

► TOWARDS A NEW RENAISSANCE

The Newsletter of the Scientific and Medical Network

► EDITORIAL

Cleansing the Doors of Perception

BY DAVID LORIMER



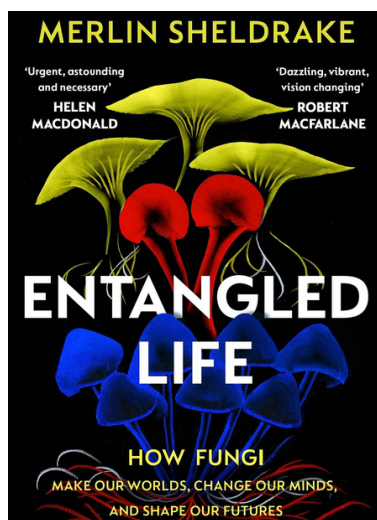
If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear as it is, infinite. - William Blake

The Doors of Perception is the title of a famous book by Aldous Huxley following his experience of mescaline in the 1950s. As readers will know, Huxley was famous for his book *The Perennial Philosophy*, but equally important is his *Ends and Means* showing how these need to be consistent if we are not to create vicious circles of violence. Indigenous cultures create a sacred space around entheogenic ceremonies, while clinicians seek to create a space of trust and openness. Their healers explain that they listen to plants to learn about their therapeutic qualities.

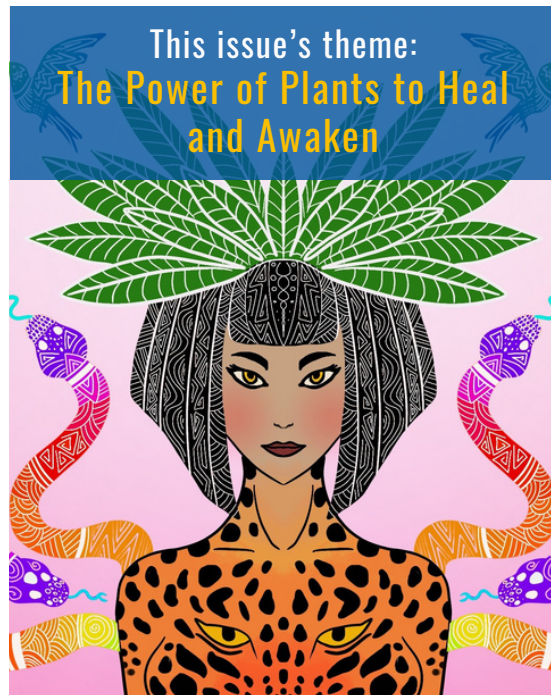
Plants have also been shown to exhibit intelligence and sensitivity, as we found in Paco Calvo's presentation at the online Mystics and Scientists conference last year. And Merlin Sheldrake's *Entangled Life* discusses fungal intelligence and communication by trees through root networks (see The Bookcast on page six for a review). It looks like sentience and intelligence are much more widely distributed than is allowed for by a mechanistic and anthropocentric worldview.

Ayurvedic and Chinese medicine as well as Western Herbal Medicine

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This issue's theme:
**The Power of Plants to Heal
and Awaken**



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► FEATURED BLOG



Steve Taylor

Why Do Near-Death Experiences and Psychedelics Have a Transformational Effect?

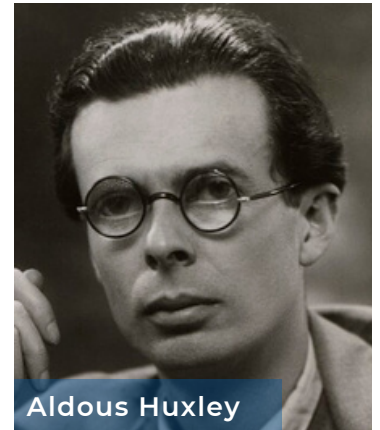
In this recent post on the *Psychology Today* platform Taylor discusses a new study that examines the transforming power of NDEs and compares this to the psychedelic experience.

'Both experiences take us beyond the limitations of our normal awareness. Our normal state is to see the world through a filter of thoughts and concepts, with a never-ending stream of associations passing through our minds. Through this filter, our everyday surroundings seem familiar and mundane. We also have a sense of living in duality to the world, inside our minds and bodies with the rest of the world "out there". In NDEs and psychedelics, the world becomes a completely different place. It becomes much more real and beautiful.'
Read the full post [here](#).

