

# **Turn on, Tune in, and Trance out**

The Exploration of Entheogens and the Emergence of a Global  
Techno-shamanic Ritual

Christopher B. Larkin



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Lewis and Clark College

Professor Deborah Heath  
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## **Abstract**

This thesis is an attempt to display how the emergence of entheogenic substances in the Western paradigm has given rise to a global trance culture rooted in the practices of traditional shamanism. This is evaluated through the illustration of key points beginning with the early scientific explorations of entheogens and ending with what is known as the Goa trance ritual. Through participant observation in the trance ritual with and without the use of entheogenic substances, I propose that the trance-dance is an entirely new and unique redefinition of an ancient tribal ritual that holds great value for the future of anthropological and sociological studies on the nature of shamanism and entheogens.

## **Interlude**

As Bob Marley's sweet, softly spoken prophecies eloquently spilled out of the speakers, I began to sip away alongside my fellow psychonaut. The beverage, which was supposed to be "French vanilla" coffee, seemed to resemble the sweetness and consistency of melted ice cream rather than a coffee drink, but in the moment it was the perfect solution. Anything to make the 3.5 grams of dried psilocybin mushrooms tolerable or even enjoyable to ingest would do the trick. As the two of us sat in the candle-lit room eagerly awaiting our evening's storytelling session by the master teller of them all, things began to get weird.

The first thing I noticed was that my cognitive processes were not operating in their "normal" everyday fashion. Weird. When I looked at Jessi's face, I could only focus on it for a short period until it morphed into another face and yet another, as if I were flipping through a photo album in my mind that had physically manifested in the flesh before me. Some I recognized, others I did not. Very weird. What the hell was going on? I had eaten the mushroom a few times before, but this time something was different. Straying from the common feeling of "connectedness" in the bemushroomed state, I was experiencing the exact opposite in which I felt a disconnection between time, space, and physical matter. I was losing my mind, and I could feel it going.

Fear swept over me. Uh-oh, what if I have gone overboard this time? What if I don't make it back? There really is a rabbit hole!! Shit, where's Alice?!?!? She might be able to help... Ironically, everything I feared just served to catapult me further and further down into the abyss until I arrived at the gate of death. This was it, and whatever was going on, I just had to go with it. Trying to rationalize a logical explanation for the headspace I was in was beyond the scope of the earthly realm.

The state of sweet surrender set in as a mysterious energy gently unhooked my consciousness from its earth-bounded cognitive Kansas (McKenna 1992). As my cognitive ties to the earthly realm were dissolved one after the other, a point of light began to emerge. Yet, this was not like seeing a flashlight in the distance. Instead, this light was shimmering with all the five senses that had been so familiar in my everyday state. Throughout this marvelous experience, I had forgotten about the whole death thing. What a trivial thing to get hung up on when there's just so much going on. When my mind reeled back to this and the final umbilical cord was cut, I stumbled upon the realization that death is nothing more than a transition, just another point in the road. There is no grim reaper sitting there with blood dripping off his sickle, or some angelic dude waiting to see if you made the grade to get into his special kingdom. No, it's much simpler than that.

It's more like toll-booth Willy, performing a very simple job, asking a very simple question. Do you have what it takes, not on you, but in you, to cross over this line to the other side? The great thing about crossing this line is that you don't have to leave anything behind, well, except your body. It would be like trying to travel around the

world with your 4000 square-foot house attached to you, terribly inefficient and not so practical. Ditch the body; you don't need it right now.

As I kept peering into the light that was getting closer with every breath, I began to notice this peculiar sensation of the light actually peering into me, probing my mind with the same curiosity I projected upon it. It was as if some sort of contact was made with an entity I hadn't communicated with in a long time. I say "a long time" because it was also coupled with the feeling that we had met before many, many times, and will meet again. As we came closer to one another, I felt this sense that I was approaching another one of those transition zones. Without a wave of hesitation, I buckled up and got ready for whatever the universe was going to throw at me, or throw me off of. Besides, this light felt pretty nice and I was just too curious to stay still.

The final union formed a galactic light alloy which was to be my vehicle for a destination unknown. Like being attached to a bungee catapult, I braced myself for the cord to be released from the base which holds you down. Of course the pre-departure jitters crept up, but instead of getting hung on them, I took a deep breath and off I went, hurling through the cosmos like I was on the starship enterprise. The marvels of the universe that had previously been known to me only through textbooks, telescopes, and sci-fi movies were suddenly in full view, where description lacks words and the tools of conventional science could not even begin to explain the phenomena. The further I traveled through this realm, the notion of time as a linear progression began to curve, as past and future began to meld into one. Wow, what a simple process, just take that time line, bend it to bring the two points together, and voila! You have a circle. What was

really going on was an exiting of the realm of time and space and an entrance into timelessness.

Like in the scene of the movie Contact where Jodie Foster finally exits the wormhole, I too was delivered into the most tranquil, peaceful, and light state of being, all held together by the immense density of cosmic consciousness. The heart-beat pulsing through this realm drew me further and further in while the map of the galaxy continued to unroll. This entity has something to show me, something very important. So, I just chilled out and wandered around while everything came together. Suddenly, the splendor of the magical vision began to fade away and darkness fell upon me. When the last image finally faded from my field of perception, the ground underneath me vanished in a poof, and dialogue with the mushroom entity began.

The dialogue didn't operate in your average sit down for tea scenario; there was nothing sitting aside or in front of me. I was floating in the ocean of infinite darkness while the peculiar voice was speaking from within. After all, I *did* eat it. It was more like a peer-to-peer file sharing system, where we both were inside the mainframe of each other's neural pathways and had unrestricted access to anything our hearts desired. My first few moves in this dialogue were more in the form of statements than questions. "None of this is real. This is way too perfect to be real," I said. With a flash of light the entire universe, its inhabitants, and history appeared. I was not alone. I was simply participating in a cosmic darshan<sup>i</sup> that has been eternally in motion, with the mushroom being the host of generations since the beginning of time. This is how the mushroom liked to conduct conversation. Though a multidimensional weaving of language and information, it liked to speak in visionary tapestries. Quite efficient if you ask me.

While pondering this vision of the universal matrix, I couldn't help but notice that part of my ecstatic experience lay simply in the fact that I had somehow consciously synchronized my mind with the movement of the universe. If it was only for a brief period, it still was happening. Mushrooms or not, this aspect was as real as the earth spinning on its axis and the earth revolving around the sun. What I was seeing was not some sort of abstract tripped out vision, but instead the pure, unadulterated latticework of the Gaia mind that for so long was just a dismissed hope, or so I had thought. I laughed to myself about all those silly scientists thinking they can solve the mysteries of the universe by only peering through their telescopes into the cosmos when in actuality, the mystery seats itself in the universal matrix readily available anyone who wants to know.

As I observed, I saw friends, family, random people, and holy people cycling through, some seeing this for their first time, others just making the regular trip back home. I thought to myself, "If everyone on earth could see and experience this, if only for a split second, the world would be a much different and arguably more peaceful place. But to think that you could turn the whole world on to the mushroom was definitely unrealistic. This state is not for everybody. It's not that it's something to be kept secret, but the sheer fright of the reality that the mushroom shows one can be too much for some to handle.

"But you can," it replied. "You have been given a gift in the dark, all you need to do is unwrap it in the light, and you will find your answer to your question. "

As the transmission slowly began to subside, cognition's gravity gently began to attract me back to the earth like a feather effortlessly fluttering its way towards the ground. All I could think to my self was, "I made it and I'm not going back for a LONG

time!” My surroundings became more familiar as I re-entered my body. The flame of the candle drew my attention to it as I noticed Jessi out of the corner of my eye, fixated on it as well. In silence, our eyes focused on each other as a wave of divine confirmation washed over. It was the look of confirmation that we both went to the same place and saw the same vision.

### **Introduction**

This inspiring experience has served as the main catalyst for my thesis. The many questions it left led me into both the academic and experiential study of mind-altering substances and the cultures that use them. People around the world have used visionary plants for thousands of years and continue to do so today. Used within the contexts of healing, curing, sorcery, and shamanic purposes, the sacred plant chemicals have played important roles in ancient cultures and arguably our very own (Eliade 1964, Furst 1972, Dobkin de Rios 1972, Wasson 1978, Chagnon 1992). Unfortunately, knowledge and the use of these various substances to the western conscious was extremely limited up until the early 1940’s, with Dr. Albert Hoffman’s discovery of LSD playing a key role in sparking further interest in mind altering chemicals.

