

# TERENCE MCKENNA

Could you comment further on the interaction between various sexual yogas and the psychedelic experience or intoxication as potential tools for approaching the kind of extra-terrestrial eroticism you're talking about?

**McKenna:** Certainly you have all kinds of things going on when people are having sexual intercourse. The physiological state is one of intense arousal; there's production of pheromones. I've noticed on psilocybin that skin contact changes; there is a disappearance of normal resistance across membranes, especially if there is perspiration, so that two people with large amounts of skin in contact, both on psilocybin, become one thing. I would suggest to Masters and Johnson or whoever has license to do these

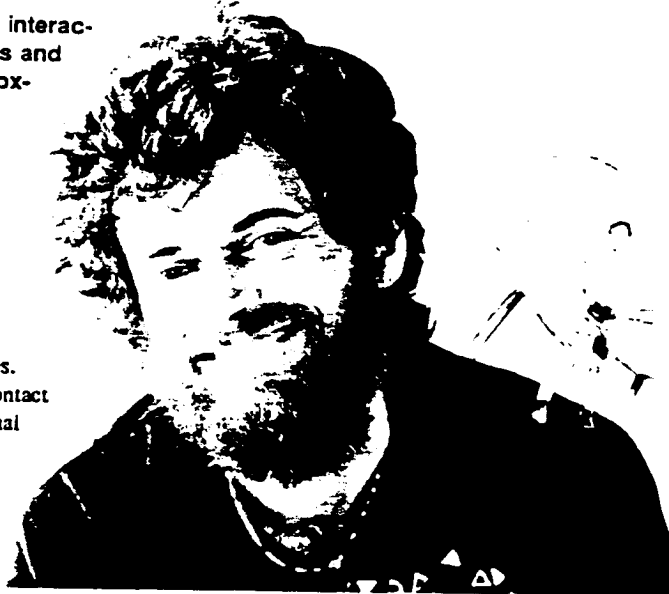


PHOTO BY FAUSTIN BRAY

& Q  
A

kinds of things, that this be tried if one is serious about validating telepathy. This is a very simple experiment. And potentially amazing.

Taoist sexual practices lay a lot of stress on the generation of unusual substances in the genitals or in the perspiration, which is a theme absent from Indian yoga, but a theme picked up in Amazonian shamanism where there is a lot of stuff about magical forms of perspiration, magical objects that are generated out of the body, or put into the body of other people. It's interesting. In the matter of Taoist alchemy, it appears that there was originally an erotic control language; much of what appear to be prescriptions for sexual practices are actually recipes for plant combinations, because words which were used with sexual connotations were also code words for plants and fungi. The association in the Taoist mind between the fungi and the feminine

genitalia is pervasive. The words and the concepts are the same. This is a prevailing motif of the so-called esoteric schools of Chinese eroticism, meaning the schools where actually nothing appears to be going on, but the presence of certain plants and certain objects in a composition indicate that it actually is an erotic cryptogram of some sort.

Could it be that the natural psychedelics that exist on the planet are a kind of love offering from the Other to us through which, when we accept them, we can develop that bond sought by the Other?

**McKenna:** Recently I spoke about extra-terrestrial contact and the relationship to the psilocybe mushrooms. I've mentioned before that psilocin, which is what psilocybin quickly becomes as it enters one's metabolism, is four hydroxy-di-methyltryptamine; it is the only four substituted indole in all of organic nature. It happens to be this psychedelic substance which occurs in about eighty one species of fungi, most of which are native to the New World. Its uniqueness is a chemical signature, saying "I am artificial; I come from outside." I suggest that it is a gene—an artificial gene—carried perhaps by a space-borne virus or something brought artificially to this planet, and that this gene had insinuated itself into the genome of these mushrooms. It is an unresolved problem in botany why there is such a tremendous concentration of plant hallucinogens in the New World—in North and South America. Africa, which is where man is generally thought to have arisen and gone through his formative cultural development, is the poorest of all continents in hallucinogens. The New World is very, very rich and this is why hallucinogenic shamanism is so highly developed in the New World. It seems to me that the fact that the gene or the psilocybin compound is chemically unique, the fact that it induces this Logos-

