

# Hermeticism and Alchemy

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Today's thing is sort of a return to a more orthodox educational kind of mode, hopefully not to such a degree that it's boring. The agenda is to talk about Hermeticism and alchemy; the way in which this tradition — which is counter-intuitive and heterodox, if not heretical from the point of view of Christianity — what it can mean for the present, what it means for the psychedelic experience, what it means for the notion of the end of history and how the loss of this point of view has probably done us a certain amount of damage.

The great tension in the late Middle Ages was between the magical schema, the magical view of human beings, and the Christian view. The Christian view is very strongly marked by the idea of man's fall, that we screwed up early on and somehow then, by virtue of that, were forced into a secondary position in the cosmic drama. We are doing penance as we speak, the world is a vale of tears, the lot of human beings is to till hard land and we are cursed unto the nineteenth generation by the fall of our first parents. We can be redeemed through Christ, but we don't deserve it; if you are saved it is because there is a kind of hand extended to you from a merciful God who is willing to overlook your wormy nature and draw you up in spite of yourself. This is deep in us; you may not think you've bought in because you're black or Chinese, but it's just in the air we breath. It's what Western civilization makes you think, whether you want to think it or not, even if you don't come out of these traditions; for us, the concept that you've got to pay your dues...

Human beings are copartners with deity in the project of being: this is the basis of all magic. In a Christian context, magic is heresy because it implies that man can command God to act; in other words, that, in some strange way, the magician compels nature to behave as the magician desires. In Hermeticism, it isn't so much put in terms of "compel," but the idea is that men and women of great spiritual accomplishment are copartners in the project of being and that God, as it were, stepped off the stage of creation with it only 90% completed and the rest is left in the hands of his brother. The *Hermeticum* actually refers to humanity as the brother of God. It's a completely different attitude toward

being human, it's an empowering attitude; with power comes the potential to abuse power, because you're no longer a worm. You remember that image in Jonathan Edwards' sermon *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, where he says you're like a worm suspended over an abyss, held there only by the love of a merciful God; implying that if he weren't a merciful God, he'd just let go of your thread and you'd go down the tubes.

In the Hermetic magical view, human beings are not tainted by original sin. No ideology is without the potential of abuse. The Hermetic attitude in the Renaissance was summed up in a single aphorism by the great Renaissance Platonist Marsilio Ficino — there's no sexism in all of this, you just have to realize that these guys were primitive types and they hadn't confronted the political issues we've confronted, so when they say "man" they mean humanity — the Renaissance magical attitude is summed up in Ficino's aphorism, "Man is the measure of all things." This is a double-edged sword, because in a single affirmation you cast off the guilt trip, you cast off the view of ourselves as a flawed creature, but when you say, "Man is the measure of all things," you could be the chairman of the board of Louisiana Pacific or Dow Chemical; this is approximately their attitude. In other words, it's not rainforests, it's not the life of the earth, it's none of that malarkey, we are to be the measure of all things. So, it has to be tempered. We'll probably end up talking a bit here about the pathological expression of the Hermetic position, which is called Faustianism. Faustianism is where you have unbridled ego, unbridled faith in the intellect, so that you proceed forward without self-doubt. If you haven't read *Faust* recently, it's a surprising read. First of all, it's very funny, it's funnier than any of Shakespeare's plays, I think. The way it ends is that the guy dedicates himself to land reclamation and the draining of swamps to build low-cost housing for poor people. People don't know this, they're caught up in the images of the center of the story, where magical power is running rampant, but Faust's final conclusion is that he should do some good work for the least of society and give up these Promethean and titanic dreams of the mastery of power.

Well, a little bit of history about this Hermetic ideal. It's an interesting story in the light of our discussion of time yesterday. Western civilization can be thought of as an accumulated series of misunderstandings, and one of the most severe of these misunderstandings has to do with this whole business of Hermeticism. The Renaissance really believed that Hermes Trismegistus was a great teacher of antiquity who preceded Moses, who was, in time, older than Moses. They had what they called the *prisca theologia*, the three theologians, and they were Hermes Trismegistus, Moses and Orpheus, in that order. The reason that I say Western civilization is built on a series of misunderstandings is because they got it all wrong about Hermes Trismegistus. There was great confusion and unhappiness in the 16th century when Isaac Casaubon, who was an early philologist, attacked the dating of the *Hermetic Corpus* and argued correctly that this could not possibly have been written in a period preceding Moses, that in fact this was post-Christian, written no earlier than the 1st century A.D. This is the equivalent of us finding out that George Washington was

alive in Greenwich Village in the 1930s. It was a completely mind-bending realignment of how people thought the history of the world had unfolded, because they had up to that time thought that when you studied Hermes Trismegistus you were reading the oldest philosopher in human history; actually, it's very late. In a way, this is what destroyed the magical alternative: that the advent of modern philology showed that these so-called ancient texts were not ancient at all, they were late Roman, they were Hellenistic. So strongly was imprinted in the Western mind what's called the "nostalgia for paradise," in other words, the belief that the older it is, the better it is — Giambattista Vico in *La Scienza Nuova* laid the basis for this kind of thinking, it's called "classicism" in the Renaissance context — so once they found out that the *Hermetic Corpus* had been written in late Roman times it was like it was finished, and science was able to use the confusion in the magical community at that point to force its own agenda very strongly.