It is proposed that through the emergence of mind altering chemicals in the West, a new global culture and spiritual practice has formed through the use of psychedelics and a reintegration of those experiences into traditional shamanic practices. The global phenomena of psychedelic Goa-trance gatherings and in particular the Goa Gil Trance-dance ritual serve as the main focus of this new culture that emerged in the Southwest state of Goa, India. In short, the Goa-trance ritual is a modern-day version of the ancient,

shamanic tribal ritual used for spiritual healing, rejuvenation, and community building, or what DJ/founder Goa Gil calls his mission “redefining the ancient tribal ritual for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.” This particular ritual revolves around an intense period of dancing that lasts all night long and well into the following day, where participants rhythmically move to trance-inducing electronic dance music that is carefully selected by a DJ. Ingestion of hallucinogenic substances by the dancers, primarily LSD, while common, is not a rule. The point is to alter one’s consciousness and this can be achieved in many different ways.

While the concepts of using music, dancing, and hallucinogens to induce one into a state of trance is nothing new to the field of sociology and anthropology, the manner in which it is being implemented in or modern times through the Goa trance ritual is something new. The important element of technology that has changed the world has also rippled out into the realms of spiritual practice. The Goa trance ritual is a hybrid of ancient spiritual practices fused with the most cutting-edge technology of today, creating a physical atmosphere that has never been available to us before. It is within this medium that I am finding strong reason to believe that a new path of spiritual practice which involves long periods of trance-dancing is carving a niche in the global community. This in turn is providing a new outlet of spiritual expression that incorporates the fruits of the archaic as well as the futuristic technology that is truly unique and tailored to our times.

Being an inside participant in many trance gatherings over the past few years has given me a unique perspective in which to deliver information regarding the physical and mental aspects of trance dancing as well as the use of LSD and psilocybin within its settings. While my experiential advantages allow for potentially deeper insight into various aspects of the trance ritual and hallucinogen ingestion, it is the underlying

principles of the trance-dancing phenomena that show up time and time again into other cultures that are of prime importance. While technology plays a key role in the emergence of the Goa Trance Ritual, its foundation lies in time-tested shamanic practices that have been documented all around the world. Even though I have experienced various altered states of consciousness through rhythmic dancing, it is the fact that people all around the world for multiple thousands of years have been doing the same thing that adds to my convictions that something quite profound is happening through the hybridization of technology and traditional techniques of achieving transcendental states.

This notion of a resurgence surrounding the knowledge of hallucinogens, formation of the Goa trance ritual, and a new avenue of spiritual practice is neatly encapsulated in an evolutionary model proposed by Terence McKenna called the Archaic Revival. Terence, who just recently passed away in 2000, was by and large the main spokesperson for the psychedelic culture of today. Instead of using mass media and fanatical tactics like those of Dr. Timothy Leary to spread knowledge and awareness about psychoactive substances, Terence turned to the well established fields of philosophy, anthropology, physics, botany, and mycology to explain the presence and implications of the many psychoactive substances. By looking at these substances from a wide variety of angles, Terence has been able to present information on them in a manner that has the ability to speak to a wide audience. While Terence is not the only one who has taken this approach, his wisdom and ability to translate the psychedelic experience into an easily digestible package has put him on the forefront of academic discourse in the field of mind altering substances (McKenna 1991; 1992).

This thesis is an attempt to display evidence for McKenna's theory of the Archaic Revival by looking at the formation of the Goa Trance Ritual and the subsequent global trance culture that spawned from it. It also is argued that this Goa Trance Ritual is a modern version of ancient ritual practice that is rooted in shamanism. I have chosen to illustrate this phenomena by sewing together three major factors that I feel have helped play crucial roles in the development of this culture.

## **I. Archaic Revival and the re-introduction of psychedelics to the West**

What is being proposed in this work is that global civilization is going through a process of transformation which Terence McKenna calls the "Archaic Revival." While this revival embodies a multitude of different elements that support its presence, the revival and expansion of shamanism and its various techniques are of primary focus in this thesis. The stance that McKenna takes appears to be rooted in what is described in sociology and anthropology as neo-primitivism. This concept is based around the principles of bringing simple elements of the primitive life into our modern worldview. The neo-primitivist view is one that sees the natural world as a realm of ultimate freedom and that full immersion in this leads to a more balanced and harmonious social structure (Kassman:1997, Bozeman:1998). In essence, it is not a return *to* the primitive, but instead a return *of* the primitive or archaic which McKenna is pointing out.

As the inevitable chaostrophy approaches, people look for metaphors and answers. Every time a culture gets into trouble, it casts itself back into the past looking for the last sane moment it every knew....and the last sane moment *we* ever knew was on the plains of Africa, 15,000 years ago....Rocked in the cradle of the great-horned mushroom goddess, before history, before standing armies, before slavery, and property. Before

warfare, and phonetic alphabets, and monotheism, before, before, before....And this is where the future is taking us, because the secret faith of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is not modernism.... The secret faith of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is nostalgia for the Archaic. Nostalgia for the Paleolithic. And that gives us body piercing, abstract expressionism, surrealism, jazz, rock and roll, and catastrophe theory. The 20<sup>th</sup> century mind is nostalgic for the paradise that once existed on the mushroom dotted plains of Africa, where the plant-human symbiosis occurred that pulled us out of the animal body and into the tool-using, culture-making, imagination-exploring creature that we are.(McKenna-audio)

While it is noticeable that a shamanic resurgence is part of this archaic revival, I find it of interest to include what seems to be an important catalyst in the revival itself. In its simplest terms, it has come through the understanding by many that there are areas of consciousness that we have been unaware about in our past and that we are capable of studying them through the use of various mind-altering chemicals.

It is the entheogens that are of particular importance due to their strong relationship with spiritual practice and discourse. The term *entheogen* can be translated as “God generated within” and is used as a replacement for terms such as *hallucinogen* and *psychedelic* to describe psychoactive botanical substances and their psychoactive derivatives. While I may use the terms *psychedelic* or *hallucinogen* throughout this thesis, it is more for practical purposes. For instance, *psychedelic* rock music would be a much more familiar term to the average reader than would the term *entheogenic* rock music. I prefer to take the approach to dealing with mind altering substances from the entheogenic stance simply because it is the spiritual element of the experience that I wish to explore. While *hallucinogen* or *psychedelic* may be good terms for broad-based descriptive purposes, I don’t feel that they adequately address the matter at hand. I find the re-evaluated knowledge of

entheogenic chemicals to be a crucial key in unlocking the dimensions of the mind formerly deemed as “crazy.”

The list of plant botanicals, fungi, and chemicals that fall into the category of entheogens is quite extensive. Through my experience, I have found that part of what defines whether a certain compound is entheogenic or not has a lot to do with the person using it and their reaction to the particular compound’s effects. While LSD could be considered entheogenic for one person, another could indeed have a terrifying experience that has nothing to do with God. Since the list of known entheogens is quite extensive and in no way have I experienced them all, I will only make reference to the ones I have become familiar with through my own experience. The use of psilocybin and LSD within the contexts of the Goa Trance Ritual is where I’m mainly focused, but influences on my ideas have also come through experience with MDMA, (ecstasy) DMT,<sup>ii</sup> salvia divinorum,<sup>iii</sup> and marijuana.

Although shamanic practices, rituals, and medicines take on many different forms as well as geographical location, it is the reintroduction of the entheogenic compounds into the mainframe of the western psyche that is of particular interest. I am explicit when I say “reintroduction” because there is existing evidence showing that these compounds *have* been part of the “western diet” and hence the effects of chemically-induced alternative states of consciousness were acknowledged by society in a previous time. Unfortunately, much of the western consciousness has orientalized the use of plant substances to commune with the spirit world, placing its knowledge and benefits outside the scope of our rational, scientific framework of reality. In turn, a stigma of uncertainty and “otherness” has been placed upon cultures that still incorporate the use of

entheogens, who have often been looked upon as primitive and of a lesser order. It is my feeling that the emergence of entheogenic substances into the realms of Western science and medicine has helped break down these barriers of “otherness” and continues to do so (Said 1978).

The first truly groundbreaking milestone in regards to the West’s exploration of entheogens could be attributed to Dr. Albert Hofmann’s discovery of LSD-25 in 1943. The compound was actually made in 1938 but its psychoactive properties were not known at the time. Looking for a drug that would ease contractions in a woman’s uterus during childbirth, Hofmann discovered what some perceived as an antidote to the nuclear age (Leary 1965). The phenomenal effects and optimism generated by LSD quickly drew attention from clinical psychiatrists who studied the chemical and its potential therapeutic benefits. While many associate LSD with the counterculture of the 1960’s, few realized that LSD was at the cutting edge of academic psychiatry and psychology for a good while until its presence was made public knowledge.