Continued from page 1

use plants and herbs in their protocols. Their models include forms of subtle life energy and anatomy entirely absent from Western medical curricula. In addition, they use corresponding metaphors of flow, balance and harmony and they treat systemically rather than symptomatically, recognising dynamic patterns and relationships within the body. The human microbiome exhibits just such dynamics.

At the Science of Consciousness European meeting in Interlaken in 2019, a whole session was devoted to studies of psychedelic research, and I was struck by the strong correlation between experience of mystical unity and recovery from depression. In Huxley's case the normal doors of perception through the senses were opened up into a different and more expansive inner space. Research




Aldous Huxley

"Some suggest that the psychedelic renaissance forms part of the evolution of human consciousness"

from the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre shows indication of higher levels of wellbeing among mystical experiencers; these are not pathologies.

Some researchers suggest that the psychedelic renaissance forms part of the evolution of human consciousness towards a recognition of our underlying interconnectedness, which is often experienced non-dually in such states that are characteristically infused with light and love. Reports from NDEs also emphasise the hyperreality of the experience, and it is interesting to note that brain activity is actually lower when subjects are in altered states. This finding supports the 'filter' theory of the relationship between the brain and consciousness where, as both Bergson and Huxley suggested, the brain acts as a reducing valve.

So I think Blake was right – and he surely experienced this himself – that if the doors of perception are cleansed, we open into the infinite or at the very least to wider and deeper structures of reality. 



► THE POWER OF PLANTS TO HEAL AND AWAKEN

The Psychedelic Mystical Experience and the Betterment of Wellbeing

BY JESSICA CORNEILLE



The use of psychedelics, both for the treatment of mental health disorders, and the betterment of mental wellbeing, is entering the West's mainstream. Increasing numbers of individuals are flocking to South America for Ayahuasca, to Mexico for San Pedro, and seeking out psilocybin truffles in the Netherlands, while psychedelic retreat centres are mushrooming (excuse the pun), all over the world.



Ayahuasca pot in Ecuador

Meanwhile, scientific research into these substances - which had been halted for several decades only to give way to the new psychedelic research renaissance in the last few years - is developing to support such practices. Psychedelic and

entheogenic substances are being explored as potential treatments for psychopathologies such as anxiety, depression, PTSD, substance abuse, and even eating disorders. These powerful substances are also being explored as potentiators for increased nature-connectedness and nature-relatedness, and as catalysts for increased prosocial and pro-environmental behaviours.

But what is it about these compounds that make them so healing? The answers aren't clear yet, but some studies indicate something that, whilst curious, might not come as a surprise to some of our readers: that the strength of the mystical experience generated by these substances might be responsible for yielding these most measurable changes.

For instance, psilocybin-occasioned mystical experiences have been positively associated with the sustained improvements of treatment-resistant depression (1), in significant reductions of end-of-life anxiety, hopelessness, and fear of death in patients with life threatening cancer (2),

Continued on page 4...

► FEATURED ARTICLE



Lauriane Chalmin-Pui Houseplants Don't Just Look Nice – They Can Also Give Your Mental Health a Boost

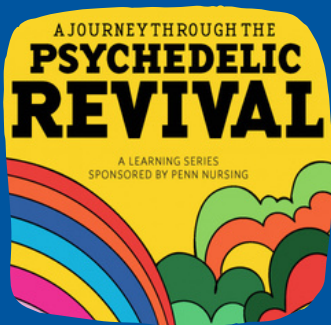
Writing on *The Conversation* platform Dr Chalmin-Pui, a Wellbeing Fellow of the Royal Horticultural Society, reviews the benefits of having some green spaces in your home.

'A recent review of 42 studies demonstrates that even just being in the presence of indoor plants can improve mental and physical health. These experiments compared participants doing various activities in rooms with or without plants. The presence of plants saw better performances on cognitive tasks involving focus, sorting or memory recall, greater pain tolerance when holding hands in ice cold water, and lower levels of physiological stress. Interestingly, the aesthetic appearance of plants is important too, with separate research showing that people tend to react more positively to lush, green plants with rounded and denser foliage.'

Read the full article [here](#).



