

Dancing the Wild Divine: Drums, Drugs, and Individuation

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Abstract: For complex reasons, Carl Jung was apprehensive of ecstatic rites in which participants dance to hypnotic drumming and transcend normal states of ego. He was also strongly opposed to the use of LSD, mescaline, and other psychotropic agents often used in such rites, cautioning that psychedelics facilitate access to unconscious energies one is ill-equipped to absorb. This paper represents a challenge to Jung's thinking on both issues. Drawing upon recent research in shamanic studies and the once-again blossoming field of psychedelic research, D. J. Moores demonstrates the limitations of Jung's caution and argues for the value of ecstatic rites in depth work.

Keywords: Depth psychology, drums, drumming, ecstasy, ecstatic rite, entheogens, hallucinogens, Jung, psychedelics

Since time immemorial, cultures all over the globe, even those separated by impassable distances and wide swaths of time, have used drumming, dancing, and the ingestion of psychedelics and other psychotropic agents in rites that serve several functions: to alter consciousness, to heal physical ailments, to lubricate social tensions, to cast out demons and bad spirits, to locate meaning and purpose in life, to recognize kinship with flora and fauna, and to acquire spiritual wisdom. Such ecstatic rites are fundamental to the story of human cultural origins because they foreground what might be the oldest musical instrument, that is, drums, percussion, or beating time on an object in rhythmic cadences. They also foreground what some scholars (see Harner) have posited is the oldest form of spirituality: ingesting mind-altering substances that similarly facilitate altered states of consciousness in which deeper aspects of the psyche flood the ego and the individual, sometimes utterly terrified or joyous or both, learns the illusion of selfhood and the verity of the archetypal foundations of being. Ecstatic rites always manifest in specific historical contexts, and historicists do well to identify and analyze their differences as a means of shedding productive light on phenomena that prove quite strange to Western ideals and values. But most Jungians will see beyond superficial differences among such rites and easily identify their common elements—drumming, dancing, and chanting in a circular formation, usually at night around a blazing fire in a sacred, protected space, while under the powerful influence of psychedelics—all of which point to an archetypal core. The wild gods and goddesses of ecstasy are ubiquitous around the globe, and to dance with them is to alter consciousness in ways that today might be called psychotherapy. Before Freud, Jung, and other depth psychologists, there were the shamans of old who taught the techniques of ecstasy.

The question remains, then, whether Jungian psychology is receptive to participatory, ecstatic rites in which people dance to hypnotic drumming while under the mind-manifesting influence of psychedelics. Although Jungian analytical work is favorably

disposed to the idea of consciousness transformation through *ekstasis*, or ego subversion in which analysts explore their unconscious depths, Jung himself strongly objected to the use of psychedelics such as mescaline, or synthesized peyote, and LSD, commonly known as “acid.” To his dying day, Jung refused to see the beneficial potentials of such agents in depth work. He also exhibited a problematic stance toward ecstatic rites, particularly those of “primitives” whose wild drumming and dancing caused him considerable anxiety for complex reasons.

In taking this position toward an archetypal activity and in vehemently opposing the use of psychedelics, did Jung overlook the ancient wisdom of potent psychospiritual medicines that can be used as a means of beneficial transformation through the temporary transcendence of ego and a deep dive into psyche’s oceanic depths? I argue in the affirmative. Of interest here is not only what he missed in taking such a stance but also why he adopted it to begin with: Jung’s vehement opposition to the use of psychedelics is a complicated position, informed by his first-hand experience with temporary, destabilizing psychosis and a concern over how to integrate unconscious material once it is accessed. His anxiety over ecstatic rites involving drumming and trance states is equally complicated, as it reflects his internalized racial fears and an introvert’s distrust of and aversion to crowds and group consciousness. On the whole, Jung’s view of mind-altering drugs and ecstatic rites, developed as it was in the early days of psychedelic studies, proves unsupportable in the face of an enormous body of research that attests to the powerful psychospiritual benefits of agents such as DMT, ayahuasca, psilocybe mushrooms, peyote buttons, mescaline, iboga, LSD, and others. It also proves unsupportable when measured against the touchstone of the shamanic tradition, which, for thousands of years, has associated ecstatic rites involving drumming and dancing with beneficial healing—helping people to become more human, more aware of their enormous psycho-spiritual totalities. Ecstatic rites and the ingestion of psychedelics in the appropriate context represent a highly potent method of consciousness transformation catalyzed by an engagement with psychological depths, one that Jungian analysts might soon be able to incorporate into therapy sessions in controlled, safe, and legal environments.

Ecstatic Rites and the Caucasian Response to Them

An example of an ecstatic rite, one that proves most relatable to Westerners, is the ceremony of the mystery religion associated with Eleusis, a small town situated about seventeen kilometers northwest of ancient Athens. Often referred to as the Greater Mysteries (in contrast to the preparatory Lesser Mysteries of Agrai), the Eleusinian cult exerted an enormous influence over the ancient world for over 2000 years (Meyer 4). Until the fourth century C.E. and the bloody conversion of Rome under Constantine, Eleusis was the most important sacred site in the entire Mediterranean region. Before the Greeks of the classical age made the Greater Mysteries an entirely Hellenic affair, banning those who could not speak their language to barricade themselves from the “barbarians” of the North, diverse peoples traveled from all over the region to participate in the Eleusinian rite. Ecstasy had a cachet in the ancient world that it does not enjoy in the present day.

In preparation for the Greater Mysteries, which were held in honor of the grain goddesses Demeter and her daughter Kore, or Persephone, initiates would first participate in the Lesser Mysteries at Agrai in the Greek month of Anthesterion, or February (Meyer

18). Because initiates took a binding oath not to reveal the nature of either mystery tradition and because breaking the oath was punishable by death, little is known of what these rites actually consisted of. But from various sources, scholars have been able to fill in some of the details. It is known, for instance, that the Eleusinian Mysteries took place during the Greek month of Boedromion and, starting on the 13th of that month, required initiates to engage in a prolonged multiday fast, to bathe ritually in the ocean, to carry unknown but sacred objects (possibly psychotropic mushrooms, according to some scholars [Wasson et al. 27]), and to dance ecstatically for an exhausting eleven miles presumably to drums and other instruments in a Dionysian procession along the Sacred Way, a road that led from Athens to Eleusis. Once there, initiates would then engage in a secret ceremony, the ultimate nature of which is still unknown today but one that scholars know for certain involved imbibing the ceremonial *kykeon*, a sacred drink that precipitated in initiates a life-changing, final revelation, one that Cicero claimed made the Eleusinian rite “the paramount contribution of Athens to the civilized world” (qtd. in Ruck et al., *Mushrooms* 17). Coupled with the other preparatory activities, imbibing the sacred *kykeon* profoundly altered consciousness.