While it may be easy for the scientifically driven Western mind to denounce entheogen use as something “other” or second rate to the practices of the modern world, Dr. Hofmann’s discovery brought the orientalized subject matter into the heart of Western civilization’s arena of rationality; the science laboratory. What is unique here is that nothing was brought from outside the lab, but instead the chemical discovery was synthesized inside of it. In other words, LSD was a creation that would not have been possible if it were not for the scientific knowledge of Dr. Hofmann and the technology that enabled him to create the compound. While there are compounds in nature that are structurally and psychoactively similar to what Dr. Hofmann synthesized, LSD was truly

in a class of its own. While extensive scientific research into this chemical was taking place, the exploration of indigenous cultures that were claimed to use entheogenic substances were explored as well.

Thanks to the work of ethnomycologist R. Gordon Wasson who extensively studied the role of the sacred mushroom in Mexican folklore, knowledge of the entheogenic properties of psilocybin-containing magic mushroom were brought to the attention of mainstream America and the rest of the world. Wasson was a freelance journalist, banker, and a high-ranked employee at the J.P. Morgan Company. Aside from this, Wasson and his wife had an avid interest in ethnomycology. Ethnomycology is the study of the role of mushrooms, in the broadest sense, in the past of the human race. This is also a branch of ethnobotany (Wasson 1978). Appearing in a May 1957 issue of Life magazine, Wasson's exploration of the Mexican mushroom rituals as well as testimony of its visionary qualities were made public, paving the grounds for what would arguably become one of the most important stepping stones in the development of the psychedelic culture as well as bolstering support for these studies among academic circles. As he describes his mushroom experience,

We were never more awake, and the visions came whether our eyes were opened or closed....They began with art motifs, angular such as might decorate carpets or textiles or wallpaper or the drawing board of an architect. They evolved into palaces with courts, arcades, gardens-resplendent palaces all laid over with semiprecious stones...Later it was as though the walls of our house had dissolved, and my spirit had flown forth, and I was suspended in mid-air viewing landscapes of mountains, with camel caravans advancing slowly across the slopes, the mountains rising tier above tier to the very heavens....The thought crossed my mind: could the divine mushrooms be the secret that lay behind the ancient Mysteries? Could the miraculous mobility that I was now enjoying be the explanation for the flying witches that played so important a part in the folklore and fairy tales of northern Europe? These reflections passed through my mind at the very time that I was seeing visions, for the effect

of the mushrooms is to bring about a fission of the spirit, a split in the person, a kind of schizophrenia, with the rational side continuing to reason and to observe the sensations that the other side is enjoying. The mind is attached as by an elastic cord to the vagrant senses (Lee 1992:72).

Wasson later sent specimens of the psychoactive mushroom to Dr. Hofmann where he isolated psilocybin as the active component of the mushroom that gave it its visionary qualities. While LSD may have taken over in the 60's as the psychedelic substance of choice, the visions which gave rise to the movement were rooted in the psilocybin-containing mushroom. (Powell)

Before subcultures began to form around the use of psychedelic substances, heavy research was under way to map out the therapeutic benefits, if any, of these newly discovered tools.<sup>iv</sup> Coincident or not, it was an encounter with the mushroom while vacationing in Mexico that propelled Dr. Timothy Leary of Harvard University to organize and embark on a deep research of psychedelics, firstly psilocybin and later more heavily with LSD. Later to be coined the “high priest of LSD,” Leary along with fellow colleagues, poets, musicians, hipsters, and freaks spread the mantra of “turn on, tune in, and drop out.”

### **Evidence of Eleusis**

There is strong evidence showing that western civilization has not only known about, but has participated in the use of entheogenic visionary ceremonies in the peak of classical Greek civilization (Wasson 1978, Riedlinger 1990, McKenna 1991, Forte 1997). Through time, information and inherent knowledge regarding these sacred rites have been lost or forgotten and are now making their return.

In honor of Demeter and her daughter Persephone, the sacred ritual that took place in the temple of Eleusis has remained truly a mystery ever since its commencement, approximately 4,000 years ago (Wasson 1978:10). This sacred ritual was open to all members of Greek civilization, assuming you were not involved with any murderous crimes. The ritual took place once a year in the month of September, with the final vision in the *telesterion* being upheld as the vision of a lifetime. The telesterion was the actual sanctuary where the visionary ceremony took place, which was heavily guarded and off limits when ceremonies were not happening. What was actually seen has been described as ineffable, or without words. Beyond that, the ritual actions that took place at Eleusis were to be kept secret and not to be talked about amongst civilians, whose crime was punishable by death. This factor did not seem to scare people or take away from the experience's importance, but instead added to the validity and protection of the sacred vision. As Pindar commented,

*Blessed is he who, having seen these rites,  
Undertakes the way beneath the Earth.  
He who knows the end of life,  
As well as it's divinely granted beginning. (Forte: 1997, 33)*

The works of Plato, Pindar, Cicero, and Sophocles, among many others, all attest to a marvelous vision seen within the telesterion. What this vision consisted of and how it was created remained a mystery to those outside of Greek civilization not only during the time period of the ritual, but after its demise in the 4<sup>th</sup> century of our time as well. Stamped out by impeding Christian sects, the mysteries of Eleusis went unsolved for yet another 2000 years until the case was reinvestigated.

In the book *The Road to Eleusis: Unveiling the Secrets of the Mysteries* (Wasson et. al, 1978) Wasson, Hofmann, and Ruck suggest that the central core to the Eleusinian Mysteries involved the ingestion of an entheogenic beverage, called the *kykeon*, which was most likely derived from the vision inducing fungus of ergot that was growing on a common grass in Greece (Riedlinger, 1990). If this is indeed the case, a very interesting twist is put on the evolution of Western history. What these findings seem to point to is nothing less than the inspirational source of some of the greatest philosophers in the West. While it is possible that Western civilization as we know it may be a derivative of divine vision experienced by the Greeks, the absence of an actual rite that serves as a core experience of conscious social and mystical solidarity is definitely missing from our picture. The only established practice that could come close would be the legal and sacramental use of the mescaline-containing peyote cactus in the Native American Church (Clark 1969).

It is no coincidence that the initiation rites that took place at Eleusis were coined as “mysteries,” and this term seem quite appropriate given the circumstances involving the ritual. The initiation rite was offered to all members of Greek civilization, but its adherents were required to follow strict guidelines such as not being allowed to talk about what goes on inside the temple and only being able to make the journey once in a lifetime. The strict rules that surround the Mysteries seem to be present for protection rather than control of the people. It is my impression that there was some sort of feedback loop with the mysteries where the experience served as an inspiration for virtuous social development, and this virtuous development in return led one to the experience the mystery at Eleusis. This practice of shrouding mystical insight with

secrecy or disguise is nothing new. While punishment by death may seem like a drastic measure, it was the protection of the rites for future generations of Greek civilization that was of prime importance. If the most acclaimed experience of one's life involves keeping quiet about what goes on within the sanctuary in order to protect its heritage, it surely seems like a small price to pay for such an awe-inspiring reward.

## **II: The psychedelic revolution of the 1960's**

While Wasson's groundbreaking article about the mushroom brought a greater awareness of entheogens to the American public, I propose that it was Dr. Timothy Leary and his team at Harvard who took things to an even larger scale. Tim Leary turned on, not to LSD but to the mushroom, after an interest sparked by Wasson's article. Experiencing the psilocybin-containing mushroom for the first time while on vacation in Mexico in 1960, he remarked, "it was above all and without question the deepest religious experience of my life, I discovered that beauty, revelation, sensuality, the cellular history of the past, God, the Devil-all lie inside my body, outside my mind"(Lee 1992:73). Leary soon returned to the US and began the Harvard Psilocybin Project at Harvard University. Ran Dass, formerly Richard Alpert PhD, joined Leary shortly after that, embarking on what seems to be the reinvestigation of the nature of mystical consciousness brought on through the ingestion of entheogens and its place in society.

Of the many interesting findings that came about with the experimentation of psilocybin, it was the mystical qualities of the experience which were of particular interest in investigating. The visions and emotions that were evoked through the

ingestion of psilocybin ran parallel, if not identically with many of the mystical writings of the past, both Eastern and Western. In my experience, instead of being able to attribute these experiences to any particular religious denomination, it almost seems as if psilocybin has the ability to take the individual beyond the organized structures of religion to the very heart of existence that gave rise to religion in the first place. While scientific academia was interested in these newly discovered mind expanding chemicals, bringing religion and spirituality into the picture was still somewhat taboo. Nonetheless, Leary and team pushed forward to test the relationship of psilocybin and mystical insight by performing a groundbreaking scientific study at Boston University in 1962.