like experience, makes me at least entertain the possibility that this is an extra-terrestrial contact. As human history goes forward, we develop the linguistic discrimination to be able to recognize the extra-terrestrials that are already insinuated into the planetary environment around us, some of whom may have been here millions and millions of years. In other words, space is not an impermeable barrier to life; there is slow seepage. There is genetic material that is transferred through space and time over vast distances. Operationally, I deal with the mushroom that way.

It may well be an aberration of some slice of the human collectivity, but since it presents itself as The Other, I treat it as The Other. Sometimes, as I have said, it is my colleague and sometimes it is my Jewish godfather, and sometimes it is what Jung called the *soror mystica*. What my brother, Dennis, called his sore mistress. It is, you know. It has an erotic connotation to it; this is all part of the picture. It has to do with changing our preconceptions of things so that an idea such as that a mushroom could be an intelligent extra-terrestrial, which is posterous by one point of view, can be seen to move from possible to highly probable, by simply shifting language around; the evidence has been left untouched. The

evidence is equally friendly to either point of view because the evidence is so impersonal. The empirical evidence that the mushroom is an extra-terrestrial is zilch. But the subjective experience of those who have formed a relationship with it is overwhelmingly slanted in the other direction. This then is where we have ideas in competition, the evolution of points of view through time. That's why I say the opportunity should not be missed to open a cultural dialogue about this phenomenon with ourselves, among ourselves, and with the thing itself. It's a unique opportunity.

I'm going to ask you to speculate just for a minute...

**McKenna:** I never speculate.

**Just try. Given that we are led by our imaginations into the future, and that facts are indeed suppositions that are agreed upon by a large group of people, how many people do you suppose it would take to agree on these facts and what sort of rituals or ceremonies would be required to align everybody's thinking to agree on specific elements of the invisible landscape to the point where it would be possible to retool the language to accommodate the new visions and take advantage of this opportunity to perfect the paleolithic ideals of shamanism?**

**McKenna:** I don't know. Maybe there's a critical five percent, or something like that. Political revolutions are said to be made by ten percent. What I put it down to is the emanation of these psilocybin mushrooms throughout society. In 1975 we underwent something like a second neolithic revolution. The first neolithic revolution was the invention of agriculture; the second neolithic revolution was the invention of home fungus cultivation. Suddenly, twenty or thirty species of psilocybin-containing mushrooms, which were previously rarely met forest endemics, or the coprophilic kinds of mushrooms—the ones which grew on the dung of cattle—have become ubiquitous. *Stropharia cubensis*, the most ubiquitous in the natural state, was, before the invention of human cultivation, a rare tropical mushroom. Now it grows from Nome to Tierra del Fuego in every attic, basement and garage around, and the strategy by which the mushroom conquers society is exactly the same strategy by which the mycelium spreads across a petri dish; it just moves out in all directions. My brother and I wrote the book *Psilocybin: Magic Mushroom Growers' Guide* in 1975. It sold 100,000 copies. We had stiff competition from Bob Harris who wrote a book called *Growing Wild Mushrooms*. Jonathan Ott wrote a book. Spore companies sprang up; it's very hard to imagine how many people are doing this. If the mycelium spreads through society the way it spreads through bulk substrate or a petri dish, then what phenomenon can we expect in society when the mushroom fruits, when it goes through the ontological transformation where it ceases to manifest its homogeneous hyphal network form and instead manifests its form which is devoted to sunbathing and sex thrills, the mushroom which emerges above the ground?