The ingredients of the *kykeon* are not fully known but surely consisted of some type of barley, according to the oldest known source of the Mysteries, the “Homeric Hymn to Demeter” (Richardson). In *The Road to Eleusis* the famed mycologist Gordon Wasson and other scholars offer a compelling argument on the psychotropic nature of *kykeon*, claiming that it was so powerful because it contained a cultivated form of *claviceps purpurea* or ergot (27), a psychotropic fungus that sometimes infects crops. Ergot, the same fungus that Swiss chemist Albert Hofmann used when he first synthesized LSD-25 in 1938, likely grew on the plentiful barley in the fields surrounding Eleusis, according to Wasson. Although his theory on the exact nature of *kykeon* is still unproven and may never be fully validated, it seems reasonable to conclude that the drink was psychotropic, or mind-altering, in nature, particularly since it was included with other techniques associated with psychedelic-influenced ecstatic rites. Together with the elements of fasting, ritual bathing, and dancing to repetitive drumming, the *kykeon* was a tipping point for the ancient Greeks, one that forever changed the initiates who drank it, leaving them with the kind of wisdom that proved so deep it could not be spoken in language—an insight into the human psyche that would fall on deaf, profane ears if revealed to one who had not engaged in the ritual and drunk the sacred beverage.

The drumming and probable ingestion of a psychotropic agent that initiates experienced in the Eleusinian Mysteries are ecstatic techniques found all over the globe in non-Western cultures too numerous to survey here. One such example aptly illustrates the point: the Bwiti of central Africa offer a rite called “breaking open the head,” which entails the ingestion of iboga, a potent psychedelic plant that functions as a sacrament at the heart of an ecstatic, tribal dance to loud drumming (Pinchbeck). The Bwiti clearly know something about depth work, and they are not alone in this wisdom: such elements are found in shamanic participatory rites across time and culture.

In the groundbreaking study *Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy*, Barbara Ehrenreich analyzes the responses of European colonialists, missionaries, and scholars to the various ecstatic rites they encountered in non-Western cultures. White observers of such rites often responded with “horror” and “revulsion” to what they

interpreted as the primitive savagery of barbaric, pagan religion. According to Ehrenreich, “*grotesque* is one word that appears again and again in European accounts of such rites; *hideous* is another” (4; emphases in the original). The ethnomusicologist W. D. Hambly, for instance, writes the following: “The student of primitive music and dancing will have to cultivate a habit of broad-minded consideration for the actions of backward races [. . .]” “Music and dancing performed wildly by firelight in a tropical forest,” he adds condescendingly, “have not seldom provoked the censure and disgust of European visitors” (qtd. in Ehrenreich 4–5). Charles Darwin responded in precisely this manner when he encountered the Corroborree rite of Australian aboriginals. “The dancing,” he observes, “consisted in their running either sideways or in Indian file into an open space and stamping the ground with great force as they marched together.” The wild gesticulations and primal vocalizations of participants lead him to conclude that “it was a most rude, barbarous scene, and, to our ideas, without any sort of meaning” (qtd. in Ehrenreich 2). Despite his forceful demystification of monotheism, Darwin’s understanding of non-Western religion was shot through with mystification, misunderstanding, and misrepresentation.

Jung’s views on Africa and its religions are perhaps closer to contemporary perspectives, but they are also not without a similar European condescension. On the one hand, Jung recognizes the other face of the European colonial mission, with its stated attempt to spread civilization and Christianize pagans, as “the face of a bird of prey seeking with cruel inattentiveness for distant quarry—a face worthy of a race of pirates and Highwayman,” as he puts it in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (248). At the heart of European imperialism, he correctly discerns, lay a rapacious motivation to dominate and exploit. “All the eagles and other predatory creatures that adorn our coats of arms,” he writes, “seem to me apt psychological representatives of our true nature” (248). Jung adopts a forward-thinking, anti-imperialist position on Africa, recognizing the European attempts to bring a civilizing light to the “dark” continent as a thinly veiled pretext for rapaciously exploiting its resources and subjugating its dark-skinned inhabitants—all under the guise of saving souls and bringing the march of progress to a backward land.

On the other hand, like Darwin and so many other European observers of non-Western spirituality, Jung was frightened by his encounter with Africans, whom he misunderstood and misinterpreted. While in North Africa, for instance, he observes a strange work ritual in which several Bedouin tribes come together to do labor for a revered elder, whose arrival is heralded by many men wildly shouting and dancing, beating small drums as they gyrate themselves into bizarre states of mind unfamiliar to him. After the work begins, Jung notices the “men carrying their baskets filled with heavy loads of earth” in a state of “wild excitement” as they “danced along to the rhythm of the drums” (*MDR* 241). He also believes that, “[w]ithout wishing to fall under the spell of the primitive,” he nevertheless has been “psychically infected” by the encounter, the physical manifestation of which is an infectious enteritis, he claims, that clears up after a few days (242). The wild shouting and dancing coupled with the hypnotic, trance-inducing effect of pagan drums obviously stirred him at deep, unconscious levels. And they caused him much distress, leaving him to believe that he was physically infected by the powerful, psychic energies they roil in people.