The Good Friday experiment, or “The Miracle at Marsh Chapel” was an attempt by Dr. Leary and his assistant Walter Pahnke, who was working on his doctorate for Harvard, to determine whether the transcendence experiences reported by those under the influence of psilocybin were in accordance with the many Holy Scriptures and mystical writings of past saints, prophets and sages. The experiment took place during a Good Friday service where psilocybin was given to ten theology students and professors and the other ten received placebos of nicotinic acid. The placebo, used to make the participants feel like they got the real thing, produced a tingling sensation on the individual’s skin but no psychological effects. This was also a “double blind” experiment, where neither the participants nor the administrators knew who was getting what. What resulted from this was quite profound; nine out of the ten people who were administered psilocybin reported to have an intense religious experience, while only one from the control group (those who received placebos) could make this claim (Clark 1969, Lee 1992, Smith 2000).

Pahnke concluded that the experiences reported by those who were administered the psilocybin pill were “indistinguishable from, if not identical” (Lee 1992:76) with the classical mystical experience. Although it may be easy to deduce from this experiment that psilocybin can cause a mystical experience, I prefer to take a more cautionary approach and use Huston Smith’s presumption that they can “occasion” a mystical experience. In this manner, he is saying that it is possible that a mystical experience can occur, or be “occasioned” while steering clear of a direct causal link, for it is also evident that there are individuals who experience the polar opposite of what could be described as a classical mystical experience (Smith 2000). Just because a correlation is found does not necessarily mean that there is any causation implied.

With the psychedelic revolution looming on the horizon, it was small scale happenings like the Good Friday experiment which further bolstered the footings for a large scale movement. As the wave built up, more and more influential people began turning on to the beneficial qualities of entheogens. Beat poet Allen Ginsburg, who had previous experiments with ayahuasca as well as being one of the CIA’s LSD guinea pigs, experienced psilocybin for the first time with Dr. Leary in December of 1960. His reaction was nothing less than profound, as he proclaimed that, “we’re going to teach people to stop hating....Start a peace and love movement!”(Lee 1992:77) How this movement was going to unfold was another story.

While initial studies were more or less confined to academic work, over time the psychedelic sessions began to trickle out of the school setting and into the lives of anyone who was willing to make the voyage. Respectable scholars such as Aldous Huxley felt that these valuable substances should be kept within the circles of formal academia,

religious institutions, and influential people in order to make the best use of them for the general whole. On the flipside, Leary and Ginsburg felt that these experiences should be available to all and instead of controlling information to select groups of people, it should be made widely public and readily available.

Even though psilocybin helped catalyze this new movement that Leary and Ginsburg spoke of, it wasn't until the introduction of LSD on a large scale that it would become implemented. While Leary felt that if you've tried one psychedelic, you've tried them all, he was knocked down once again when he was first given LSD.

It came sudden and irresistible. An endless deep swamp marsh of some other planet teeming and steaming with energy and life, and in the swamp an enormous tree whose branches were foliated out miles high and miles wide. And then this tree, like a cosmic vacuum cleaner, went ssssuuck, and every cell in my body was swept into the root, twigs, branches, and leaves of the tree. Tumbling and spinning, down the soft fibrous avenues to some central point which was just light. Just light, but not just light. It was the center of Life. A burning, dazzling, throbbing, radiant core, pure pulsing, exulting light. An endless flame that contained everything-sound, touch, cell, seed, sense, soul, sleep, glory, glorifying, God, the hard eye of God. Merged with this pulsing flame, it was possible to look out and see and participate in the entire cosmic drama (Lee 1992:84).

Aside from the boundary dissolving effects of LSD, its physical makeup made it a prime substance for the mass movement due to its potency to weight ratio. The potency to weight ratio of LSD compared to that of psilocybin is quite remarkable. While one gram of psilocybin is efficient to produce approximately 40 individual doses, the same amount of LSD is capable providing around 10,000 doses. LSD's microscopic size, lack of color, and lack of odor made it very easy to transport as well as produce in mass quantities.

With psilocybin use waning and LSD consumption and manufacturing on the rise, groups began to form in order to chart the new territories that the LSD

experience unleashed. The research projects at Harvard ran smoothly until they began to draw a lot of attention with rumors of Leary administering LSD to anyone who wanted it as well as extravagant LSD orgies. Rumors along these lines obviously did not go over well with the administration, eventually leading to the expulsion of Dr. Leary and eventually Dr. Alpert from the University in 1963. Even though the Harvard administration used Leary's failure to keep classroom appointments as grounds for dismissal, it was clearly the work he was doing with psychedelics that shook the boat (Clark 1969).

Shortly after Dr. Leary and Alpert's expulsion from Harvard, a commune was organized on a large estate in Millbrook, New York. This was *the* hotspot of the east coast psychedelic counterculture, attracting people from all walks of life. It was a big step away from the clinical settings of former experiments to an environment where individuals could experience LSD in a more down to earth, natural setting.

Ken Keasey and the Merry Pranksters, who were also getting quite the following in California, also were pursuing a similar agenda. There is a stark difference though in the influences behind Keasey's organization and Leary's. While Dr. Leary and many of the inhabitants at Millbrook were behavioral psychologists, students, etc., Keasey was another one of the guinea pigs who was experimented on by the CIA and consequently turned on to LSD. Instead of focusing inwardly on spiritual development in the path of Leary and Alpert, Keasey and the pranksters took the magical world of LSD from the inside and spewed it out to the public in any sort of radical and freaky way possible.

If Leary's actions can be looked at as an academic revolt on the establishment, Keasey's would be the complimentary popular revolution. It was an effort to give "the man" a dose of his own medicine, in a sense. It was the people's turn to take the inhumane drug testing being conducted by the government and throw it back at them. Fortunately, the government unknowingly gave them the key, the LSD experience, to do so. As Allen Ginsburg quipped, how ironic "that the very technology stereotyping our consciousness and desensitizing our perceptions should throw up its own antidote....Given such historic Comedy, who should emerge from Harvard University but the one and only Dr. Leary, a respectable human being, a worldly man faced with task of a Messiah"(Lee 1992:78-9).

Out of the practically infinite settings where LSD could be taken, gatherings where music and dancing were also present proved to be a very powerful meeting ground for many like-minded people. From small scale gatherings such as the Merry Prankster's Acid Tests, whose host band was the Grateful Dead, to mass scale events like the '66 Trips Festival, SF Human Be-in, and Woodstock, these events seemed to act as a breeding ground for the forces that would converge in the Indian state of Goa almost 20 years later. Some foreshadowing of this lies in the productions of The Family Dog, who were a collective responsible for many of the rock concerts in the SF bay area. While there were many concert promoters and organizers around, I see the work of the Family Dog as playing a key event in the development and emergence of what is known today as the Goa Trance ritual.

The Family Dog was dedicated to putting on rock shows where people were encouraged to dance, which was a rather novel proposition at the time. Their first Rock-Dance happened in October of 1965 and was hailed as a huge success. While I was not even born at the time of this happening, its following description resonates beautifully with the energy and raw emotion present at a Goa Trance party in this day and age.

Thoroughly stoned on grass and acid and each other, they rediscovered the crushing joy of the dance, pouring it all out in a frenzy that frequently bordered on the religious. When rock music was performed with all its potential fury, a special kind of delirium took hold. Attending such performances amounted to a total assault on the senses: the electric sound washed in visceral waves over the dancers, unleashing intense psychic energies and driving the audience further and further toward public trance. Flashing strobes, light shows, body paint, outrageous getups-it was a mass environmental theater, oblivion of limbs and mind in motion. For a brief moment outside of time these young people lived out the implications of Andre Breton's surrealist invocation: "Beauty will be CONVULSIVE or will not be at all (Lee 1992:142).

It was only a matter of time before the rest of the nation and then the world would catch wind of the revolution. The Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco became the world's first psychedelic mecca, attracting tens of thousands of dropouts, musicians, mystics, activists, etc. who were all tuning into the utopian bliss simmering in the streets. With all the publicity, the good vibes began to take a detour and the tour busses began to roll in so people could observe all the hippies. Aside from the mass influx of people coming to check the scene out, the subsequent outlawing of LSD in 1966 created a rift in the experience which put a potentially paranoid twist on one's trip. What was once a legal act of freely exploring one's consciousness that carried no political baggage became a crime overnight.