There have been numerous episodes of misplaced dating like this that have contributed to the confusion around the history of magic. For example, and I hope this doesn't bring somebody rising out of their chair in an air-clawing rave: Rosicrucianism rests on a whole bunch of phony dates, because they want to tell you that that somebody named Christian Rosenkreutz wrote a book called the *Chymical Wedding* and sealed it up in a time capsule in the 12th century, and that it was then dug up in the 16th century, but actually all these Rosicrucian documents were ponied up by people in the 16th century who had a very complicated political agenda, which we will probably discuss as part of this weekend.

Hermetic philosophy is based on what is called the *Hermetic Corpus*. This is a group of books, the most important of which is called the *Asclepius*. Most of these books were completely lost during the Middle Ages. At the fall of the Roman Empire, copies of these Hermetic manuscripts were systematically destroyed by enthusiastic Christian barbarians. The Hermetic manuscripts were scattered and they only survived in monasteries in Syria and places like that. Then, in the Renaissance, the Council of Florence under the patronage of the Borgias and people like that, there was this great interest suddenly in antiquities, because this Roman statuary and stuff was coming out of the ground, so the Council of Florence commissioned a character named Gemistus Pletho to go to Syria and bring back these manuscripts, and they established a translation commission. They had, in manuscript, the works of Plato, the works of Hermes Trismegistus, a whole bunch of ancient literature. To show you what the psychology of the Renaissance was, here they had Plato, which they hadn't been able to read for a thousand years, sitting there waiting for translation, and the Cosimo de' Medici said to Marsilio Ficino, "Plato can wait, translate the *Hermetic Corpus* first," and so it was done. If you're interested in Renaissance Hermeticism you can't do better than to read Dame Frances Yates' book *Gior-dano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*. Well, I want to read you some of this stuff because it's very interesting and it has a modernity that is astonishing. It's also very psychedelic.

Here's a little passage on the imagination. I'm reading from Book Nine of

the *Corpus Hermeticum* in the Scott translation. This is a four volume set. I only brought the “texts in translation” volume, but if you read Greek, it’s all here, if you don’t, it’s all here in English, but this will give you a feeling for the approach:

If then you do not make yourself equal to God, you cannot apprehend God; for like is known by like. Leap clear of all that is corporeal and make yourself grow to a like expanse with that greatness which is beyond all measure. Rise above all time and become eternal: then you will apprehend God. Think that for you too nothing is impossible. Deem that you too are immortal and that you are able to grasp all things in your thought, to know every craft and every science. Find your home in the haunts of every living creature. Make yourself higher than all heights and lower than all depths. Bring together in yourself all opposites of quality: heat and cold, dryness and fluidity. Think that you are everywhere at once: on land, at sea, in heaven. Think that you are not yet begotten, that you are in the womb, that you are young, that you are old, that you have died, that you are in the world beyond the grave. Grasp in your thought all this at once, all times and places, all substances and qualities and magnitudes together: then you can apprehend God. But if you shut up your soul in your body and abase yourself and say, “I know nothing, I can do nothing. I am afraid of earth and sea, I cannot mount to heaven. I know not what I was nor what I shall be,” than what have you to do with God? Your thought can grasp nothing beautiful and good, if you cleave to the body and are evil.

Interesting; very different from the “Humble yourself,” hard labor, spun wool and watery beer approach of medieval Christianity. Here’s an amazing passage. People like to think that people thought the world was flat until the Renaissance. This is an incredible psychedelic image of outer space that is 2nd century A.D.:

Would that it were possible for you to grow wings and soar into the air! Poised between earth and heaven, you might see the solid earth, the fluid sea and the streaming rivers, the wandering air, the penetrating fire, the courses of the stars and the swiftness of the movement with which heaven encompasses all. What happiness were that, my son, to see all these borne along with one impulse, and to behold Him who is unmoved moving in all that moves, and Him who is hidden made manifest through His works.

It goes on and on. It’s very readable, it’s very literary, it’s highly poetic. It’s a celebration of nature, the notion of sin is completely absent. It rings with a kind of confidence, a kind of joy that was completely running counter to the brimstone and damnation point of view of Christianity. Here’s, to me, a psychedelic passage:

But He who presents all things to us through our senses and thereby manifests Himself through all things and in all things, and especially

to those to whom He wills to manifest Himself: begin then, my son Thoth, with a prayer to the Lord and Father who alone is good. Pray that you may find favor with Him and that one ray of Him, if only one, may flash into your mind so that you may have power to grasp in thought that mighty being; for thought alone can see that which is hidden, inasmuch as thought itself is hidden from sight, and if even the thought which is within you is hidden from your sight, how can He, being in Himself, be manifest to you through your bodily eyes? But if you have power to see with the eyes of the mind, then, my son, He will manifest Himself to you; for the Lord manifests Himself ungrudgingly through all the universe, and you can behold God's image with your eyes and lay hold on it with your hands. If you wish to see Him, think on the sun, think on the course of the moon, think on the order of the stars. Who is it that maintains that order? The sun is the greatest of the gods in heaven. To him as to their king and overlord, all the kings of heaven yield place; and yet this mighty god, greater than earth and sea, submits to having smaller stars circling above him. Who is it then, my son, that he always obeys with reverence and awe? Each of these stars too is confined by measured limits and has an appointed space to range in. Why do not all the stars in heaven run like and equal courses? Who is it that has assigned to each its place and marked out for each the extent of its course?