Jung’s problematic understanding of non-Western culture is also apparent in his description of the Bedouins: “This scene taught me something: these people live from their

affects, are moved and have their being in emotions. Their consciousness takes care of their orientation in space and transmits impressions from outside, and it is also stirred by inner impulses and affects. But it is not given to reflection; the ego has almost no autonomy” (242). Although he acknowledges at the end of this passage that “the situation is not so different with the European” (242), he does see an essential difference between the egos of “primitives” and Caucasians, the former being weak and directly influenced by the unconscious, while the latter “possesses a certain measure of will and directed intention” (242). The difference, as he further specifies it, is the “primitive” is governed by powerful emotions and little or no self-reflection, much like that of an animal, whereas Europeans have ego-strength and self-consciousness but lose psychic vitality through their development and expression. Jung seems to be giving fair balance to both cultural traditions here, but his ideas are racially essentialist and thus problematic in the present day. Surely, the Africans he encountered on his sojourn were more complex than mere automatons ruled by their emotions and unconscious drives. In the important book *Jung in Africa*, Blake W. Burleson discusses the problematic nature of Jung’s views on Africans in terms of cultural complexes such as romantic primitivism, fears of “going black,” expressing inappropriate anger towards natives, and others. The matrix from which such views arose was European culture itself, since most sophisticated Europeans could not accurately see Africans as human beings like themselves, blinded as they were by their own projections. Jung’s understanding of Africans was tainted by such bias.

He similarly expresses fear of what he interpreted as “primitive” culture on the same trip while in the Sudan. Here, the village elder hosting him holds an *n’goma*, or tribal dance, in his honor. At first, he seems to enjoy the activity, participating in the dance and cracking his whip, while the other men wave their weapons in wild fury and women and children circle-dance to drums around the primeval fire. When the drumming and dancing accelerate, however, he grows increasingly uneasy. Alarmed that “[t]he dancers were being transformed into a wild horde,” he becomes extremely worried “about how it would end” (271). After recalling the story of a fellow countryman struck and killed by a stray spear at a similar event, he cracks his rhinoceros whip “threateningly, but at the same time laughing,” and then swears “at them loudly in Swiss German that this was enough and that they must go home to bed and sleep now” (271–72). Although he ends the *n’goma* good-naturedly with a laugh, he is obviously more than distressed by its impact on him.

The question, of course, is why he was so distraught, for there seems to be more to his response than perhaps he himself was aware of. Was he truly afraid of a stray spear? Later during this expedition through Africa, he has a dream that sheds partial light on his fearful response to the rite. Dreaming of an African American barber who cut his hair while on a trip to America twelve years earlier, Jung finds himself feeling angst over the question of racial identity:

In the dream he was holding a tremendous, red-hot curling iron to my head, intending to make my hair kinky, that is, to give me Negro hair. I could already feel the painful heat and awoke with a sense of terror. I took this dream as a warning from the unconscious; it was saying that the primitive was a danger to me. At that time, I was obviously all too close to ‘going black’ [. . .] In order to represent a Negro threatening me, my unconscious

had invoked a 12-year-old memory of my Negro barber in America, just in order to avoid any reminder of the present. (272–73)

Here, he unwittingly reveals at least partly why he was disturbed both in North Africa and in the Sudan by rites involving wild drumming and dancing: because of centuries-old, European fears of “primitive,” dark-skinned people and their strange customs, that is, because of institutionalized and internalized racial anxieties. After all, what is so bad and dangerous about “going black”? In his discussion of the barber dream, Michael Ortiz Hill notes that the *essential* difference between Westerners and Africans, for Jung, was in the exercise of reason over emotion. To “go black,” then, means to slide into “moral laxity and instinctuality” (132), both of which include engaging in sexual relations with black women and thus losing one’s vitality. While such an account of Jung’s trepidations about “going black” is partly true, there is more to the image than an unconscious attempt to manage “inappropriate” sexual desire and a “descent” into instincts. Michael Vannoy Adams, for instance, insightfully reads the dream not in Jung’s own terms as an ego-defense mechanism (the unconscious warning him that the primitive is a danger) but as an encouragement to be like the other that he positioned himself against (88). If Jung was correct in his ideas on the compensatory nature of dreams in their relationship to consciousness, then it seems Adams’s idea is irrefutable: Jung’s dream caused him anxiety because it challenged his Caucasian sense of identity, but it was also a call to growth, one that he did not consciously recognize. Like Darwin before him and most Europeans of his day, he was racist by today’s standards.

Assuming that his fears about the stray spear were unfounded, would he have been psychologically harmed in some way if he had participated more fully in the *n’goma*, entering the trance states invited by such activity and becoming one with the dark-skinned, “wild” horde? Not likely. To the contrary, as I mentioned earlier, shamanic rites are nearly universal in the ancient world and, notwithstanding a few exceptions, represent opportunities for psychospiritual development, or what Jung called individuation. In *Ecstatic Religion: An Anthropological Study of Spirit Possession and Shamanism*, I. M. Lewis points out their association with well-being or the desire to heal or to redress a social wrong. In *The Art of Losing Control: A Philosopher’s Guide to Ecstatic Experience*, Jules Evans similarly notes their association with liberating people from depression, fatigue, and addiction; inspiring creativity; fostering a sense of community and other-directedness; and providing a sense of meaning and purpose (xxiii–iv). According to an ancient body of received wisdom, Jung needlessly closed the door on an opportunity to enter an altered state and explore his own depths in the context of ecstatic rites. He cracked his rhinoceros whip, in part, because he felt the rhythms of primal drums as their hypnotic cadence assaulted the citadel of European ego. As Ehrenreich points out, repressed Caucasians historically have been successful in resisting the seductive urge to participate in wild nighttime rites that invite entrance into trance states through dancing to the stirring rhythms of hypnotic drums. Jung, for all his brilliance, was no exception.

Fear of the Wild Horde

Nevertheless, a complicating element in Jung’s response to ecstatic rites is something that cannot be attributed to his internalized European racial ideas: his introverted aversion to and distrust of crowds, which had nothing whatsoever to do with skin color and represents

a healthy suspicion of all humans in masses. Such chariness about groupthink can be seen in Jung's ideas about the value of ego consciousness. Quite unlike Freud, Jung was not a strict determinist who believed that consciousness is merely an effect of subterranean, psychic forces. To the contrary, he championed the importance of individuality, or ego, and recognized its causal power to assist one through the individuation process and thus to enable resistance to the collective will.