▶ FEATURED VIDEO



A Journey Through the Psychedelic Revival: Personal Stories of Transformation

In this clip - part of a series by Penn University School of Nursing - a panel of people give accounts of the results they saw in their lives after experiencing psychedelics. One speaker, an army veteran, tells how he was self-medicating his depression and panic attacks with alcohol until he decided to try ayahuasca on a week-long retreat. "There was something really deep to it," he reports. "I noticed immediate benefits: for the first time it felt as if my brain was on my team as opposed to actively trying to destroy me or fighting against itself. And over the course of months I noticed extreme reduction in anxiety, hypervigilance, and in me just not going to magic bullet scenarios to try and fix my life. I was much calmer and more focused in moving forward." Watch the video [here](#).

Continued from page 3

and in the treatment of treatment-resistant alcohol (3) and tobacco addiction (4). Also significant are the increased prosocial (5) and pro-environmental behaviours (6) mediated by psychedelic mystical experiences. This is in line with (still nascent) research on endogenously-generated or spontaneous mystical experiences, whose occurrences have been linked with an array of positive perceptual and behavioural changes, for instance, in the treatment of treatment-resistant substance abuse (7), in the decreased risk of suicide among suicidal individuals (8), in increased prosocial and pro-environmental behaviours (9), and in general increased physical and mental wellbeing (10).



Psilocybin trial at Imperial College London

These few examples are enough to make us wonder what it is about mystical experiences that are powerful enough to 'shake the unshakable' - and while much more scientific research is to be conducted on these experiences to understand the full extent of their healing capacities, perhaps we should also be questioning why, in this day and age, people having them are still not being supported adequately within mainstream healthcare systems.

• **Jessica Corneille** (MSc) is the Communications Coordinator for the SMN and a Research Psychologist who specialises in spiritual and transcendent experiences.

References (click each reference for the link to the full study)

- 1) Carhart-Harris et al., 2016; 2018
- 2) Griffiths et al., 2016; Ross et al., 2016
- 3) Bogenschutz et al., 2015
- 4) Garcia-Romeu et al., 2014
- 5) Griffiths et al., 2006; 2011; MacLean et al., 2011
- 6) Forstmann and Sagioglou, 2017; Lyons and Carhart-Harris, 2018
- 7) Galanter et al., 2007; Khanna and Greeson, 2013
- 8) Horton, 1973
- 9) Taylor, 2013; Taylor and Egeto-Szabo, 2017
- 10) Corneille and Luke, 2021

Quote

"In consciousness dwells the wondrous; with it, man attains the realm beyond the material, and the peyote tells us where to find it." - Antonin Artaud, poet, dramatist



Banner: Raphael Lacoste - [raphael.lacoste.com](#). Psilocybin trial pic: © Imperial College London.



► THE POWER OF PLANTS TO HEAL AND AWAKEN

A Festival of Transformation and Emergence

BY NATALIE MEARS



This year marked the third anniversary of the **Medicine Festival**, held on the beautiful Wasing Estate in Berkshire. I joined fellow spiritual seekers and nature lovers at the alcohol-free event. The idea behind Medicine Festival is to provide ‘medicine’ for attendees in the form of a deep dive into nature, community, wellbeing and music. The festival



offers ‘the medicine’ in many forms from ceremony and ritual, to music and dance, and immersion in nature. Indigenous elders, wisdom keepers and leaders in their field come from all over the

world to hold space for attendees at this gathering. The theme for this year was *emerge*, and the programme was designed to support attendees to emerge as a transformed community, acting for the benefit of all life.

The festival featured talks, discussions and a roundtable on topics including psychedelics and psilocybin access rights. There was a full wellbeing programme that included yoga, breathwork, sound healing, dance, forest bathing and wild swimming – and a sacred fire around which ceremonies and rituals were held. The festival is for all ages and featured a family area curated by Wider Horizons. I met a lot of like-minded scientists and holistic practitioners during my visit and spread the word about the SMN. For more details (including more photos from the event) go to medicinefestival.com.



• **Natalie Mears** (MSc) is a Rapid Transformational Therapy Practitioner and also an SMN Zoom host.