I'm very bullish on psilocybin. I think that the word "drug" is inappropriate and that the model of hallucinogenic drugs that we have inherited from our experience with LSD is completely inadequate—that the fact that LSD is our model hallucinogen for doctors and researchers is only a historical accident. The fact is that it was discovered first, or characterized first, in the laboratory and then millions of people took it. Millions and millions of people were touched by LSD. I don't think that mass drug-taking is a good idea. But I think that we must have a deputized minority—a shamanic professional class, if you will—whose job is to bring ideas out of the deep, black water and show them off to the rest of us. They would perform for our culture some of the cultural functions that shamans performed in preliterate cultures.

I think that a true symbiosis is happening between humans and hallucinogenic plants. LSD was a *thing* of the laboratory. Psilocybin is a *creature* of the forests and fields. When man propagates it, when we spread it, when it intoxicates us, there is a reciprocal relationship and transfer of energy and information. This is a true symbiosis. Both parties are gaining; nobody is giving up anything. We have domesticated many plants and animals; that's not big news. But this is not a bean or an apple; it isn't even a cat or a dog; it may be smarter than we are. So the implications of this relationship have to be couched in at least human terms and that's why the erotic metaphor is not inappropriate.

**If psychedelic substances were legal and this were a class in introductory psychedelic appreciation, what do you suppose our first assignment would be?**

**McKenna:** From me? I would have you plant some seeds and read some history; when you had read the history and grown the seeds (and I don't know what they would be, morning glory seeds or the spores of mushrooms), and when you had assimilated and cared for the plant and brought it to its fullest self-expression of fruitful production of alkaloids, then you would be at the threshold of your career and I would adjourn the class. History is very important to doing well in the psychedelic experience, at least psilocybin, because it shows movies of history; it sees us as historical creatures. It has this above-everything point of view where it isn't dealing with one in the slice of the moment. It's dealing with the phenomenon of the monkeys over the last millennium and that's how it sees us. One can assimilate some of its viewpoints by having a real feeling for the ancestors, all the people who are dead and the people who went before. What a long, strange trip it's been, from the cave paintings at Alta Mira to the doorway of the starship. And now we stand on that threshold, hand in hand with this strange new partner, not anticipated in the context of historical change. The unexpected is what we have on our hands. The problem of The Other, the need for The Other, the presence of The Other, the nature of The Other, these are the questions and the concerns that will catalyze the next order of human knowing.

**You don't preclude at all the possibility that the yearning for The Other is just a yearning for the Self—that The Other really is an undisclosed Self.**

**McKenna:** No, I don't. In fact I said at the beginning that the nature of the archetype is being set now in the light of scientific knowledge about how it's possible that there is other intelligence in the Universe, and it's a combination of our need for connection and science giving its blessing to this form of expressing that need that is creating the phenomenon of the potential for alien love. But we don't know what the Self is. Buddhism, says that everything is bodhi-mind; that means that there could be extra-terrestrials and if everything is bodhi-mind, they are an aspect of the Self. This word, Self, is as great a mystery as the word Other. It's just a polarity between two mysteries and then the thin, thin myths that are spun between them, the myths of science and religion and the horoscopes and the shamanism. This is a polarity between the mystery of the Self and the mystery of The Other. A mystery is not to be confused with an unsolved problem; a mystery is by its nature mysterious and it will not collapse into solution. We are unfamiliar with that kind of thing. We think that if there's a mystery, then why not hire a bunch of people of whatever kind and get it straightened out and issue a report? And that's that! But this only works for trivia. And what's important—our hearts, our souls, our hopes, our expectations—is completely mysterious to us. So how must it appear then to The Other if it truly is Other? We need to cultivate a sense of mystery. The mystery is not only in the Other; it is in us and this reverberates with what I said about how we become what we behold. History is turning suddenly here in the post-quantum physics, post-

modern phase; this was not expected. The nineteenth century, the early twentieth century...they didn't realize this was what they were pointed into. Although some people, the Pataphysicians, the Surrealists, they saw what was coming. Now we are there.