And so forth. So it's nature-oriented, celebratory; it glories in the exercise of the mind. It is not doctrinal, it is not pietistic. It is magical, psychedelic, expansive. I'm not implying that they used psychedelic substances. The evidence for that is incredibly murky and hard to get at, and probably they didn't. One of the real tragedies of Western history is that Western Europe is so poor in psychoactive plants. Had Western Europe stayed in touch with the mystery religions of Ancient Greece, Christianity would never have been able to force its agenda to the degree that it did. I think you can make an argument that there were psychedelic mysteries in Europe, probably up until the time of the fall of Eleusis. Hermeticism is only one heterodox strain among many that were in existence in Europe in the late Roman period and that then partially survived into the Dark Ages. You had Neoplatonism, which is a group of philosophers in the 3rd and 4th century — Plotinus, Porphyry, Proclus and that crowd — and they took the late Plato and contorted that into a mystical doctrine of emanation. They were what are called emanationists: what this means is that you start with the One, or the Unnameable, or Brahman Atman, and then you have a series of declensions into more and more material and more and more multiplistic expressions of being. These Neoplatonists were emanationists, and their theories about how the universe is constructed have become the unconscious basis of all later magical speculation. They are the people who brought the angels into the picture so intensely, because they were trying to create a descending hierarchy of being from the most high down to the most low.

Angels, once set in place, became a real problem for Christianity, because they are not very easy to distinguish from the old stellar demons of paganism. Paganism was largely the belief that the power of the stars could be drawn down to earth through sympathetic magic. By setting up resonances in a ritual situation, you could draw the power of the stars down into your projects and your intentions. The late Middle Ages was a period of intensely working out all the associations between minerals, colors, perfumes, plants, musical notes and styles, so that you could then bring together all these things for purposes of magical evocation. If any of you are interested in this, the book to read, which will point you toward many other interesting books, is a wonderful book called *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella*. In the Renaissance, over a period of about three generations, this became a real problem, because what starts out as angel magic ends up as out-and-out demonic conjuration, something which I've noticed my 14-year-old son has an incredibly unhealthy interest in. I did as well at his age; I hope it's not the family curse coming back.

I mentioned the dating error. It was Lactantius, who was one of the fathers of the early Church, one of the patristic writers, that generation of theologians that followed Christ who canonized the Christian religion; he placed Hermes Trismegistus as older than Moses, older than Pythagoras, older than Plato, and it wasn't until Isaac Casaubon that this was corrected. We forget how transformative a breakthrough was represented for Western Europe by the recovery of all this ancient literature. It had been completely lost. A misimpression that probably needs correcting is that most people who are not schooled in Western history think that the further back in time, the more "superstitious" people were. This isn't actually the case. It isn't the case that the further back in time you go, the more belief in demons, magical conjuration and stuff like that you get. The 10th, 11th and 12th centuries in Europe were periods of remarkable piety and intellectual cohesion; of course it was also some kind of a fascist nightmare, that's how they achieved it. They had stamped out paganism, they had pushed heresy and heterodox thinking to the very distant frontiers of the Holy Roman Empire. People were not superstitious, people were not obsessed with horoscopes and conjuration and this sort of thing. Where that reached its culmination was in the 16th century; the 16th century was the most magic-obsessed century in the last ten.

Alchemy, conjuration, talismanic magic, sympathetic magic: all of these things flourished, not as a throwback, but as a kind of prelude to modern science. Modern science is an incredibly demonic enterprise, and we will see as we discuss this stuff that, in a curious and rarely discussed way, the agenda of magical dissidence in Europe has been entirely achieved by the forces of what we call modernity. It's simply that it has been done in an entirely secular metaphor. If you take even the trivial belief about alchemists, that they were concerned with changing lead into gold — of course that wasn't what it was about, but there were plenty of con artists running around on the periphery of these deeper scenes who were claiming that they could change lead into gold — well, in the 20th century, we routinely change lead into gold. We do it with neutron bombardment and particle accelerators, and of course it costs far more to do it than the worth

of the gold that you get out, but that really wasn't the point, was it: it was to prove that it could be done. The dreams of creating the homunculus are dreams that dovetail directly into the aspirations of modern biology and genetics. The Great Chain of Being of Aristotle is animated, given a dimension of motion and, lo and behold, it becomes the Darwin-Wallace theory of evolution. Mircea Eliade talks about this, about how all the alchemical dreams of the 15th and 16th century have been brought to fruition in the 20th century in the absence of magical rhetoric, but certainly in a spirit of magical and Faustian recklessness. Scientists claim such a devotion to truth that decency must never stand in the way; they serve a higher god than human values, they serve the golem of the truth in some weird way that makes the truth OK even if it kills you. I studied philosophy from Paul Feyerabend and he used to say at the beginning of his Epistemology 101 course, "I will teach you to recognize the truth and I will teach you to ask the question, "What's so great about it?""