► FEATURED ARTICLE



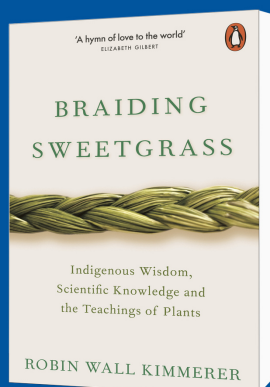
Rich Haridy Psilocybin Alcoholism Trial Highlights Problem for Psychedelic Science

In this article on *New Atlas*, Haridy reports on how the psychedelic nature of psilocybin presents a unique challenge in terms of verifying blinded studies.

‘A randomized, blinded, control trial is the gold standard of modern research. Getting two groups of people together to test an intervention, but blindly giving one group a placebo, is a crucial way scientists can gather empirical evidence as to whether a novel treatment fundamentally works. But in psychedelic science it can be virtually impossible to give someone an inactive placebo without them realizing pretty quickly they haven’t been given the real drug. Over the last few years this problem has been cited as potentially leading to over-inflated effects in psychedelic clinical trials.’ Read the full article [here](#).

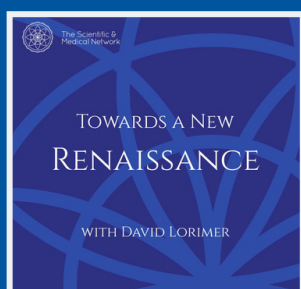


► THE BOOKCAST



Mutual Reciprocity

This episode features reviews of two significant - even seminal - books: **Entangled Life** by Merlin Sheldrake and **Braiding Sweetgrass** by Robin Wall Kimmerer. Both convey a message of our need to recover a relationship with Nature by drawing on how organisms work (in Merlin's example, fungi) and to go beyond a reductionist approach outwardly manifested in ecocidal destruction in the name of growth. As Robin writes, we have kinship with all forms of life, everything is relationship, and flourishing is mutual. Listen to the episode [here](#).



Find the full bookcast on [RedCircle](#), [Apple podcasts](#), [Spotify](#) and [Stitcher](#).

► THE POWER OF PLANTS TO HEAL AND AWAKEN

Michael Pollan: 'There's a tremendous potential in psychedelics to relieve human suffering'



Michael Pollan

In this interview from July, on Channel 4's Ways To Change The World podcast, Krishnan Guru-Murthy talks to journalist and self-described 'reluctant psychonaut' Michael Pollan about his book and recent Netflix documentary series **How To Change Your Mind**. In both Pollan investigates the remarkable power of psychedelics to heal negative mental and emotional patterns in people but also the challenges inherent in using a substance that can seriously alter human consciousness. "You know, the Greeks really had it right," he says. "They called drugs *phármakon*. It meant both things: it could be a poison and it could be a blessing." He suggests that the key to staying on the right side of that line is down to context. "One of the lessons we learn from indigenous cultures that use psychedelics is that they don't do it casually, they don't do it recreationally," he says. "That has been going on for 6-7000 years - indigenous cultures using these drugs - and I think we should study that." Watch the interview [here](#). The trailer for the Netflix series is [here](#).

Simon Makin: Restrictions on Psilocybin 'Magic Mushrooms' are Easing as Research Ramps Up

In this article in *Scientific American* from August Makin examines the changing legal status of psilocybin in the US as serious research into the therapeutic potential of these substances continues to increase. The progress is gradual but still significant: 'As news of psilocybin's promise spreads,' writes Makin, 'several U.S. cities have passed measures decriminalizing magic mushrooms. This is not the same as legalization; the molecule and the mushrooms themselves remain illegal, but prosecuting people for their possession or use is deprioritized or discouraged.' Read the full article [here](#).

Quote

"I have become more and more interested in community and nature as important ways of integrating not only psychedelic experiences, but just life experiences."
- Rosalind Watts, former Clinical Lead for Imperial College London's psilocybin trial



Banner: Rodrigue Pralier - [rodrigue.pralier.artstation.com](#)