On the incubus... I had an experience in sleep two years ago that felt like sexual contact and the word *incubus* was explained to me as it was happening. My reception of it was not very good. The experience was fun, but the words came in like it's an old thing that people used to get caught up in, I guess...fear of evil.

**McKenna:** Yes. The cultural programming of the last thousand years has not been kind to demons. This is a real question. I don't think the Moral Majority is going to greet with much joy the news that people are communicating with extra-terrestrials using hallucinogenic mushrooms. Demons are of many kinds. This is why it's necessary to have your ducks in a row when you go into these dimensions. That is why not only the study of history, but a fair understanding of epistemology and philosophy and even camel trading would probably not be inappropriate.

Have you had erotic experiences too...

**McKenna:** I've certainly had feelings that I loved and that it loved me, and that there was a tremendous flow of energy back and forth. Oh, it loves me; no question about that. It tells me all the time.

If I could add the comment in terms of sexual evil. The important thing to remember, I think, is that the ethical questions are no different for aesthetics than they are for any other kind of human activity. Because of the historical and emotional position of sex in the human psyche it becomes a tremendous magnet for projection of any particular kind of demon you may be conversant with within your own mind. That problem is not exclusively sexual, but it very often becomes sexually colored because of the unfortunate antecedents of sex in our culture.

**McKenna:** In Tantric Buddhism the wrathful deities—which are those demonic, multi-armed, multi-headed forms—are the knowledge-holding deities. This connection of knowledge with the demonic, with the Other, has always been present in human mythology. Think of the story of Prometheus stealing fire from the gods and bringing this alien thing to man. There is always this element of alienness of the thing gone against.

The discussion earlier of how the mushroom was possibly seeded from afar reminded me of the Pan-spermia theory—of the idea that life itself was sent to this planet.

**McKenna:** Yes, I should have mentioned that theory because it is the best support I have for the idea I was putting forth. What's being mentioned is a theory—the Pan-spermia theory—which was formulated by Cyril Punampurama, who was the discoverer, along with James Watson and Francis Crick, of DNA. They are proposing a much more radical theory than what I put forth, at least in terms relative to biology. They are saying that pre-biotic molecules arise in the greatest numbers in deep space, not on the surfaces of planets. That planets are only secondary and at a late stage in the development of complex polymers and prebiotic compounds. Do the surfaces of the planets become where the action is? I'm harking back to the old adage that we each are made of stars, that the atoms in our bodies were once cooked in the hearts of stars. This is true, but an unremarked accompanying necessity of that fact would be that there must, therefore, be some atoms in your body which were not cooked in the heart of stars, but were part of the planets which circled around

those stars before they exploded. My point being that not all of the material that is circulated in the galaxy has been through something as violent as nuclear burning at the heart of a star. When stars go nova, the planets are blown to pieces and biotic material that has evolved on those planets is injected into the general cosmic soup of circulating material. That is more my idea of what the spore strategy may have originally been about. Forms of life which evolved in very harsh environments where a spore could survive but seeds, for instance, could not. If you have mushroom spores and you want to preserve them, you create an atmosphere as much like that of deep space as possible. Ideal is a total vacuum at minus-sixty degrees centigrade. Then they will last virtually forever. At any higher temperature they will slowly degrade. I envision mushrooms, or spore-bearing life forms antecedent to mushrooms, evolving in very harsh environments; space was a medium through which they could migrate. Of course this happens over very long periods of time. But if you think that the galaxy is roughly a hundred thousand light years from edge to edge, if something were moving only one one-hundredth the speed of light—now that's not a tremendous speed that presents problems to any advanced technology—it could cross the galaxy in ten million years. There's life on this planet a billion point eight years old; that's eighteen hundred times longer than ten million years.