It was 1460 when these manuscripts were brought to Florence. Those of you with photographic memories can see the Time Wave signature as it turns over and heads through the floor. The Cosimo de' Medici immediately ordered Ficino to abandon his work on Plato. The *Pimander* was the only one of these books which existed in Europe even in partial form during the Dark Ages; Cosimo died in 1464 but the translation project went forward. The tree, the developmental process in Western magic all goes back to this Florentine translation project, and from there people who were well placed got a hold of this stuff. The most important person probably being an unsung hero in the development of Western thought, Trithemius, Abbot of Sponheim. Trithemius wrote a book — it was really a manuscript, it was never printed as a book in his lifetime — called the *Steganographia*. In it he put forth many of these magical doctrines, and also encryption methods for codemaking and breaking so that this stuff could be circulated under the eyes of the clergy without causing a problem.

Then the development of Western magic splits into two strains: the strain of Giordano Bruno and his school; he was a Franciscan monk who ended up being burned at the stake. His sin, for which he was burned at the stake, was that he was sitting on a rooftop of one of these Italian city-states one evening, presumably smoking some pretty decent boo that they'd brought in from North Africa, and he was looking at the stars and it occurred to him, "These things are suns. These little points of light are like the sun. Jesus christ!" and in a single moment the universe became infinite. He thought, "If these are suns. . ." and his mind was boggled, literally. Can you imagine, inside the medieval worldview, where they have these concentric shells of angels and demons, suddenly this guy gets it in a single moment and he sees that the universe is infinite and he begins to say so, and this is against Aristotle. The Church just goes nuts and they drive him out of Italy, and he has a whole bunch of adventures in England and other places. Eventually he makes the mistake of coming back to a place in Northern Italy, where he's betrayed by his patron and he is burned at the stake for a point of view which all of us take quite for granted.

The other strain of magic coming down from Trithemius is the Dee strain, and it is a bit more accessible to people like ourselves because John Dee was

an Englishman and he wrote in English, so you don't have to conquer 16th century Italian or late Latin in order to read him, although he wrote a lot in Latin as well. Dee is a very interesting character, worth spending some time on, because Dee is the last person to be able to unify into one worldview science and mathematics, magic and astrology, all together; he is the greatest magician of his age and the greatest scientist of his age. He designed the navigation instruments that Sir Francis Drake used to go around the Cape Horn and sail up the coast of California, he was an intelligence operative serving Queen Elizabeth on the European continent. He could cast the best horoscope in Europe and that was his entree into the various royal families of the capital cities of Europe, and then he was making maps of battlements and of the deployment of war facilities and shipbuilding capacity and sending it all back to Elizabeth in these codes that he had learned from Trithemius, not personally but from the *Steganographia*. A very strange incident happened on a cold day in April at his house in Mortlake, which was on the outskirts of London, now completely surrounded by modern London. I should say, he had the largest library in England, he had 6,000 books. Sir Philip Sidney and the Queen would occasionally call upon him to shoot the bull, he was a very learned man.

So, one day in April of 1582, he's working at his desk at his room in Mortlake. There's some disturbance in the garden and he goes outside. His story, and we have only his story, is that an angel descended in a ball of light and gave him an object, which is to this day on exhibit in the British Museum. If you ever have a chance, it's worth hunting it down, it's in the Renaissance Hall. It's a piece of black polished obsidian; he called it the Shew Stone. The deal was that you could look into the Shew Stone if you had the right talent, and it was a magical theater. There were gods and demons and female spirits and all kinds of things swirling around this thing. For the next many years, the Shew Stone was the major guiding force on Dee's life, and a guy came to him named Edward Kelley. Legend has it that he had no ears, which in England at that time meant that you had committed some infraction in the province and they had removed your ears. It was the mark of a con artist, it was so you couldn't fool anybody else, so if you met somebody with no ears and a big scheme you knew to keep your wallet in your pocket. This guy Kelley had an immense facility with the Shew Stone. It is one of the most puzzling and undiscussed episodes in the evolution of Western thought. It's very puzzling, because if he was a con artist he must have been a con artist of immense cleverness, because often the way the Dee angels would work is that they would deliver very long messages in Latin, backwards, and Kelley would dictate this stuff at a very rapid speed, Dee would write it down, and then they would put away the Shew Stone and they would very laboriously rewrite this stuff from back to front. They would be these long, coherent harangues about what they should be doing; about which courtly figures they should support with money and who should be introduced to who; it was very political.

Well, what kind of a polymathic talent was Edward Kelley that he could invert whole pages of Latin and reel it off and then have it be reconstructed and make sense? We know about this because Dee kept a diary over the years that



this was all going on. It's one of the most astonishing books in all of English literature, and until the last ten years the 1658 edition was the only edition ever published. It's called *A True and Faithful Relation*, or in full, *A True and Faithful Relation of What Passed for Many Years Between Dr. John Dee and Some Spirits*, with annotation by Méric Casaubon, the son of Isaac Casaubon, who did the correct dating on the *Hermeticum*. It's very interesting reading, it's one of the most puzzling incidents in the whole history of science.

