schizophrenic activity in our society is told. They're told, *You don't fit in. You are becoming a problem, You don't pull your own weight. You are not of equal worth to the rest of us. You are sick. You have to go to the hospital. You have to be locked up. You are on a par with prisoners and lost dogs in our society.* So that treatment of schizophrenia makes it incurable. Imagine if you were slightly odd, and the solution were to take you and put you – lock you into a place where everyone was seriously mad. That would drive anyone mad! If you've ever been in a madhouse, you know that it's an environment calculated to make you crazy and to keep you crazy. This would never happen in an aboriginal or traditional society.

I wrote a book, I mean this has to be the wrap-up, because we're over time – but I wrote a book called *The Archaic Revival*; I signed it tonight for some of you. The idea there is that we have gone sick by following a path of untrammelled rationalism, male dominance, attention to the visible surface of things, practicality, bottom-line-ism. We have gone very, very sick. And the body politic, like any body, when it feels itself to be sick, it begins to produce antibodies, or strategies for overcoming the condition of dis-ease. And the 20<sup>th</sup> century is an enormous effort at self-healing. Phenomena as diverse as surrealism, body piercing, psychedelic drug use, sexual permissiveness, jazz, experimental dance, rave culture, tattooing, the list is endless. What do all these things have in common? They represent various styles of rejection of linear values. The society is trying to cure itself by an archaic revival, by a reversion to archaic values. So when I see people manifesting sexual ambiguity, or scarifying themselves, or showing a lot of flesh, or dancing to syncopated music, or getting loaded, or violating ordinary canons of sexual behaviour, I applaud all of this; because it's an impulse to return to what is felt by the body – what is authentic, what is archaic – and when you tease apart these archaic

impulses, at the very centre of all these impulses is the desire to return to a world of magical empowerment of feeling.

And at the centre of that impulse is the shaman: stoned, intoxicated on plants, speaking with the spirit helpers, dancing in the moonlight, and vivifying and invoking a world of conscious, living mystery. That's what the world is. The world is not an unsolved problem for scientists or sociologists. The world is a living mystery: our birth, our death, our being in the moment – these are mysteries. They are doorways opening on to unimaginable vistas of self-exploration, empowerment and hope for the human enterprise. And our culture has killed that, taken it away from us, made us consumers of shoddy products and shoddier ideals. We have to get away from that; and the way to get away from it is by a return to the authentic experience of the body – and that means sexually empowering ourselves, and it means getting loaded, exploring the mind as a tool for personal and social transformation.

The hour is late; the clock is ticking; we will be judged very harshly if we fumble the ball. We are the inheritors of millions and millions of years of successfully lived lives and successful adaptations to changing conditions in the natural world. Now the challenge passes to us, the living, that the yet-to-be-born may have a place to put their feet and a sky to walk under; and that's what the psychedelic experience is about, is caring for, empowering, and building a future that honours the past, honours the planet and honours the power of the human imagination. There is nothing as powerful, as capable of transforming itself and the planet, as the human imagination. Let's not sell it straight. Let's not whore ourselves to nitwit ideologies. Let's not give our control over to the least among us. Rather, you know, claim your place in the sun and go forward into the light. The tools are there; the path is known; you simply have to turn your back on a culture that has gone sterile and dead, and get with the programme of a living world and a re-empowerment of the imagination. Thank you very, very much.