So, looking at the galaxy on those time scales, you see that the percolation of spores between the stars is a perfectly viable strategy for biology. We know that the casing of spores is a very electron-dense material, as electron-dense as metals; global currents form, generation subsuperconducting or superconducting states on the surface that make them even more resistant to radiation. And we know that spores are light enough that Brownian motion and convection percolate them even into the high stratosphere. There, highly energetic events are going on at a fairly regular pace sufficient that we can calculate that a certain number of these spores move right out of the gravitational field and then are subject to larger forces. It's radical to suggest this, but it's only because the empirical evidence is thin. The logic of the case is well founded. What is on such shakier ground, of course, is the idea that the mushroom is an intelligent life form. That's my special obsession and province. Most people say I'm welcome to it.

It's very interesting that in a book called *Perspectives on Scientific Communication with Extra-terrestrials* by Punampurama, there is an article by R.N. Bracewell, an astrophysicist, who talks about the logic of searches for intelligent life. He concludes that no matter what kind of life form you are, no matter what kind of technology you have, if you are seriously going to search space by physically sending probes from one star to another, then the only strategy which would work would be what is called a von Neumann machine, meaning a machine which can reproduce itself. Four of these machines are sent out in four opposed directions from a parent star. At a certain distance from the parent star, each machine replicates and then you have eight machines. At double that distance, they replicate again and you have sixteen machines, and so on. The notion is that only by this process of replication can you cover all bets. And probably then what you do is send a message which says "We are searching the galaxy by an exhaustive means. If you read this message, please call the following, toll-free number and we will initiate contact." Only by this means could you hope to have contact with all the worlds in the galaxy. And this makes it very important to understand what the message is that the mushroom conveys.

The Mandeans, who were an obscure religious cult of gnostics in the Middle East of very long survivability, have a very interesting idea. They believe that at the end of time what they call the Secret Adam will come to earth. The Secret Adam is a Messiah-like figure, but he builds a machine which then transmits all the souls back to their hidden source in the All-Father outside the machinery of cosmic fate. This notion of the Messiah building a machine is very interesting. It's conceivable that if there is an extra-terrestrial message in our environment, it is a message to build some kind of device so that a less tenuous form of communication

can be opened up. And Bracewell makes this case; to him this is just inherent in the logic of the situation. I suppose it would be an interesting branch of logic—the logic of protocols of extra-terrestrial contact. What can we define about contact that is so basic that whatever form of life and intelligence you were, you would have to flow along those credos? This is an undeveloped field at this point, but it certainly could be done. It's like alternative physics. We need alternative theories of social contact and social contract-making in the event that we meet an extra-terrestrial. This is a fertile theme in science fiction, the logic of contact, how to make it without giving away too much and yet get something out of it. It's poker, but the stakes are very high. We're talking survivability, viability and evolutionary fates of species, if not entire planets.

I would like to ask whether you see a difference with what you're doing with your life and what a shaman would do? The last time I heard you speak, you said you didn't consider yourself a shaman.

**McKenna:** The primary characteristic of shamans is that they cure. In other words, they perform a medical function. If I'm performing a medical function, it is a fairly curious one. That's how I differentiate, because I respect that and it is often lost sight of. People think of the plants and the magic and the magical feats. In Carlos Castaneda, I don't think anybody cures anybody in about twelve hundred pages of material; nevertheless, classically and statistically, shamans are curers. I think there is something called "lived shamanic ideals" which is what I'm trying to do—to try to explore reality with a shamanic spirit and by shamanic means. But the curing is the *sine quo non* of shamanism.

Could you give me your best understanding of what space is from the psychedelic perspective and the differentiation between inner mental space and outer physical space, and the validity of that differentiation? Just the relationship between space in general and consciousness?