Another religious system that was sort of complimenting the *Hermeticum* and developing alongside it was Gnosticism. The psychology of the late Roman Empire was very modern; Gnosticism is a very modern impulse. It may not at first appear so, because ancient Gnosticism is freighted with angels, demons, what we would call superstition, but if you strip away all that baroque stuff you come to a philosophy very similar to the philosophy that many of us have accepted without thinking; we just call it modern attitudes. The idea of Gnosticism is that you're on your own, there ain't no free lunch; if God did make the universe, he disappeared shortly afterwards and has no interest in your fate, your fears, your hopes. Gnostics were profoundly phobic of the world and they were either very ascetic cults or they were very libertinistic cults, springing from the same idea, which was that they did not belong in this universe. They were from a different place, and their whole concern was to escape. They are the ones who decided that the earth was an iron prison. They didn't like to have children because they felt that to have a child is to trap light in matter. In many Gnostic sects, the only forms of sexual activity that were approved of were forms that were guaranteed not to lead to conception: oral sex, anal sex, whatever. Needless to say, these sects died out in a hurry because they were self-limiting.

The whole Hellenistic world was awash in religious speculation. On every street corner they were casting horoscopes and prescribing diets. There were the temple prostitutes, there was the whole hedonic element in sexuality, orgy was a style in some religious organizations. Out of all of this religious foment came Gnosticism, Hermeticism, Chaldean oracularism, Jewish syncretism and so forth and so on. Christianity was just one in the crowd, but, with sharpened elbows and a sense of organization, it was able to slowly worm its way into a position of dominance. The real Christians probably were stamped out under the name of pagans. The message of Christianity was that the end of the world was imminent. For about 150 years after Christ, everybody was so stoned out on this rap that no serious organization got done and they just waited for the end of the world in little communities, practicing voluntary poverty and doing their thing. Then it began to slowly dawn on people that it had been a long time since the messiah's promise and that it was stretching out a little. So then certain mentalities in that situation said, "This return of the messiah is all very well, but I think we should get some real estate under our control, begin a vigorous building program and maybe found some schools." These religions began to turn away from their end-of-the-world, ecstatic millenarianism and to see themselves as organizing for the long haul. It was in this atmosphere that the Hermetic books were produced and written down.

The chief magical ritual of Hermeticism is the ability to call stellar demons down into statues, and these statues prophesied. This is why Christianity takes the Jewish aversion to idol worship and raises it to a whole new level of intensity, because they were freaked out by this animating of statues with stellar demons thing that the Hermeticists were into. When you're reading a 1,500-year-old account of a magical invocation, if we are to believe them, what happened was that by singing certain songs, burning certain incense and performing these rituals at certain times that were astrologically correct, they could invoke these things called decans, which are zodiacal demons of some sort; there are three decans to each zodiacal sign. Modern astrology has largely forgotten this. There are people who do decanic astrology, but you have to pay through the nose, because of course this is a lost and dying art. They would somehow be able to draw these decans down into the statue, and then they could extract knowledge from it, and this would lay the basis for these sympathetic magics that were later developed in the Renaissance. It's quite powerful, this is why this book I recommended is so interesting, the one on *Spiritual and Demonic Magic* by Walker.

These Renaissance princes were incredibly wealthy; you have a suite of apartments that overlook the Plaza San Marco in Venice and certain colors are prescribed that the walls be painted, you only wear certain kinds of robes made of certain materials, you perform your magical invocations at certain times of day, you burn certain incenses. They were big on fresh air and light. It isn't the dark image of magic that we get, of the stirring cauldron, the bat-faced familiar and all that; it's all about open air, light, wind blowing through, flowing silk robes. They were angelic magicians, and they were invoking these things through the use of sigils, which are magical symbols, and then there became stress on magical languages. Enochian is one of these magical languages. Remember, I mentioned the whole ten year episode with the Shew Stone — well, one of the subjects which these entities that Dee and Kelley were dealing with returned to again and again was the Enochian language, which they said was the true language that Abraham used to communicate with the angels. It has an alien alphabet, and there has even been published an Enochian dictionary of some four or five thousand words. There was a very bizarre episode in the mid-1950s, there was a woman who was some kind of clairvoyant and she was in contact with flying saucers. Now everybody and their dog is in contact with flying saucers, but then it was fairly rare, rare enough that she became an object of interest to the CIA. At one point she was in the CIA building in Langley, Virginia, they were interviewing her and she said, "There's a flying saucer right outside the window," and these guys rushed to the window and looked, and there was some kind of thing in the sky, and she said, "It's giving me a message for you," for this colonel. The message was, "*AFFA, AFFA, AFFA.*" I looked this up, I had a hunch, and *AFFA* is the Enochian word for nothingness; just more weirdness.

Angelic languages; why are these DMT creatures so concerned with language? Not only language, but alphabets. One of the high-water weirdness events of my life was that when I was young I wanted the DMT flash to last

longer, so I used to smoke it at the height of LSD trips. One Christmas vacation at this rooming house that I managed in Berkeley, everybody had gone home for Christmas, I thought, so I decided I would take some LSD and smoke DMT. It was just nuts, it's nuts enough, but this was like turbo-charged nuts; it went on and on and on. There was a woman who I rented a room to upstairs named Rosemary, who was supposed to be in Minnesota. She was an actress and very projective and did everything with great flair, and she apparently came back early from Christmas vacation. So, she hit the front steps of this house running, used her key to let herself in, came right around to my door and started beating on my door. I am by nature a very paranoid person. I can be up the Rio Yaguas in the middle of the Amazon Basin, and if I'm out in the rainforest smoking a joint and a stick is broken, I immediately hide the dope.