Jung's defense of ego can be seen in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* in a passage where he recounts an important, insightful dream, one in which he finds himself protectively holding a tiny light, while "making slow and painful headway against a mighty wind" (88). The light, as he realizes upon waking and analyzing the dream, is of the utmost importance, because it represents the conscious self, the ego: "[. . .] this little light was my consciousness, the only light I have. My own understanding is the sole treasure I possess, and the greatest. Though infinitely small and fragile in comparison with the powers of darkness, it is still a light, my only light" (88). The tiny light represents the willing ego's function in the individuation process, which is frequently overlooked in Jungian studies, dismissed, as it so often is, as a barrier that needs to be circumvented. While such a statement is partly true, it is also important not to accept the fallacy that ego is irrelevant, since one needs a protective ego in order to function successfully in the world. Psychotics and those with fragmented egos lack such protection. Jung believed that there is a slight but critically important distinction between the mystic and the madman: both plunge into the same oceanic depths, but while the mystic knows how to swim back to shore, the psychotic chokes on the waters of spirit and drowns. The ego must reconstitute after its transcendence, and if reintegration does not occur, the consequence goes by the name of psychosis. The title of Jack Kornfield's book pithily encapsulates the idea: *After the Ecstasy, the Laundry: How the Heart Grows Wise on the Spiritual Path*. Although ego can be woefully one-sided, repressive, and diseased, its best iteration facilitates a successful navigation through psychological growth and mundane affairs. However attuned to psychic depths one may be, a healthy, strong ego is a fundamental prerequisite to functioning in any society. An example to support the point is seen in the mild psychosis-like state Jung experienced after his break from Freud. Although his consciousness was thoroughly destabilized as he confronted the ghosts of his own psyche, Jung successfully held himself together during the period and even met with clients in the evenings. In fact, as he claims in his memoir, the responsibility of his work with analysands, coupled with drawing mandalas and engaging in stonework, kept him from completely disintegrating (*MDR* 201). His ego, in other words, pulled him through.

Jung forcefully defended his ideas on the importance of ego assertion, as distinguished from submergence in the collective will of crowds, in the late essay *The Undiscovered Self*, an argument in which he eloquently condemns mass thinking and champions the importance of individualism in the face of the other twentieth-century "isms" that threatened it. In this work he repeatedly makes it clear why one's individual light—note the related term individuation—is of critical importance. Submerged in the mass, "[t]he individual is increasingly deprived of the moral decision as to how he should live his own life, and instead is ruled, fed, clothed and educated as a social unit, accommodated in the appropriate housing standards that give pleasure and satisfaction to the masses" (22). Elsewhere in the same work he levels his judgment on such a circumstance, arguing that

“the individual becomes morally and spiritually inferior in the mass” (68). A member of a wild horde has no conscience or reasoning power and is thus thwarted in any kind of moral decision-making and ratiocination. Such an individual is no individual at all and, lacking in free will and deprived of reason, merely becomes an unwitting instrument of those who are clever enough to influence and control society, which, he believes, is “only a camouflage for those individuals who know how to manipulate” the masses (26). The dissolution of the will may be a noble ideal in depth psychology and various forms of spirituality, but a strong ego is one’s only weapon in the face of the “mindless mass” (69). Without it, one can be compelled to live collectively, which, in Jung’s thinking, is to live a debased existence. “[T]he collective psyche,” he writes in “The Psychology of Rebirth,” “will be more like the psyche of an animal, which is the reason why the ethical attitude of large organizations is always doubtful. The psychology of a large crowd inevitably sinks to the level of mob psychology” (CW 9i, par. 225). A further problem with mass psychology is that it represents the eruption of collective shadow energies that too often result in bloodshed. “As soon as people get together in masses and submerge the individual,” he writes in “On the Psychology of the Trickster-Figure,” “the shadow is mobilized, and, as history shows, may even be personified and incarnated” (CW 9i, par. 478). Because of the Nazis, the Bolsheviks, the Maoists, and other twentieth-century mass movements that threatened the sanctity of the individual through mass shadow eruptions, Jung had serious misgivings about the stymying of the will, without which a precious aspect of being human is lost: the ability to use reason and to exercise moral judgment, especially in the face of injustice and the excesses of power.

Through a closer look at the language Jung uses in his depictions of the African drumming rituals, it is possible to discern his fear of mob psychology. “In dances such as this, accompanied by such music,” he writes of the *n’goma* in the Sudan, “the natives easily fall into a state of virtual possession” (MDR 271). States of trance and possession represent the loss of will and the suspension of conscious awareness, both of which are problematic in the context of groups in Jung’s thinking. As the dancers gyrate themselves further into their ecstasy, Jung becomes alarmed: “As eleven o’clock approached, their excitement began to get out of bounds,” he writes. From his perspective “the dancers slowly transformed into a wild horde,” and he grows increasingly concerned (271). Fearing the crowd’s seductive allure, he ends the affair with the crack of his whip. Among the Bedouins, he sees a procession of “hundreds of wild-looking men” that seems to function as one being: “with fanatic purposefulness the procession swarmed by, out into the oasis, as if going to battle. I followed this horde at a cautious distance . . .” (MDR 241). His verb use—“swarmed by”—suggests an association with a mindless hive of worker bees, and his reference to the dancing men as a singular, fear-inspiring “horde” is also clearly negative, carrying associations of Germanic tribes, invading Mongols, ravaging Huns, and other violent packs. Both reflect his opposition to the swallowing of individuality by the mass and his characteristically Western championing of individualism.

Underlying Jung’s fear of the Bedouins and the Sudanese, then, was also a protective mechanism against mass thinking, which is really no thought at all but a submersion into a collective psyche, a relinquishing of what he felt was a prized human possession—the human will. Of course, I am not offering an apology for his racial ideas, which reflect the white European culture in which he was raised and from which he took his values. There

is a considerable difference, nevertheless, between, say, an attendee at an alt-right rally who rails against the evils of brown-skinned people supposedly destroying America and Jung's internalized racial ideas about the other. Whereas the former represents mass shadow eruption, the latter does not.