The mass media and profiteers trying to make a quick buck off the youth eventually drove out many members of the core community who helped establish grounds for the scene to flourish. The peace and love vibe amplified by LSD became dissipated with the growing presence of other substances such as speed, cocaine, and heroin, effectively splintering the community in many directions. One of the interesting conditions that seemed to also emerge was the sociological grouping of so-called hippies into “heads” and “freaks,” with heads taking the positive connotation and freaks holding the negative. “Heads” were generally associated as those who used drugs (primarily LSD and marijuana) in a responsible manner for personal, communal, and spiritual awareness as well as taking a vested interest in their community and the global environment. On contrast, “freaks” were generally those who were simply dropouts looking for a good high and the drug of choice tended to be whatever the person could get a hold of. While getting high was a part of a head’s life, it was not the center of his or her existence (Davis 1968).

Nonetheless, the rift in the Haight community eventually sent both heads and freaks onwards, but not always upwards to greener pastures. While the community was fragmented in many ways, the drive to somehow live out as well as expand upon the newly discovered lifestyle pushed people into all corners of the globe. Of the many seeds planted in the hearts of the LSD revolutionaries, it is the particular seed that was taken overseas from the heart of San Francisco to the beach of Anjuna in the state of Goa, India that is the focus of the next installment in my account of the revival of shamanism and the formation of a techno-shamanic ritual.

### **III. Formation of a techno-shamanic hybrid in Goa, India**

The spiritual dimensions evoked during the LSD boom naturally sent seekers to far off lands enriched with spiritual history. Bypassing the Western realm of spirituality, many dove into the heady planes of spiritual teachings found in the Far-East, with India being a cornerstone. While people were traveling throughout India and other countries in SE Asia, Goa emerged as a popular location where travelers met up in reunion-like fashion every year around the Christmas/new years time to hang out, reconnect, and swap travel stories. Goa, which used to be a Portuguese colony up until 1961, lies on the SW tip of the Indian subcontinent. Due to its nice weather, laid back lifestyle, and subtle European influences, Goa became the ideal spot for the hippie visionary dream to unfold. A fitting explanation for why India was such a spiritually suiting place for the foreigners lies in the fact that the country still had quite a collective consciousness, which made the presence of the gods and deities come alive and was a very integrated part of the Indian society as a whole. “Because the spiritual contexts were already there, people were opening up in a very big way” (Rood 2002).

Although this time, there was a striking difference in the group make-up compared to that back in the USA. No longer were the hippies culture-bound and weighing heavily on one nationality. Instead they took on the image of a truly international community who came together on similar philosophic and spiritual values. The whole LSD/hippie/rock&roll stigma that emerged from the America media had been ripped out of its context and eventually spread around the world. What was once a

localized culture in America and bits of Europe transformed itself from isolated subculture to global super-culture in a matter of years.

If San Francisco was the location where the hippie philosophy was conceived, then the location of its gestation is in Goa and its fruits are represented in the psychedelic trance parties which now can be found practically anywhere in the world. As one of the original western inhabitants explains the funnel of people coming into Goa, “They all kind of re-gathered there, a bunch of people, and took over these villages where the people were very, very, poor and the houses were crumbling. We fixed up the houses, rented the houses from them, and made our own kind of lifestyle there which was the best of the east and the west. It was the best of the east because of the simple village life and the best of the west because of our ideas, our art, and our music” (Goa Gil 1995).

At first, the parties seemed to resemble those found back home in the States: people hanging out around bonfires and dancing to the music of the Stones, Pink Floyd, Santana, Hendrix, etc. while taking part in the copious amounts of acid and hashish available. Even though there was an endless list of excuses for a good party, the full moon was always a festive occasion and in turn set the stage for what later would become a focal point in the trance parties.

It must be noted that while many were attracted to Goa for its simple, cheap, and carefree lifestyle, there was also the allure of Goa being a place where drugs of all sorts were readily available at very cheap prices. Once again, we are back to the scenario of the “heads” and “freaks.” While my impression of Goa back in the early days is one of calmness where people could finally live out their paths uninterrupted, I have the feeling

that once word got out, the freaks began to trickle in, leading Goa for a similar scenario in resonance with the Haight scene in SF.

While I'm mainly paying close attention to the positive spiritual aspects of the global hippie community in Goa, it's important to point out its dark side, for it's not all flower-flying peace and love. Many of the travelers who wound up in Goa found the lifestyle that they truly loved, but also needed a way to support it. Since this was the generation that rejected the 9-5 job, drug smuggling seemed to be an easy and very profitable business for many. Hashish and heroin were easily available at dirt cheap prices which fetched extraordinary sums in Europe and North America. In the book Goa Freaks: My Hippy Years in India, ex-smuggler and anthropologist Cleo Odzer describes in harrowing detail her life as a Goa freak whose indulgences led her to heroin addiction and smuggling, eventually winding her up in rehab. A truly free lifestyle comes with great responsibility and Cleo's testimony is an example of how things can turn sour when this responsibility is not upheld.

The central person in the development of the Goa full moon trance parties is DJ Goa Gil, who was also a collaborator with the Family Dog's rock and roll dance concerts. Gil, who had been a musician all his life, traveled to India on a one-way ticket in 1969 when things began to get too hot and heavy to handle back in San Francisco. Eventually becoming initiated to the holy order of Hindu Sadhus,<sup>v</sup> Gil spent a lot of time practicing yoga and meditation as well as playing music, dj-ing, and hosting gatherings in fulfillment of his spiritual mission. When he felt the music in the scene was becoming old or worn out in the early 80's, he turned to some of the New-Wave electronic body music and Industrial sounds for inspiration.

While this was at first not well received by those who had been perfectly satisfied with the Doors or Credence Clearwater Revival, Gil saw something truly electrifying and fresh in it. Tracks were compiled, cut up, and spliced back together in order to make continuously playing party “mega-mixes.” It did not take too long for others to realize that this party format was something new. It consequently inspired participants to make music once back in their home countries which fit the style of party in Goa. Whereas music for the beach parties in the past was comprised of mainly bands playing amplified instruments, Goa went fully electronic by the early 1990’s.

While there are sequential stepping stones in the emergence of the Goa Trance party, it was also the fusion of different elements of East and West which made it possible. Gil, “Having been a musician all his life and then doing intense Yogic practices with Gurus in the Himalayas he tried to unite the two, (Music and Yoga), into One Spirit befitting this Age. The result was the Goa Full Moon parties, and his concept of "Redefining the Ancient Tribal Ritual for the 21st Century". At the ripe age of 51, his focus is in trying to use the party situation as a medium to uplift the consciousness of the participants through the Trance Dance Experience” (Goa Gil). I am using Gil’s “redefining the ancient tribal ritual for the 21<sup>st</sup> century” in providing evidence of a shamanic re-awakening within McKenna’s theory on the Archaic Revival.

The notion that this is not just a *rendition* but is instead a *redefinition* of ancient tribal ritual leaves me to believe that the Goa trance party is truly at the cutting edge of a modern, here and now, path of spiritual development and growth. What makes this truly unique and separates it from more “traditional” spiritual exercises is the mandatory element that technology plays. But instead of displacing the ancient ritual, the

technology helps to complement it. If a Goa trance party were completely stripped of all modern technology, it would be not much more than a gathering of people, a bonfire, and some acoustic musical instruments, which is the exact foundation that Gil seems to be using for the party. As he says, “Since the beginning of time mankind has used music and dance to commune with the Spirit of Nature and the Spirit of the Universe... We are trying to use Trance Music and the Trance Dance Experience to set off a chain reaction in Consciousness... Through the Trance Dance Experience hopefully people will become more sensitive and aware of themselves, their surroundings, the crossroads of humanity, and the needs of the planet... With this Awareness comes Understanding and Compassion... THAT is the need of the hour, and the true Goa State of Mind !!!”(Goa Gil)

So in effect, Gil is taking an ancient concept and reshaping it in order to fit it into a context which speaks to the people of this day. Youth, a musician and artist for trance-based Dragonfly Records also points to this notion of redefinition and reinterpretation of ancient cultural ideas and practices, saying, “to have them re-awakened in yourself and then reinterpreted by yourself and integrated into your contemporary world..... is a way forward for society” (Rood 2002).

### **The Goa Trance Party: its set and setting**

The description of the Goa trance party is based on my first-hand participant experience over the past three years. Instead of being localized in one setting, I have drawn views from experiencing the long-running trance parties held on the islands of Koh Phangan<sup>vi</sup> and Koh Phayam as well as parties held in and outside of San Francisco CA, Eugene and Portland Oregon, and Washington state. While every party has been

different, there are commonalities that arise amongst all of them. The description of these parties is presented in more of an “archetype” fashion than a recipe. While I have never experienced a trance party in Goa, my interest in them eventually led me to the source of the matter where I have been able to experience two parties, or rituals, facilitated by the avatar of psychedelic Goa trance himself, providing the framework of my participant activity. The fact that Goa Gil is not only a DJ but a recognized holy man and guru in the Juna Akhara order of Sadhus adds to the validity of the genuine spiritual roots of the Goa Trance ritual (McAteer 2002).