So, this woman lets herself in and beats with her clenched fist on my bedroom door. I underwent a coronary thrombosis or something; I was in the elf space and they were screeching and chattering and showing me all this stuff. When she did this, I flew off the bed, I jumped two feet in the air and landed on my feet, and it was as though the sudden flash of adrenaline and this sudden movement that I made broke up the ordinary division between the trip and normality. Anyway, I pulled the trip with me into the room. I was now standing in the room, eyes open, but the elf creatures had come with me. Everything had been jacked up to some immense level of intensity. There were these rotating geometric things hanging in the air and they were moving in this jerky motion. This thing was going, "Click. Click. Click," and it was faceted. Every time it would make this large metallic click, these plastic, triangle-shaped, brightly-colored chits, like little pieces of floor tile, would fly across the room. Each one of them had a letter on it in an alien language, sort of like Hebrew or Sanskrit. There were several of these machines and these things were ricocheting off the walls, and I had an elf hanging off each hand and I was just saying, "Holy shit!" She's still beating on the door, so I stagger over to the door, fling it back and look at her and say something like, "*Wey dukwham waxibo gwani haptigo butix shning*," and she realized at that point what my problem was and retreated, but I've never forgotten. It's the one time they went literary on me, and not only did I see them, not only did I hear them, they were printing their message on the air as well. Very curious.

Mandaeanism is a very old religion that arose around Jerusalem a couple centuries before Christ. It was a baptismal cult, they were the oldest continuous Western religion in the world with a gnostic intent. Probably they started out as Jews, but they were persecuted. They claim John the Baptist as one of their own, and he was a member of some kind of baptismal cult because we know that he baptized Christ. They were driven out of the area around Jerusalem and then for centuries they were in Lebanon, and they slowly made their way across Persia and ended up in the swamps of Iraq and Iran. Mandeans are very interesting, they have their own written language, although in 1847 there was a cholera epidemic that wiped out 90% of the priesthood. Only priests were allowed to learn to read and write this language; I have some facsimile manuscripts from the Vatican library.

I sort of think that we all should become Mandaeans; of all the religions I've ever looked at and studied it seems to me the most psychedelic, the most ethically correct. It would be a great religion to practice on a world scale because they're into caring for the land. They're river nuts, they love rivers and they build a cult hut called a *mandi* and they always divert a little ditch through it and they do their ritual baptisms there. Their folk tales and their religious beliefs are very interesting, it's like a religion of biology. The highest god in Mandaeanism is called Hibbel Zaywa, and Hibbel Zaywa is always referred to as "they." It's that "they" are in charge. It's beautiful scriptural stuff. They're very much like Orthodox Jews, only moreso, in that if you're a religious Mandaean your life is ruled by all kinds of things, sort of like the rules of kosher. The most difficult rule that these people are asked to keep in their own lives is that, if you're really a devout Mandaean, you are considered polluted if your eye falls on an unbeliever. An unbeliever is a non-Mandaean, so you can imagine how difficult it is, when you're down to 400-500 people, to make sure that those are the only people you ever see. The only profession that a Mandaean man can follow and not require ritual decontamination every day is silversmithing. So if you ever go to Baghdad or Basra or Kirkuk there are communities of these people, and you find them by going to the silver markets and then through discreet inquiry you can find them.

Folkloric anthropologists have developed all these rules. If a religion makes something taboo, you can usually bet that means that they were into it at some point. When a religion makes something taboo, it means that there has been a reformist upheaval inside the religion. This is probably how *soma* was lost to the ancient Hindus. Zoroaster was called the Great Reformer because he suppressed a lot of indigenous shamanic cults. Some people think that he attempted to suppress *haoma*, the Avestan counterpart of *soma*. If any of you are interested in all this, in this book by Flattery and Schwartz called *Haoma and Harmaline in Iranian Religion* they make a very strong case that *soma* was not mushrooms, that it was *Peganum harmala*. In the pre-Zoroastrian faiths of Iranian religion, drugs were not only used to access the spiritual world, but they actually said that there was no other way to do it, which is sort of my position. These pre-Zoroastrian Iranian light religions were into what they called the *menog*, and it's another dimension and you can only attain knowledge of it through the use of drugs. The *menog* existence is where the dead people are. What their religion was about is that you get to know your own soul through using drugs. It's like visiting somebody in stir, your soul comes through the *menog* existence and meets you at the membrane. The idea is that during life you must learn to recognize your soul, because after death, if you can't pick it out of the soul swarm, then you will be somehow incomplete in the after-death world.

DMT raises the possibility of death by astonishment. When you take DMT the question is not, "Will I be all right?" the question is, "Have I lived through it or not?" because you can't tell whether you've lived through it. DMT is a very short-acting hallucinogen that you smoke, but it's a neurotransmitter, it occurs in all human beings on the natch. It occurs in various plants and animals, in

terms of nature it's the commonest of all hallucinogens; in terms of impact, it's the strongest of all hallucinogens. It's a completely reality-obliterating experience, and it comes on so quickly that you don't grok it like a drug. We all know what a drug is: you feel this, you feel that, it gets stronger, it makes you rest, finally it overwhelms you. This isn't like that. This is like: you and your friends are somewhere, there's talk about this drug, the pipe gets filled, you smoke this drug and a 747 crashes into your apartment building at three times the speed of sound and interrupts whatever you were doing. Sometimes people come out of it saying, "What happened? What happened, for crying out loud?" and you say "Nothing happened, you just did it. That's what it does." It happens so quickly that we interpret it as an event coming from the outside, rather than a chemical compound diffusing through your body. It completely replaces reality, not with the contents of your unconscious or your unfulfilled dreams, wishes or any of that but with another dimension, a space filled with entities busy about their many tasks, although they notice you and come flocking over with a piercing screech. They like to treat with you, they play with you, they're not entirely friendly. It's the kind of feeling I used to have in India when I would go to make these hash buys in these Indian markets, and these guys would say, "Welcome, welcome. You're my friend. I'm not like all the others." It was fine, we were there to do business and everything usually went smoothly, but this was no environment in which to let your guard down.