Jung and Psychedelics

It is unclear whether the two rites Jung encountered were characterized by the ingestion of a psychedelic, a term coined in 1957 by the British psychiatrist Humphry Osmond meaning "mind-manifesting," or that which discloses hidden parts of the psyche. Participants in similar rites around the globe surely do ingest various types of mind-manifesting agents. As I previously mentioned, Shamanism, an ancient form of spirituality, is characterized by hypnotic drumming and (often) the consumption of psychotropic agents intended (in Jungian parlance) to dissolve, however temporarily, the limiting structures of ego and thus enable access to other psychic dimensions. Mircea Eliade, the most famous scholar of shamanism, believed the use of psychedelics in shamanic work represents a debasement of the tradition and functions as the *modus operandi* of inept shamans who cannot transcend consciousness on their own resources (77). Other scholars, however, reject such a purist view. Michael Harner and many others, for instance, point to numerous shamanic traditions around the globe in which psychedelics, with the help of hypnotic drumming, function as a central sacrament that shuttles those who ingest them to otherwise inaccessible realms of the mind.

Jung was of the purist camp, strongly opposing the use of mescaline and LSD, the two psychedelics that in his day had been synthesized from natural sources (mescaline is synthesized peyote cactus, while LSD is derived from an ergot, or fungus, that grows on crops, as I previously mentioned). Although early research showed positive effects, Jung saw only the dangers. In 1954, the same year in which Aldous Huxley published the famous account of his own experience with mescaline in the book *The Doors of Perception & Heaven and Hell*, Jung wrote a letter to Father Victor White, admitting his ignorance of psychedelics but opposing their use, nevertheless. "Is the LSD-drug mescaline?" he asks, quickly asserting, "I don't know either [sic] what its psychotherapeutic value with neurotic or psychotic patients is. I only know there is no point in wishing to know more of the collective unconscious than one gets through dreams and intuition" (Letters 172–73). In a less than open-minded manner, and without ever trying a psychedelic, he criticizes the "poor impoverished creatures [. . .] for whom mescaline would be a heaven-sent gift without a counterpoison" (173). Because of his profound distrust of engaging with the contents of the collective unconscious beyond any known analytical means, he closes Huxley's doors of perception. Criticizing the author in the same letter, Jung dismisses Huxley as one who "knows how to call the ghosts but did not know how to get rid of them again." "I am profoundly mistrustful of the 'pure gifts of the gods,'" he writes, because "[y]ou pay very dearly for them" (173). He was opposed to psychedelic use because he believed that they do indeed open doors in the psyche, but such portals also carry the potential of flooding consciousness with waters in which one is unable to swim.

In a 1957 letter to Betty Grover Eisner, a woman who tried LSD and discovered its remarkable, numinous properties, Jung seems more open-minded but essentially adopts the same position. "Experiments along the line of mescaline and related drugs," he writes, "are

certainly most interesting, since such drugs lay bare a level of consciousness that is otherwise accessible only under peculiar psychic conditions” (*Letters* 382). He then draws a parallel between the powerful archetypal imagery one experiences under the influence of psychedelics and the ecstatic states of “primitives in their orgiastic or intoxicated conditions” (382). The problem with psychedelic use in ecstatic rites, however, is that “the result is a sort of theosophy, but it is not a moral or mental acquisition,” which is to say, it is not genuine spiritual growth but an encounter with psychic energies one has no guidance on how to integrate (383). “Religion,” he also cautions, “is a way of life and a devotion and submission to certain superior facts—a state of mind which cannot be injected by a syringe or swallowed in the form of a pill” (383). Psychedelics, by contrast, represent “a dangerously simple ‘Ersatz’ and substitute for a true religion” (383). He did not believe that chemical ecstasy, even if derived from natural means, could yield an authentic spiritual experience. For him, psychedelics represented an engagement with psychic energies that merely resulted in destabilization. He never got beyond the madness.

In response to those people who claim to have a profound psychospiritual experience while under the influence of psychedelics, Jung was thus skeptical and dismissive. In adopting this stance, he ironically violates the criterion of legitimacy he himself puts forth in the 1937 Terry Lectures he delivered at Yale University:

No matter what the world thinks about religious experience, the one who has it possesses the great treasure of a thing that has provided him with a source of life, meaning and beauty and that has given a new splendor to the world and to mankind. He has pistis [faith] and peace. Where is the criterium by which you could say that such a life is not legitimate, that such experience is not valid and that such pistis is mere illusion? (*Psychology & Religion* 113)

According to Jung, the final arbiter of any kind of psychospiritual experience is not dogma, scripture, or clerical authority but the individual who has the experience. In the same Terry Lectures he draws a distinction between true religion, which he defines as experience, and creeds, which are poor, hypostatized substitutes for direct encounters with the sacred. Just as it is impossible to prove the validity of mystical states of consciousness, so is it impossible to disprove them. The touchstone of any type of engagement with the unconscious, then, if I may use Jung against himself here, is not whether it originates from the ingestion of a psychedelic or from a dream image but whether it yields insight that beneficially impacts the individual and those he or she interacts with. His closing comment in the Terry Lectures speaks to the point: “And if such experience helps to make your life healthier, more beautiful, more complete and more satisfactory to yourself and to those you love, you may safely say: ‘This was the grace of God’” (114). Psychedelics, according to this idea, cannot be reduced to mere hallucinatory, chemical chimeras if they provide an experience that helps one become more individual, more individuated, more human. And they surely do in many people who ingest them, a point I will discuss presently.

Jung’s ideas on psychedelics are grounded in the caution of someone who experienced firsthand the highly destabilizing effects an engagement with the unconscious can cause. His own engagement with the unconscious, triggered as it was by his well-known psychological crisis after his break from Freud, represented a highly turbulent period that, as he claimed in his memoir, fueled the new type of psychology he developed. But it also

carried with it a kind of burden he had to bear for the rest of his life, because it took him many years to integrate the powerful energies that erupted from the unconscious during this tumult. His experience, however defining it has become in Jungian studies, is merely anecdotal and by no means proves the point. More compelling, it flies in the face of decades of studies that point not only to the disease-mitigating potentials of psychedelics but also to their highly positive, growth-inducing properties.