► FEATURED PODCAST

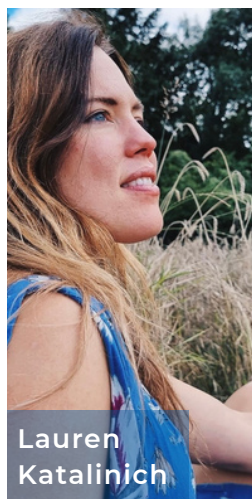
David Drapkin: **Psychedelics Today**

BY ANDREW POLSON

As its title indicates this podcast features leading conversations on the state of psychedelics culture and in this excellent recent episode host David Drapkin speaks with **Lauren Katalinich** and **Anya Oleksiuk** of the Psychedelics Society, a London-based education and events platform. They discuss the work the Society does and also stress that it is about far more than psychoactive substances. “Our values are actually connectedness, curiosity and consciousness,” says Katalinich. “Those are the kinds of conversations that really typify psychedelics gatherings.” Unsurprisingly, the pair’s interest in the potential of these substances arose from direct experience. “Psychedelics helped me on my own journey healing from depression and complex PTSD,” explains Oleksiuk. “So I felt inspired to educate others about it. My main focus is on harm reduction and making sure people who take psychedelics do it safely.”



psychedelics
today



Lauren
Katalinich

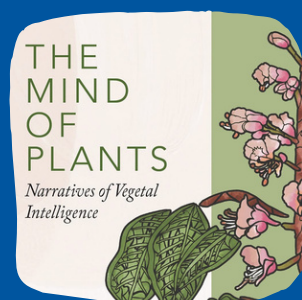


Anya
Oleksiuk

Katalinich too stresses the need for a grounded approach: “This is not a cure-all,” she says. “They [psychedelics] require quite a lot of work and it’s important to understand how they work in terms of integration.” This means supportive after-care and complementing your trip with other kinds of practices: “We have an

amazing community of facilitators that run workshops in embodiment, intimacy, breathwork,” says Oleksiuk. As the culture goes more mainstream, backwards-looking drug policies and exorbitant prices can still put barriers in front of many people who might benefit from treatment, but the pair say the community as a whole remains vibrant. “Psychedelics researchers in the UK are some of the most wonderful people I have ever met,” says Oleksiuk. “All these people reminding me every day that what we do is important and we’re doing it together.” Listen to the episode [here](#).

► SMN VIDEO CLIPS



John Ryan, Patricia Vieira
The Mind of Plants

In this SMN webinar from April 2022, Ryan and Vieira discuss the book they edited on plant cognition. Full of essays and poetry, the book’s premise is based on research that highlights ‘the capacity of botanical life to discern between options and learn from prior experiences or, in other words, to think.’ Watch the recording [here](#).

► TOWARDS A NEW RENAISSANCE

Editor: David Lorimer

Editor/Designer:

Andrew Polson

Disclaimer: The selections in this newsletter are personal – the Network has no consensus view on the material covered. Readers need to draw their own conclusions on the basis of evidence and reason.

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► WE'D LOVE TO
HEAR FROM YOU...



We are excited to bring you *Towards a New Renaissance* on a regular basis and the response has been brilliant.

We would also love to get your feedback and ideas on how we can make the newsletter even better and more relevant to you. Send us comments/suggestions on our contact form [here](#).

If you have been enjoying this monthly digest, would you also consider making a supportive donation?

Any amount would be a great help toward our costs of time and labour. And donations also help us to enhance our student support projects.

Click here to go to our donation page - and thank you!

Donate

The SMN's premiere online conference, *Beyond the Brain*, is less than two week's away! Tickets are still available... Click the poster below for details.

A poster for the 'Beyond the Brain Online 2022' conference. The background is a deep purple with a subtle pattern. At the top left is a geometric logo. Text at the top right says 'The Scientific and Medical Network presents: 4 - 6 November'. The title 'BEYOND THE BRAIN' is in large, bold, white letters, with 'ONLINE 2022' in yellow. Below the title is the subtitle 'FURTHER REACHES OF CONSCIOUSNESS RESEARCH'. A list of speakers follows: Eben Alexander, Yvonne Kason, Steve Taylor, Jeffrey Kripal, Helané Wahbeh, Peter Fenwick, Siegmur Gerken, David Lorimer, Judith Quin, Natasha Tassell-Matamua, Jeffrey Mishlove, Oliver Robinson, Mitch Horowitz, Ben Gross. Below the list is '+ 'AWARE: Glimpses of Consciousness' film & panel (Nov 3rd)'. The chairs are listed as Jessica Corneille, Bethany Butzer, Jessica Bockler, and Les Lancaster. At the bottom, a description reads 'The world's premier conference series exploring whether and how consciousness extends beyond the physical brain' followed by the website 'www.beyondthebrain.org' in yellow. There are also images of a brain and a human eye.

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