If sitting meditation can be related with calm and quiet surroundings and stillness, the dancing meditation environment of a trance party is its complete opposite, or so it may seem from the outside. Instead of a tranquil environment, the trance party is a complete sonic bombardment of all the senses, what almost appears as ordered chaos, or uncontrollably disordered to the naive onlooker. But like its quiet counterpart, the facets of inward reflection and spiritual communion resonate similarly with one another.

The process of the dance that Gil conducts are modeled after ancient sadhu initiation rites that were passed down to him through his guru. My experience in the trance-dance has mirrored many aspects of classical death/rebirth scenarios found in ancient mystical traditions as well as evoking a mirror reflection of the LSD trip (Eliade 1964, Furst 1972, Grof 1980). While the music begins in minimal and loose manner, throughout the night it builds and intensifies until the energy of the driving dance music is almost apocalyptic. One participant commented, “If you stand in the center of the dance floor at around 2:30-3 a.m. during a good psy-trance party, it almost feels like the world is ending” (SBI<sup>viii</sup>: 25). This is thought to facilitate the death of the ego, which

“seems to entail an instantaneous and merciless destruction of all the previous reference points in the life of the individual,” or what Stanislav Grof MD calls “hitting the cosmic bottom”(Grof 1980:85).

The timing of this sequence in the party tends to hit right before dawn, before the sun begins to rise. Along with this “ego death” comes rebirth where the dark void is filled with the light of the rising sun. With this comes a change in the atmosphere; a sense of deep love and solidarity erupt into infinity while the music takes a turn and lightens up as well. As the dancers move from darkness into light, there is an unspoken cry of “we made it!!” referring to the individuals excursions into the depths of their own minds and making it back in one piece.

The music that is played is truly unique to its setting but some generalizations can be drawn for descriptive purposes. Since LSD is the main substance of choice at trance parties, the creators of the music take this into account by using sounds, samples, and various frequencies that are complementary to the experience of LSD. In the same way the lava lamp or black-light poster is pleasurable to look at while under the influence, the music present at a trance party is purposely forged to be listened to in its optimum state while under the influence of LSD in the setting of a trance-dance floor. The speed of the music is a steady 4/4 beat which is played between 140-150 beats per minute (BPM) depending on the stage of the dance. Starting out on the slower side in the beginning of the dance, the BPM is slowly raised as the night progresses. Following the ego death/rebirth model, the music reached its peak intensity and then slows down a bit, softening as the sun begins to rise. Gil’s aim is to use this dance music and the party situation “as a vehicle of Transmission, and to uplift the Consciousness of the participants through the

Trance Dance Experience” (Goa Gil 2001). Another suiting description of this is by thinking of music as a carrier wave that modulates spiritual intent in the same way that FM radio acts as a carrier wave whose sound is projected through the modulation of the particular frequency, i.e. you radio station dial (Rood 2002).

One of the rather interesting things is how the musical partnership with the ego death/rebirth scenario playing out on the beaches of Goa is practically identical with many writings of Stanislav Grof MD, who is widely recognized as one of the pioneers of clinical LSD research and its use for psychotherapy. Grof writes;

Since music is such an important and integral part of LSD psychotherapy, we will briefly discuss its role, the basic principles of selecting appropriate pieces, and the specific way in which these are used in the sessions. Music seems to serve several important functions in the context of psychedelic therapy. It tends to evoke a variety of powerful emotions and facilitates a deeper involvement in the psychedelic process. It provides a meaningful structure for the experience and creates a continuous carrier wave that helps patients to overcome difficult parts of the sessions and move through impasses. LSD subjects frequently report that the flow of music helps them to let go of their psychological defenses and surrender fully to the experience. Another function of music is to provide a sense of continuity and connection in the course of various unusual states of consciousness. It is quite common that clients have difficulties with the periods when the music stops and the records or tapes are being changed; they complain that they feel suspended in midair, and sense a painful gap in experience. An additional function of the music deals more specifically with it’s content; it is often plausible facilitate the emergence of a certain emotional quality such as aggression, sexual feelings, “psychedelic breakthrough,” or a transcendental experience, by a specific choice of music(Grof 1980:153).

From my participant observation, the description of music’s role in the clinical LSD setting is mirrored identically in the procession of the trance ritual. One of Gil’s roles as techno-shaman is to act as a musical guide by selecting certain pieces of music that serve to direct the collective body into the psychedelic breakthrough, or to the annihilation of the ego that Grof mentions.

In essence, what seems to be the case regarding the trance parties that evolved in Goa is an autonomous, self-generated form of LSD psychotherapy, where the participants are their own doctors so to speak. Independent of any formal structure, The Goa trance party naturally evolved on its own and whose elements show an uncanny resemblance to the LSD therapy sessions arranged by Western medical doctors. My theory on this is that through the relatively uncontrolled use of LSD such as in Goa, conscious social groups formed around the collective revelations which were transmitted to individuals through the experience. This in turn leads to systematic analysis of the effects of the altered state and in turn directs the social as well as individual organism into creating structures that maximize the positive benefits of the experience. This in many ways is a normal function of trial and error common to all human beings.

The atmosphere of a trance party could be described as a temporary autonomous zone that focuses both on celebration as well as internal reflection. Steering away from centralized structure of ritual where dogmatic actions are present, the experience derived from a trance ritual relies heavily on what the participant brings to the event. In this case, it is each individual sharing his/her contributions with the whole group that generates what McAteer (2002) calls the collective effervescence. This sort of social action leads to every party having its own feel instead of having the same old thing, time and time again. Colorful works of art in the forms of batik tapestries, paintings, and geometric string designs are coupled with imagery that occurs in the natural world such as green plants, flowers, and crystals. All of this serves to infuse the space with a sense of sacredness and balance which further serves to provide a safe, positive atmosphere for the dancer and ultimately the group to make the exit and reentry phase as smooth and uplifting as

possible. Images more often than not tend to take on spiritual motifs and/or geometric designs reflecting already existing patterns in nature while steering clear of any sort of religious dogma.

The general vibe amongst the group could be summed up as “anything goes” but always with the intent of positively contributing to the experience of the group. While this is found in trance parties, it is also important to make note that this seems to prevail in other forms of modern all-night dancing, such as raves. One of the things that originally sparked my interest was the atmosphere generated by all sorts of different people festively coming together for a common cause. It felt like Halloween was happening every Saturday night instead of once a year. Upon returning from a 3 day long trance party in Greece, one participant commented, “Nobody cares who you are there, what you look like, or where you’re from. At a psy-party, you can be anybody. You can be Shiva” (SBI:25). Instead of a costume being looked at as a cover-up for what’s underneath, costumes for these types of parties serve as a further external expression of the individual’s inner world. In effect, what happens is that masses of people congeal together from all different walks of life with different backgrounds and stories and converge onto the dance floor where all the temporary differences are shed and the similarities amongst them are brought to light. In its simplest form, all the participants are just being themselves together.

Trance parties are preferably held in natural settings, although due to weather circumstances in many areas of the world, indoor ones are held as well. Indoor parties tend to be more difficult due to the constraints of being within four walls and a ceiling. Being in nature provides an added uniqueness to the atmosphere as well as bringing

attention to much of the natural phenomena that cannot be recreated or skirted around in an enclosed space. This is not to say that one setting works better than another, they simply operate on different mediums.

In the setting of a trance party, the divisions lines between performer and participant are blurred. Instead of having the DJ or live music as the centralized point of attention, he or she takes the back seat and simply is the music programmer for the journey. In the case of DJ Goa Gil, this musical journey is conducted over a time span of 18 to 24 hours where he is the sole selector of music. Good DJ's do acquire a following and can be glorified in some respects. Since the DJ is not really looked upon as an external factor but instead an integral part of the communal dance, his or her prestige is diverted from the common "rock star" status and tends to be judged on the overall experience evoked on the dance floor in conjunction with the DJ's musical presence. For me personally, trance DJ's fall into roughly two categories; those that can put me in a trance and those who cannot. This in no way discredits those DJ's who do not get me into a state of trance, for they could do wonders for others. This is true for its opposite as well. I have yet to find a "one size fits all" DJ.