The best guess so far is that endogenous DMT mediates attention. For instance, if there were to be a noise over here or a movement and I turn and look, that's a little spike of DMT which makes that possible. It's where you suddenly narrow your awareness and project it deeply into a small, confined area. This was the best guess of the people who did work on it a few years ago. There are a number of physioactive tryptamines. DMT is not a cardioactive tryptamine, if it's made right. Sometimes when you smoke it your heart races, but you can't tell whether that's sloppy synthesis or that you're scared. It's made from tryptophan, which is an amino acid, one of the eight essential amino acids. It's an easy conversion out of tryptophan. It can come from a plant, but if you were to ask a chemist to make it for you he'd ask you to get a few hundred grams of tryptophan.

On mushrooms you hear a voice, you rarely see who's talking. On DMT all barriers are transcended in the first thirty seconds. You hear it, you see it and sometimes you feel it. These little entities, these self-dribbling basketballs, these things that I call the tykes; they jump into your chest and then they jump out again. I don't know why they do that. In the Amazon, among the tribes that use DMT derived from plants, they call these spirit things *hikoolé*, and they say that they will jump into your chest and then you're supposed to have a technique to keep them from getting out. The number of these things that you trap inside your body cavity indicates how powerful a shaman you are. Your magic is done through the *hikoolés* that are trapped inside of you. It's very hard on DMT to tell yourself that this is a drug. It doesn't seem like it, it seems like you just tunnelled through an energy barrier into the beta sub-x dimension which is all the time all around us, but somehow you became virtual

and moved across the energy barrier, and there you are. The other thing about DMT that's weird is that it does not affect your mind. You don't feel gaga with ecstasy, you don't feel relaxed, you feel exactly the way you felt before you did it, it's that the world has just been swapped out. That's strange, I sort of like that: that it doesn't lay a glove on the observing cognitive processes. Instead, it just does something in the visual cortex that causes the world to be replaced by a five-dimensional highly-colored moving environment filled with screaming elf demons.

Some of you may know this book *The Fairy Faith in Celtic Countries* by Evans-Wentz. It was reprinted recently and I wrote the introduction to it. It mentions there that when Saint Patrick arrived as a missionary in Ireland, the problem that he encountered was this belief in the land of fairies. In order to convert the pagan Irish, he convinced them that these were souls of the dead in an intermediate zone that was neither heaven nor hell, which he called purgatory. Purgatory was invented to accommodate the folk beliefs of the pagan Irish. When it was brought back to Rome, it seemed like a such a good idea for converting all kinds of pagan peoples on the fringe of the expanding sphere of Christianity that it's been in place ever since. I've wondered about the way in which there seems to be a racial or genetic undertone to some of this stuff. I didn't know until I was 13 years old that I wasn't a white person. I grew up in Colorado where everything was white-bread culture, and my father may have had opinions about the IRA and all that but we were never told that we were Irish. Some of you who have roots in this city know that, as recently as fifty years ago, they used to have signs up along 8th Avenue that said, "No Dogs or Irish Allowed." So I reconnected to that part of the heritage. The Irish are stereotypically known to be susceptible to intoxication, to be great word spinners and to have this peculiar relationship to fairyland. I don't want to think that I'm just exploring the Celtic collective unconscious, it seems to me that these things must be there for everybody. Nevertheless, we're so concerned to suppress racial differences — because we're a democracy, and because racial problems have haunted American racial politics from the very beginning — that we tend to want to believe that everybody is the same.

I took a course once at Cal that was given by the forensics department, and it was called Biochemical Markers for Individuality. It was actually taught by Alexander Shulgin, the great drug designer, and one of the things we did is that he brought in a little vial of some kind of chemical and he passed it around. Out of 200 people in the class, 198 couldn't smell it at all, and two people were so overwhelmed by the smell of this that they actually became physically sick for a few minutes. He explained to us that these people were probably up to 50,000 times more sensitive to this chemical than most people, and that this is a gene that you carry for sensitivity to this thing. Those kinds of compounds, aromatic compounds with an electronically active ring structure, are the very nearest relatives to drugs, and so it's reasonable to suppose that there are genetic differences in the way we relate to drugs, which doesn't mean racial differences, it means from person to person. It also may mean that a race is a collection of related genes which are more frequently found together than not.

This is why, technically speaking, you can never say that so-and-so belongs to a race. A race is a quality of a group; it's not something an individual is. You have to have a bunch of people before you can say that you're confronting a phenomenon of race. What aboriginal people believe is that there are shamanic lines, family lines with a greater susceptibility to these things than others. One of the things you learn when you begin to explore psychedelic substances is that it isn't hitting everybody the same way; in fact, it can hit people radically different ways.