Jung's dismissive stance is based, in part, on the prevailing understanding of psychedelics in the fifties, a decade in which researchers observed that the effects of mescaline and LSD closely resemble the delusions and hallucinations of schizophrenia. Such agents were often referred to as "psychotomimetics" because they mimic madness: psychedelics cause a temporary disintegration of ego, and the content of the imagery they arouse in the minds of those who ingest them is strikingly like schizophrenic hallucinations (Pollan 34). Hofmann learned firsthand of the temporary madness LSD can induce when he accidentally dosed himself in the laboratory while synthesizing the drug and then undertook his famous bicycle ride home, where he experienced some frightening visions but also some beautiful imagery as the effects wore off. Soon after this, he sent out dozens of samples to psychotherapists all over the globe, hoping the drug would give them a temporary sampling of what it is like to have a schizophrenic crisis. Jung insightfully recognized the similarities between the experiences of psychedelic trippers and schizophrenics, but he was perhaps overcautious in completely closing the doors of perception on LSD and mescaline before fully understanding their complete effects and promising possibilities.

Toward the end of Jung's life, the psychotomimetic model of the fifties gave way to a psycholytic, or mind-releasing, paradigm, for researchers quickly learned that psychedelics also have mysterious, salutogenic capacities. While there is not enough space for a robust literature review in this essay, a brief overview will bolster the point.

Although they are often seen as "drugs," psychedelics are not habit-forming and have proven efficacious in treating various chemical addictions. As early as the fifties, researchers discovered this property. Osmond, for instance, began administering LSD to alcoholics, and the results were promising but not without considerable controversy. The politics of the sixties, moreover, later obscured his findings (Dyck). But current research has cast new light on the subject. In 2007 Teri Krebs and Pal-Orjan Johansen conducted a meta-analysis of the subject and concluded that there is "evidence for a beneficial effect of LSD on alcohol misuse," even in cases where only one dose is administered (994). Maslow conjectured in the sixties that LSD is efficacious in treating alcoholism because it chemically induces a peak experience, the substance of which changes one's values. While his idea may not be fully vindicated today, current research compellingly points to the ability of psychedelics to heal addictions to alcohol. Of course, further research is needed.

And there is a host of other medicinal effects. In addition to treatment of alcoholism, psychedelics recently have shown beneficial impacts on addiction to nicotine (Garcia-Romeo et al.) and opiates (Richards 149); to reduce drug-related prison recidivism (Hendricks et al.); to eliminate trace fear (Catlow et al.); to promote prosocial attitudes and behaviors (Griffiths et al., "Psilocybin-Occasioned Mystical-Type Experience"); to alleviate cluster headaches (Sewell et al.); and to mitigate or completely resolve a host of psychological ailments such as anxiety (Grob et al.), depression (Reiche et al.), traumatic

memories (Mithoefer et al.), and mood disorders (Kraehenmann et al.). Psychedelics, as the research compellingly shows, are by no means panaceas, and not everyone responds to them with beneficial outcomes. But their healing properties are so undeniable that it has become downright irrational to reduce them to chemical madness and to lump them together with other harmful drugs.

What is more, recent research has taken a quantum step beyond the psycholytic model, as scholars have begun to recognize that psychedelics prove salutogenic not only by removing disease but also by profoundly enhancing the sense of meaning and purpose in people who are moderately happy and neuroticism free. In this newer model some researchers prefer the term “entheogen,” a neologism coined in 1979 by Carl Ruck and a team of ethnobotanists and mythologists (see Ruck et al., “Entheogens”), including Gordon Wasson, the famous mycologist whose 1958 *Life* magazine article brought psilocybe mushrooms into public consciousness. An entheogen is an agent that fills one with God, that is, with a numinous, life-changing insight that alters values and expands consciousness in meaningful ways. Derived from plant sources, entheogens such as LSD, ayahuasca, psilocybe mushrooms, and others induce ecstasies or what Maslow called “peak experiences” (27), and their effects have been shown in numerous, compelling studies, according to William A. Richards in *Sacred Knowledge: Psychedelics and Religious Experiences*, to trigger states of mind that prove indistinguishable from the insights of mystics and those blessed with spiritual epiphanies. Jung’s dismissal of them is based on their capacity to mimic madness and proves blind to their potential to resolve neuroses, to inspire feelings of awe, and to precipitate a form of ego dissolution more appropriately termed ecstasy than temporary schizophrenia—a state of mind that Jung himself, were he alive today and privy to the thousands of studies on psychedelics published since their discovery, might finally acknowledge to be numinous experience.

The Psychedelic Renaissance

In the late 1990s two researchers at Johns Hopkins University, Richards and his colleague Roland Griffiths, received limited approval to begin studying psychedelics after a long, 22-year moratorium in which the federal government banned research and placed them, contrary to all known science, in the same category as harmful narcotics with no medicinal value, a classification still in place to this day. Although psychedelics are nontoxic, nonaddictive, highly medicinal, and remarkably safe when used judiciously, the U.S. government still locates them in the same category as it does crack cocaine and crystal meth (methamphetamine). Yet such obstinacy is slowly loosening its hold: since 2000 the research has proven so compelling that it has birthed a psychedelic research renaissance. Although the whole class of drugs is still illegal, there are today numerous trials under way at several universities and research centers in the United States, and there are also current studies in the U.K., Germany, Israel, Switzerland, Spain, Mexico, New Zealand, and other countries. The study of psychedelics has become a global movement in the last two decades, as the world slowly awakens from the slumber of forgetfulness caused by the intoxicated excesses of the sixties and the sober, federal crackdown they provoked.

Such research picks up lines of inquiry that scholars were once exploring before Timothy Leary and other zealous disciples of the Dionysian counterculture frightened Nixon and the establishment into banning the agents (see Leary). By the end of the sixties,

and shortly after Jung's death, researchers had conducted over 1000 LSD trials involving over 40,000 subjects, and such studies showed remarkable promise (Pollan 44). In the ground-breaking book *Sacred Knowledge: Psychedelics and Religious Experiences*, Richards surveys these two waves of research before and after Nixon, focusing on the spiritual dimension of psychedelic experiences. According to Richards, a high percentage of people enrolled in pre-Nixon trials on LSD and psilocybin reported a remarkably life-changing, spiritual experience. But such studies needed replication. In 2006 Griffiths and others successfully replicated the famous 1962 Good Friday Experiment in which subjects were given psilocybin to determine if the experience it yields could be distinguished from mystical states. The findings of the study showed that it could not. Conducted by one of Leary's graduate students, Walter H. Pahnke, the 1962 Good Friday Experiment had a remarkable outcome in showing that nearly all subjects who received the drug (as opposed to the placebo niacin) reported a profound religious experience. But the study was flawed in a few different ways, not unlike much of the older research, as Richards points out. Along with Griffiths and others, he tried to correct those errors while also replicating the findings, which showed that one-third of psilocybin recipients had the most spiritually significant experience of their lives (Griffiths et al., "Psilocybin Can Occasion"). Two-thirds of them rated the psychedelic session among the five most important experiences of their lives, ranking it in the same category as the birth of a child or the death of a parent (629). Although Jung was skeptical about the matter, psychedelics have been shown in several trials to enable people to have a powerful, sacred encounter, one that cannot be reduced to ersatz ecstasy because it profoundly changes lives.