To metaphorically compare the trance-dance with theater, the dance floor becomes the stage in which the story unfolds through the active participation of individuals dancing while the DJ is somewhat like the light and sound man sitting in the back of the room. Victor Turner's notion of ritual being not simply a set of rules but the actual performance that erupts out of their practice seems to go hand in hand with what happens on the dance floor (Turner 1982). The relationship between the DJ and dancer

could be one of symbiosis, where both feed off of one another; the DJ reacting to the movement of the group as well as the group reacting to the music.

### **Entheogens, Shamanism, and psychedelic trance music.**

While Gil may be regarded as a shaman amongst the trance community, the nature of the rituals he conducts also serve as an experimenting grounds for those interested in self-exploration with the use of entheogens. This newly discovered exploration in altered states of consciousness found within the contexts of the trance-dance experience naturally leads into the study of shamanism. Shamanism, as defined by Mircea Eliade is simply summed up as Shamanism= technique of ecstasy (Eliade1964:4).

As Terence McKenna also puts it,

Shamanism is the use of the archaic techniques of ecstasy that were developed independent of any religious philosophy-the empirically validated, experientially operable techniques that produce ecstasy. Ecstasy is the contemplation of wholeness. That's why when you experience ecstasy-when you contemplate wholeness-you come down remade in terms of the political and social arena because you have seen the larger picture (McKenna 1991:13).

Despite vegetative, cultural, and geographical differences around the world, the shamanic backbone stays surprisingly in tact where one can trace commonalities between practically all forms of shamanism. Common themes of shamanism that are apparent in many traditions include but are not necessarily limited to soul flight, association and communication with animal spirits, repetitive and rhythmic music, various exercises(such as dancing, singing, and chanting) that induce trance, sleep deprivation, and the ingestion

of various hallucinogenic plant botanicals and fungi (Dobkin de Rios, Eliade 1964, Furst 1972, Winkelman 2000).

The use and combination of these techniques are not set in stone, but instead appear to be dealt with in the manner most appropriate for the particular situation at hand. As shamanism is based on a set of techniques for achieving ecstatic states, one shaman's set could be different to another's based on a wide variety of factors. The elements primarily involved in the Goa trance ritual include high-volume auditory stimulation in the form of electronic dance music, physical body movement in the form of dancing for long periods of time, and the optional ingestion of entheogenic substances. This combination has shown scientifically to be quite effective in evoking altered states of consciousness and whose elements of rhythmic music, ecstatic dancing, and entheogens can be found in many traditional shamanic practices in some form or another.

The Goa trance ritual's social dynamic seems to operate on two simultaneous levels; on a macro level involving the experience of what Durkheim calls the collective consciousness, and a micro level focused on the internal spiritual aspects of the individual. In a magical way, they tend to play off of one another where there is a continuous feedback loop between what is going on in the personal conscious and what is happening with the collective conscious. Through this feedback loop, the vision of the collective conscious as well as the participant's strengthens and drives itself over time to what appears to be what visionary artist Alex Grey calls the "superconscious realm of archetypes from which all sacred images arise" (Grey 1990:71). A shaman is thought to be one who has mastery over achieving this type of state.

While Gil incorporates many traditional elements of shamanism into his work, it is through his redefinition of the tribal ritual that set him apart from many traditional shamans found in anthropology texts. The very fact that the technological element of the Goa trance ritual was not available to humans until about 100 years ago, a ritual drawn from ancient initiation rites and now incorporating those elements naturally calls for a redefinition. A large part of what binds the trance party and its culture together lies in technology as a requisite. Writer Erik Davis calls it the karmic feedback loop, where you can't "drop out and plug in at the same time" (SBI:25). It is the airplanes, trains, and busses that take the jet-set gypsies across the world to the deserted beach to dance to music made on computers and synthesizers which is then pumped through high-wattage amplifiers run by gas generators into the ears of dancers riding the wave of laboratory made LSD. It has been the technological and cultural advancements of the 21<sup>st</sup> century that has made this phenomenon possible, and in so deserves a redefinition.

With this technology at our fingertips, many opportunities open up that were never before available. Pre-recorded, amplified music has taken place of live musicians, thus reducing the overall physical input energy needed to produce music to drive a body of people into trance. Devices like the internet have opened up a wealth of information regarding spiritual practices around the world and have allowed people to communicate in ways we would have only dreamed of not long ago. Modern science and chemistry has also opened the doors for the synthesizing of new mind altering chemicals, and the deeper understanding for those occurring naturally in the environment all around us. As Victor Turner states, "New communicative techniques and media may make possible wholly unprecedented genres of cultural performance, making possible new modes of

self-understanding” (Turner 1982:79). Since new tools previously unavailable to man are being used in conjunction with an ancient ritual, I find it adequate that Gil calls his work a redefinition and not just a rendition.

The technological factors incorporated into a Goa trance party are done so in a manner that acts as a complimentary element to the backbone of the tribal ritual of reaching ecstatic states through rhythmic dancing and entheogen ingestion. For example, even though the music is computer generated, it is pumped out of the speakers in the same familiar 4/4 beat pattern that people have been banging out on drums for thousands of years. The fact the pre-recorded music is used means that the dance can go on for days on end without having to worry about musicians getting tired. Blacklights and fluorescent paint are used to create an atmosphere at nighttime that was formerly impossible. All of this equates to somewhat of a utopian dream that is swimming in all the benefits of technology without being drown by it.

While technology may have given a new definition to an ancient tribal ritual, the ability for the structure of the Goa trance party to induce altered states of consciousness still lies at the heart of the matter. With or without the use of entheogens, the process of dancing and moving the body in rhythm to percussive auditory stimulation over long periods has shown to be active agents in altering various brain wave patterns as well as having physiological effects on the body. Extensive motor behavior, exertion, and fatigue have show to deplete supplies of oxygen and blood sugar, potentially causing hypoglycemia, the appearance of slow wave activity and hallucinatory experience as well as a rise in carbon dioxide levels. Participating in extensive rituals where intense rhythmic dancing is involved is also likely to induce the release of endogenous opiates

since the central opioid systems are activated by prolonged rhythmic exercise. An endogenous chemical is simply one which is produced within the body (Winkelman 2000). This state seems to be somewhat similar to what many are familiar with as a “runner’s high.”

The aspect of “auditory driving,” or where auditory stimulation aids in driving particular brain waves is also noted as an active agent in altering one’s consciousness. This “rhythmic auditory stimulation imposes a pattern on the brain, driving entrainment of both alpha and theta waves” (Winkelman 2000:148). What seems to happen is that after the brain has the rhythmic pattern imprinted upon it, the mind begins to follow it in a way that the music acts as an auto-pilot stimulus on the wave rhythms. This auditory driving “creates visual sensations of color, pattern, and movement, and leads to organized hallucinations, seizures, and general and emotional abstract experiences”(Winkelman 2000:148). Gilbert Rouget also displays some evidence in support of this idea of music as being a “driving” agent in trance states (Rouget 1985).

An interesting study was conducted by F. Holmes Atwater dealing with brain-wave and oxygen saturation correlates during a ritual induced state of consciousness<sup>viii</sup> that displayed the ability of rhythmically induced trance in triggering low wave delta frequencies. These are most commonly associated with states of deep sleep, meditation, and detached awareness. What seems to be happening is that the movement in combination with the driving music aids at controlling, or taking pressure off the low frequency brain waves while at the same time exciting the waves associated with vision and pattern forming. This results in a relaxed, calm, and meditative state with an increased sensitivity. This in and of itself can act as a healing agent. For those who

chose to incorporate an entheogen into their ritual, this physiological alteration serves as supportive structure for the entheogen to situate itself within the body, mind, and spirit. The physiological effects of trance dancing and the qualities of entheogenic substances in combination seem to act in complimentary terms with one another, where the self-generated alterations of one's bio-chemistry serve as a blank canvas for the visionary qualities of the entheogen to imprint.

I would like to argue in line with Winkelman who proposes that these various entheogenic substances used to induce visionary states act on the neurophenomenological basis of being a “psychointegrator” which is used to describe the integration of mind, soul, and spirit (Winkelman 2000:210). This is the basis where I find the healing powers of entheogens to be most accurate. The theory behind the term *psychointegrator* stems from his influences of MacLean's (Winkelman 2000) proposed hierarchical tripartite model of the human brain. This model or “triune brain” is based on the neuroanatomical, structural, and functional divisions into three strata: (1) reptilian/organic brain (R-complex); (2) paleomammalian brain; and (3) neomammalian brain (Winkelman 2000: 30). The theory behind the triune model is that each structure, or strata, performs different psychological and biological functions as well as being integrated with one another. The reptilian strata provides the basic plots and actions of the body; the paleomammalian strata provides for the emotional influence on thoughts and behavior; and the neomammalian strata is involved in using enhanced symbolic capacity in elaborating on the basic plots and emotions and integrating them with higher level information processing (Winkelman 2000:31).