**McKenna:** The world is reconstructed in the mind through the input of sensation. The sensation is canalized through the perceivers so that we're getting at least three or four lines of unrelated input, or it's generally thought of as unrelated. But the body is the interface between the mind and the world, and language seems to be the throughput from the mind to the world and then from the world back into the mind. The earliest forms of life had no perception of the world at all. If food was in their way, they took it in. Then later, when there was the development of eye spots and light sensitive pigments translocated in certain cells, the differentiation between light and darkness became possible. Then you got mobile animals and the evolution of complicated eyes. What is happening is that biology is a conquest of dimensions and even if you view culture as the extension of biological evolution, it is also a conquest of a dimension. It is the conquest of a dimension of time where, through the invention of alphabets and coding systems and oral traditions, experience is able to be coded. Now we seem to be coming into a place where we are coding space and time, but the evolution of the conquest of space through motion allows our mapping of the world. Culture is turning into a hyperdimensional entity. It is transforming itself through a series of dimensions, bootstrapping itself from one dimension to another. Notice that human culture is very two-dimensional. The highest building in the world is a thousand feet high, and generally most buildings are twenty feet high; but now we are proposing to build space colonies where the notion of how high the building is doesn't exist because the world is the building and the building is fifty or a hundred miles long.

We can record essentially anything we want about any event and recall it later. So now there is a synthesis of all this, which leads then to the discovery of the inner dimension which one can think of as a higher

or lower dimension. It is the dimension beyond space/time, or it precedes all dimensions. On some level it has point-like characteristics; that's why there's all this talk about holograms, because of the point-like characteristics of new consciousness. It's all-at-oneness, it's everywhere at the same-timeness that has fascinated commentators.

You talked about the collapse of the distinction of inner and outer space. Would you go into that more?

**McKenna:** The distinction between inner and outer space is rooted in association of the Self with the body. I think as the Self moves out into the ocean of electronic consciousness and as we explore the erotic dimensions of The Other that I've indicated tonight, this identification between Self and body will become secondary. In a way that identification between king and Self has become rather secondary over the last five thousand years. We don't even have a king. We seem to manage without one. It's conceivable we could manage without a body as well. These are just ways that loyalty is transferred toward forms of cultural consciousness validated by local languages.

The talk is of humanity being on the threshold of a new age, and that contact with aliens will help us cross this threshold.

**McKenna:** I definitely think that there is a process that has been long underway that has been gaining momentum since its very beginning. It is the process which formed the planet, which called life out of the ocean, which called higher animals out of the lower animals, which called humanity out of the primates and which called history out of tribal, sacral, timeless existence. What it is leading toward is some kind of apocalyptic transformative flowing together of everything. It is the umbilicus of being; it is where it's all tied together and, therefore, it's very hard to describe. I think that all of our science and religion and history are patterns thrown across a limited set of dimensions by the hyperdimensional fact of a certain object at the end of history toward which we are moving and toward which we are being drawn. I think that most things about man are mysterious. The sudden explosive development of the neocortex is entirely out of context with what we know about the rates of evolution that go on in other species and previously went on in the primates. It's been very fashionable in the past fifty years to think that it's all very humdrum; yet every ideological system that has been granted the status of being the official view of reality has always proclaimed that it had everything nailed down but the last five percent. Their best people were working on that. I think that religious thinking about the transformation of the world is more on the right track than the notion that the laws of physics will always be what they are, the laws of biology will always be what they are, and we're all going to go along and things are going to get worse and worse, or better and better, but that there are no surprises. I think that we do not see what's going on.

One of the reasons I like to make this argument about the mushroom and the extra-terrestrial is to show people that maybe this isn't true. Look how one can see things differently. If things can be seen that differently, how many different ways can they be seen? Stop waiting for history and the stream of historical events to make its intent clear to you. You have to take seriously the notion that understanding the Universe is your responsibility because the only understanding of the Universe that will be useful to you is your understanding. It doesn't do you any good to know that somewhere in some computer there are tensor equations which perfectly model or perfectly don't model something that is going on. We have all tended to give ourselves away to official ideologies and to say, "Well I may not understand, but someone understands." The fact of the matter is only your own understanding is any good to you. Because it's you that you're going to live with and it's you that you're going to die with. As the song says, "the last dance, you dance alone."