Numinous experiences are impossible to prove and exceedingly difficult even to discuss, since one of their defining features is their ineffable quality, as William James, Evelyn Underhill, and numerous other scholars of mysticism have observed. Still, it is possible to analyze their effects. According to Richards, there are often a remarkable number of positive, lasting changes in subjects who ingest psychedelics, particularly in the personality domain identified as openness (31). Other aspects of the personality they are known to alter include an enhanced receptivity to beauty, a widening of the perceptual field through a heightening of the senses, an increased level of tolerance and understanding, a higher sense of perspective or wisdom, an improvement in interpersonal skills, an increase in other-directed emotions, a recognition of kinship with flora and fauna, an aversion to materialistic pursuits, and a more lasting sense of meaning and purpose (138). They can also cause a value shift in those who ingest them and consequently prompt alternative life choices. Sometimes, subjects leave their jobs to grow flowers or join the Peace Corps, changing careers to do something they feel is more meaningful, as Richards observes (44). Psychedelics are so powerfully transformative that they can alter what many mental health professionals claim is unalterable—the fundamental structures of personality. The death/rebirth imagery subjects often report—imagery, incidentally, that, were it to occur in a dream, Jung might say is indicative of the successful unfolding of the individuation process—clearly speaks to the profoundly beneficial, psychospiritual potential that psychedelics carry. Whereas Jung feared the disintegrative, detrimental effects of the chemical madness that psychedelics induce, numerous studies, according to Richards, point to the opposite: psychedelics are potent *psycho-integrators*, enabling people to look deeply within and beyond themselves in a transpersonal, numinous experience that often

profoundly reshapes personality and restructures the psyche in highly beneficial ways that sound quite similar to the psychodynamics of the individuation process.

Scott J. Hill explores this last point in admirable detail in his groundbreaking book *Confrontation with the Unconscious: Jungian Depth Psychology and Psychedelic Experience*. Jung's reservations about psychedelics have led to something of a taboo regarding their use in analytical work, as Hill observes (12). For instance, the British psychotherapist Ronald Sandison went to Zürich in the late fifties to speak with Jung about the success he had been having with psychedelics in psychotherapy, but Carl Meier, the first president of the C. G. Jung Institute, strongly cautioned him not to broach the subject because Jung was deeply opposed. Operating from what seems to be almost a dogma, Jung refused to see how psychedelics can foster growth. This obstinacy is reflected in the attitudes and general orientation of many analytical therapists towards these agents: most Jungians know little about psychedelics, and they accept Jung's opposition to them almost wholesale, as Hill points out (17).

But not all Jungians shared Jung's caution. For instance, in addition to Sandison, Margot Cutner and Ralph Metzner, according to Hill, successfully made use of LSD in the context of Jungian-inspired psychotherapy before the drug was banned in the late sixties. Hill also cites the work of Stanislav Grof, an iconic figure of the Esalen Institute and the transpersonal psychology it inspired. According to Hill, Grof is the godfather of psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy for having successfully used LSD as a powerful releasing agent in his work with hundreds of clients. Focusing on the psycholytic effects of psychedelics, Grof's work has extensively demonstrated the efficacy of LSD in treating a wide range of trauma-based disorders (*Realms* 44). As he discovered, just a few sessions with LSD can help one through psychological challenges that might otherwise prove intractable for many years. While Hill makes a remarkably compelling case for the efficacy of psychedelics in the context of Jungian analytical work, it is important to note that his study is essentially a theoretical, not actual, exploration of their value in such a context because most Jungians have adopted Jung's trepidations and eschewed these psychotropic agents. Hill's book, nevertheless, is a highly important study in the field of Analytical psychology and might prove instrumental as a guide for Jungians who want to use psychedelics as adjunct therapy in the coming years.

Compounding this reluctance on the part of credentialled Jungians is the matter of the legal barrier. Such strictures have proven to be quite an enormous obstacle to circumvent. Grof developed his famous "holotropic breathwork" technique after LSD was banned at the end of the sixties, repudiating the drug for fear of legal repercussions, and most other therapists, Jungian or otherwise, were justifiably scared straight. There remained, nevertheless, a small confederation of renegades who continued to offer psychedelics (and still do in the present day) in wholly illegal, guided therapy sessions because they have proven so efficacious not only as psycholytic agents but also as numinous sacraments. In what might be the best self-help book ever written, *How to Change Your Mind: What the New Science of Psychedelics Teaches Us about Dying, Addiction, Depression, and Transcendence*, Michael Pollan discusses this underground, psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy network, drawing upon the numerous, compelling studies researchers have been conducting on these agents. Undertaking several sessions with underground therapists, who operate by their own humane code of conduct, Pollan immerses himself

firsthand in psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy and strongly affirms the claims that so many people who have ingested LSD and others have made: psychedelics heal the fragmented psyche in numerous, lasting ways. As he points out, the reports coming from the underground are what kept hope alive among researchers and even fueled the current psychedelic renaissance (144), one in which researchers once again have been able, albeit on an extremely restricted basis, to offer such enhanced therapeutic sessions in the context of legal, legitimate research. Obviously, we need more such studies, especially those by Jungians firmly grounded in analytical techniques, in order to know precisely how such agents can be used in the context of facilitating the individuation process.