What Winkelman proposes is that these entheogens act as

psychointegrators by integrating brain processes and experiences between the three different strata. He goes on to explain,

Psychointegrators stimulate mental and emotional processes, impelling the organism towards an integrative state. This systematic integration is derived from effects on the serotonergic system and its role in modulatory neurotransmission. Psychointegrators activate emotional and personal processes of the paleomammalian brain and stimulate memories and feelings underlying personal identity, attachment and social bonding, emotional stability, and convictions and beliefs. One emphasis of psychointegrators is on psyche, meaning not only mind but also the soul of the spirit. Psychointegrators stimulate the integration of behavior, protomentation, and socioemotional dynamics with language based radiomentation, egoic representations, and personal identity. These physiological effects may force emotional awareness, recall of repressed memories, integration of emotional and rational processes, and the resolution of conflicts through stimulation and integration of different functional systems of the brain (Winkelman 2000:210-11).

I am led to believe that that it is not the entheogenic agent in and of itself that provides for the basis of healing (i.e., LSD, psilocybin) but the conscious experience of the “triune brain” integration itself that provides for the therapeutic effects. By experiencing integration between the different levels of the brain through the ingestion of entheogens, formerly unconscious lines of communication between various realms of the mind seem to be opened, as if the entheogen can be used as a microscope to better understand where one is situated.

To run with Winkelman's theory of entheogens acting as a psychointegrator, I would also like to propose that in addition, they also can act as a psychic cleanser, or an agent that has the ability to not only integrate aspects of the three strata, but to also “cleanse” these channels so information can flow more freely. Like a street sweeper that clears debris from the roads so cars and pedestrians can move with more ease, the entheogen seems to act in a similar

manner making retrieval of information and communication between various levels of consciousness more efficient. This angle of view also resonates with what William Blake termed as the cleansing of the doors of perception.

Blake says, “If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it is, infinite” (Smith 2000). If the triune model can be metaphorically looked at as having “doors” between the different tiers, what I propose from personal experience is that entheogenic substances act as agents in opening these doors or dissolving the rust on the hinges, allowing for the integration of the three tiers as Winkelman describes. This allows one to become more in tune with many facets of his or her existence that were once not in the forefront of the person’s mind. This process of cleansing the channels between different brain strata in combination with integration appears to be right on line with my experiences as well as with what Blake describes as a way to see the infinite.

Even though it’s proposed that entheogens have barrier dissolving or penetrating features, the aftereffects are not permanent. Ingesting an entheogen does not necessarily mean that the doors will swing open and stay open for good. Like any household, the doorways need cleaning and maintenance, applied both naturally and chemically. If attention is not paid to this, the door hinges have the potential of rusting shut again. When the lines of communication in the brain are operating on a highly integrative level, the ego loses its dominance and is subdued within the workings of the higher mind (McKenna 1991).

My stance is that the Goa trance ritual serves a medium where the shamanic practices of trance dancing, entheogen ingestion, or a combination can be explored for individual as well as group well-being, where each individual is at the driver's seat of his/her own experience. The notion that the ritual practices of traditional trance-dancing has been redefined to include the modern aspects of technology and that it further serves as vehicle of transmission to a global audience, instead of the isolated tribe, supports McKenna's theory of an archaic revival. With the recent introduction of entheogens to the Western mind, a road had been paved for the further exploration of shamanism and the therapeutic powers of entheogens which has in turn given rise to a modern interpretation of an ancient ritual.

For too long, the West's study of shamanism and entheogen use has taken place outside of its cultural boundaries. Many books have been written on other cultures in this light, but very few draw any connection from those studies and relate it to the average westerner living in middle-America. What I see happening is that these world-wide trance gatherings are acting as a new and modern medium in which we can study shamanism and entheogens in a context that is both applicable to the western mind and very close to the source of practices executed in other "foreign" cultures. It is my hopes that these trance gatherings act as bridges between the modern and primitive worldviews allowing for mutual knowledge to be transferred in either direction.

**Conclusion.**

The use of technology as an aid in exploring our past has proven to be a very powerful tool in practically all fields of study. By using this to expand the scope of a once drug-based utopian culture to include outside influences on raising one's consciousness, positive contributions to the psychedelic trance culture are being made in the sense that it is opening up new doors to altered states of consciousness not always produced by the ingestion of substances. It is my assumption that the use of entheogens within the framework of Winkelman's psychointegrator model produces higher levels of internal and external awareness that then can be drawn from and reinserted back into non-drug forms of achieving altered states of consciousness in order to further aid the integration process.

Goa Gil's concept of fusing the philosophy of yogic dance as an active form of meditation with music pushes the movement into a realm of shamanic practice that includes the ingestion of entheogens but is not solely limited to it. Instead, by having technologically-driven meditative dance and music at the heart of the ritual serving as the base of the trance-dance experience, its roots and principles serve as grounds for cultural familiarity which open the invitation to anyone who wants the experience. The psychedelic culture's movement away from a predominantly drug base to one that is based on the ancient philosophies of yoga, meditation, and dance allows for the scope of cultural and global acceptability to widen. Since the roots of the trance-dance experience are coupled with physiological factors that can be evoked by any human with a beating heart, the culture has now spread into practically every continent on the globe. In simple terms, its ingredients are accessible to just about anyone, anywhere. The

fact that this style of ritual has spread like wildfire across the globe in a mere 15 years or so also acts as evidence of a resurgence of shamanic interest, further supporting the claim of an archaic revival.

While the use of entheogens certainly is an important aspect in the trance dance ritual, I do not see it as a major agent for keeping the momentum of the spread of this style or practice. Indeed, entheogens played as an important catalyst for the birth of the Goa trance ritual, but I see the yoga and meditative aspects playing key roles in keeping it growing as well as acting as a positive format for reintegration from entheogenic experiences. I have strong reason to believe that one of the critical factors that led to the downward spiral of the psychedelic culture on the 1960's was due to the lack of any sort of structure in which the person could interpret his or her experience. Now, the culture is no longer blowing in the wind but is instead rooted in the context of spiritual ritual that already had it's footing in India long before the emergence of a trance culture. What is trying to be created is a physical environment that acts in similar fashion to the entheogen as psychointegrator without the chemicals, basically allowing for the trance-dance itself to become the psychointegrator that is independent of the entheogen.

If the qualities of the visionary experience can be translated into a replication that is similar to the experience itself, a new method of transcendence for our time can be devised without the use of outside factors that instead relies on the physiological makeup of the mind and body shared in common amongst all humans. Now, instead of having a relatively unknown chemical (LSD) being at

the forefront of a movement, the stage is set in a modern time with roots in ancient teachings that are a bit more palatable to anyone who is interested. This ability to translate information from altered states of consciousness into a medium that is accessible and beneficial to all lies at the heart of shamanic healing, bridging the gap with this perceived reality and those of other worlds.

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<sup>i</sup> This is a Hindi word which means “to view or to see.” Part of paying respect to deities in the Hindu faith is by “taking darshan,” or the viewing of them.

<sup>ii</sup> N, N-dimethyltryptamine, or DMT is an extremely powerful substance that is found commonly throughout the world in grasses, trees, plants, other mammals, and in our very own pineal gland. Rick Strassman, MD has performed extensive clinical research into this chemical’s makeup and effects on the mind which is found in his book titled, DMT, the Spirit Molecule.

<sup>iii</sup> Salvia Divinorum, also known as the “diviner’s sage” is a member of the mint family, native to central Mexico. This plant was traditionally used when fresh mushrooms were not in season.

<sup>iv</sup> Stanislav Grof, MD is widely acclaimed for his hundreds of records dealing with the use of LSD in psychiatry.

<sup>v</sup> Sadhus are the ascetic wanderers who worship the god Shiva. The relationship between western hippies and Sadhus was an important dynamic for spiritual exchange. Sadhus wear their hair in long dreadlocks and frequently smoke hashish in honor of Lord Shiva, the god of the hash plant, he who is eternally high. This common denominator allowed for exchange between the long-haired hippies and the Sadhus.

<sup>vi</sup> Koh Phangan is located in the Gulf of Thailand and is also one of the focal points for trance parties in SE Asia along with Goa and Bali.

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vii Santa Barbara Independent

viii See case study conducted by F. Holmes Atwater titled Brain-Wave and Oxygen-Saturation Correlates During a Ritual-Induced State of Consciousness.

<http://www.monroeinstitute.org/voyagers/voyages/hsj-1999-winter-brainwave-atwater.html>

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