Implications, Objections, and Future Directions

In analyzing the issues associated with Jung's problematic stance toward ecstatic rites and their sacraments, I am not trying to debunk or demystify him, since his ideas represent some of the profoundest wisdom to emerge out of the twentieth century. Still, Jung was also a flawed human being like the rest of us, and, consequently, he was subject to the internalized values and biases that inform perception in all people. In response to the ecstatic rites he encountered, Jung exhibited the racial fears and prejudicial bias of his Swiss upbringing, one that made him not a rabid, bigoted racist by any means but surely a product of his age who parroted many of the institutionalized, racist anxieties of his fellow Europeans. He seems to have rationalized his anxiety, consciously attributing it to the possibility that he might be hit by a stray spear—a danger he also points out in the Terry Lectures (*Psychology and Religion* 20)—but rationalizations represent content that belies deeper energies. Sometimes a cigar is not just a cigar. His interpretation of the African American barber dream clearly illustrates, in part, his fear of turning into a black man with kinky hair, something that likely would have distressed most Europeans of his day. The other complicating element—his introverted fear of being swallowed up by collective consciousness, that is, mob psychology—is surely reasonable in one sense because he was a witness to some of the twentieth century's worst shadow eruptions.

Because of such cultural conditioning, Jung missed the healing potential of psychedelics used in ecstatic rites. The wisdom of ancient cultures speaks to the point. Amazonians who drink the powerful ayahuasca and Native Americans who eat the equally potent peyote buttons refer to those sacraments as “the healers,” while the Mazatec Indians of Mexico call psilocybe mushrooms “little helpers” (Pollan 43). Other cultures, according to Terence McKenna, refer to psychedelics as “little saints” and “food of the gods” (56). If the wisdom of indigenous people is any guide, then Jung would have done well to recognize the life-giving potentials of ingesting psychedelics in the appropriate environment. His trepidations, therefore, were not grounded in the wisdom of the ancients.

Still, Jung was a gifted psychological genius, and in other cultures he likely would have been lauded as a natural shaman, someone who knew instinctively how to sound the depths, summon the spirits, and heal himself and others upon a successful return. According to Harner, the first step in learning how to cultivate shamanic states of consciousness lies in visualizing oneself entering the underworld through a portal, whether a cave, doorway, hole in the ground, or some other. And this descent is precisely what Jung intuitively undertook without any guidance or training. When he found himself embroiled in a psychic

tumult as a result of his break from Freud, Jung eventually surrendered and let himself plunge into psyche:

I was sitting at my desk once more, thinking over my fears. Then I let myself drop. Suddenly it was as though the ground literally gave way beneath my feet, and I plunged down into the dark depths. I could not fend off a feeling of panic. But then abruptly, at not too great a depth, I landed on my feet in a soft, sticky mass. I felt relief, although I was apparently in complete darkness. After a while my eyes grew accustomed to the gloom, which was rather like a deep twilight. Before me was the entrance to a dark cave [. . .]
(MDR 179)

The bizarre imagery he reports in the rest of this account is quite similar, as he himself notes, to that found in hero and solar myths, and it also features the motif of death and renewal that appears so frequently in psychedelic experiences, shamanic states of consciousness, and the individuation process. Despite his intuitive understanding of how to travel psychological roads that others do not even know exist, Jung was a kind of reluctant shaman whose cultural conditioning prevented him from fully understanding his natural gifts. Had he engaged the shamanic tradition in a more direct, experiential manner, he might have been more open to ingesting psychedelics and trance-dancing around primeval fires to the stirring cadences of drums.

Jung's caution about psychedelics and the temporary psychosis they induce represents in many ways a healthy fear. The psychic instability he was plagued with starting in 1913 took him, as he himself claimed, his entire life to work through, and this agon also fueled his professional work in its entirety (MDR 212). He received a whopping dose of the unconscious, and it was enough for him. Generally healthy people who already have a permeable barrier between ego and the rest of the psyche might not need psychedelics, since they are already able to cross the boundary that LSD and other such agents enable one to traverse. According to Richards, Griffiths, and other current researchers, psychedelics also should be administered to psychotics with caution, since there is little research in such a population. Doing so, moreover, might be entirely unnecessary: psychotics are already engaged with the contents of the unconscious, and their challenge is not to get there but to return to ego consciousness in a way that enables the integration of energies experienced in the confrontation with the psychic other. Not without significant distress and turmoil, Jung successfully integrated the energies he engaged, but his Freud-crisis left him with a distrust of anything enabling a too-easy access to the unconscious, the result of which in latent and full-blown psychotics can be a crippling of ego and the inability to function in society. According to Harner, in most cultures shamans are not strange figures who retreat into the mountains every night where they eat mushrooms and then dance while howling at the moon but successful, contributing members of the societies in which they live (47). After the ecstasy, most shamans do the laundry and other mundane work like everyone else. Psychotics cannot "do the laundry," and for this reason it remains to be determined if they should be given psychedelics, which might prove far too destabilizing to someone who is already psychically destabilized. Given the healing potentials of these agents, however, it is also possible that psychotics could benefit from them in some way, perhaps through micro-dosing, a new trend popular among Silicon Valley techies and others. Further study is needed. Jung plunged into the same ocean that

sometimes drowns psychotics, but he successfully swam back to shore, and the transformation he experienced led to significant psychospiritual growth. But his fearful stance about that oceanic dive drives the truth to an extreme that overlooks viable therapeutic possibilities.

Of course, it will take a little more time for governments around the globe to loosen the misguided strictures on psychedelic use. This turn has already begun to happen, and the future for psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy is exceedingly bright, as Hill, Richards, Pollan, and so many others predict. But for any kind of radical transformation to occur in Analytical psychology, Jungians must see beyond the restricted thinking of C. G. Jung on the matter. It is entirely possible that in the future Jungian therapists might even offer ecstatic rites in which participants ingest a psychedelic and then trance-dance to hypnotic drums around a nighttime fire, entering the other psychic world and bringing back its wisdom for later integration during therapeutic sessions. The ecstatic rite and its accompanying psychedelic sacrament represent ancient archetypal activities, that, if engaged in successfully, can enable one to experience the numinous and to grow. We Jungians would do well to explore the subject more fully in ways that Jung himself would not.

Contributor

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