Audience: It seems to me that these entities are in many ways similar to elemental spirits. Do you think of that as a possible explanation for them?

It's true, they are. They don't look like them, though, they don't look like anything. Those of you who don't have kids can tune out, but since I have kids I've seen a lot of bad movies because that's what they make for kids. Four or five years ago at Christmas time there was this movie called *Santa Claus*. There was one scene in the elves' workshop where they were making thousands of toys, and there were all these conveyer belts going from level to level and these guys rushing around at full speed; it was the most DMT-like reconstruction I've ever seen. It's funny, though, that the elf mythology doesn't carry the sense of strangeness that you get in the DMT flash; although I suspect that this is because we've been polluted by Disney, that Disney has given us this vision of fairies that are too harmless. It's the Tinkerbell phenomenon. If you go back to Andrew Lang's *Fairy Books*, those are weird. Fairies are weird; they steal babies. That's their main way of relating to human beings, they steal human infants and leave behind wizened, deformed, sickly creatures who become very strange and peripheral kinds of human beings. If you get trapped in fairyland, the only way out is through poetry. They're language-oriented, they will never do you damage if you convince them that you're a master of words. All over the world there is this persistent motif of these small entities. I'm not suggesting that they're really there, but I don't know what's going on. It's odd that they should persist and that they should be experientially available. It would be a whole different thing if it was Madame So-and-So saying this to you, but I'm pushed to this stuff by experience, because my inclination is toward reason. It's just that everybody moves along safe channels, everybody stays out of the fast lane. If you move to the edges — drugs are certainly an edge, a full exploration of one's sexuality is certainly an edge, going off to weird corners of the world and staying long periods of time is certainly another edge — the self-confirming world of white-bread, European, bourgeois, work-hard types just looks as weird as any cultural adaptation could possibly be.

Reality is created by language and we are all imprisoned in somebody else's language. This isn't how we want to talk: 90% of the words and constructions we use would be great-grandfathered. We are living inside a 90% 19th-century worldview. Culture cannot evolve any faster than its language evolves, because what cannot be said cannot be done, what cannot be said cannot be put in place. One way of thinking about psychedelics is that they empower language,

it's a way to force the evolution of language. The way you stretch the envelope of culture is by creating language. This happens unconsciously. Hasidic Jews, Rastafarians, whatever, the way they create their boundaries is through language. This is how the Catholic Church does it, speaking Yiddish is a way to do it; you create a new reality inside the old one, and you can do it by moving backward into a specialized language or you can move forward into a new language. Look at how the introduction of the computer has transformed our language in the '70s and the '80s. CPU, throughput, output, input, bug, glitch: these are words that have been empowered by our involvement with a machine. Before that, the major influence on language in my lifetime was the LSD episode of the 1960s. It always amuses me how much time and energy the establishment spends heaping abuse on hippie talk. It's even now sold to you guys as West Coast talk. It's sold on the West Coast as L.A. talk. Wherever you are, you're close to it but not of it. It's like they used to say of the Watergate scandal, "linked but not tainted."

What LSD did, I can remember a concept like "ego trip." The first time I heard that I didn't know what it meant, I didn't have the concept. Well, once somebody explains to you the concept, then you've got it. "Vibes": that notion introduced a whole bunch of people to the idea of emotions. "Vibe" means that there's no rational reconstruction of what was going on, but you could just tell that it was not a place you wanted to be. So it began to empower new realities that were able to emerge, and it was important for the establishment to suppress that, because new words are the beginnings of new realities. The gay thing is an interesting example of that. In the 19th century it was called "the love that dare not speak its name." Interesting; it was there but you dare not speak its name. Somehow to name it was to bring it too much into the forefront. People who were gay, it was worse than being a communist. Now, it's empowered. All the various racial groups that have had to come up through the American meat grinder have had to create vocabularies of community that they were proud of, rather than accepting the vocabulary of the dominator culture. A good example is the NAACP. The words "colored people" are embedded there, and yet these were the sincerest and most radical people in that movement at a certain point.

Constantly, oppressed minorities are trying to get the language right, and it's important for us to do this, too. Are we stoners? Are we heads? Are we shamans? What are we, exactly? Pouring psychedelic substances into that mix opens the doorway for the Logos to define you, and building community is part of this. We are an interesting potential community. We tend unfortunately toward the lily-white, but I don't see any class dominating. There are probably, in this room, people who could buy and sell all the rest of us without going past their small change. There are probably also people who scraped and saved for this weekend and could ill afford it. Maybe we're some kind of generally definable group of people by level of education, but I don't see that either. What holds us together is what holds all subcultures together, which is an experience, in this case the experience of being loaded. It's a very powerful and immediate kind of experience. I'm sure some of us are more loaded than others, in any subgroup you'll get that kind of a spectrum.



What happens for me is that these entities want me to do what they're doing, and what they're doing is using sound to make objects appear out of the air. They can sing objects into existence. I think that they're language elves: they're not made of matter. Well then, what are they made of? It seems as though the place you go to on DMT is made purely of language. It's a hard thing to picture. They're like sentences rather than organisms. The essence of their presentation is like that of a pun. They want you to learn to make a better kind of language: not more articulate, not more clearly defined, but they actually suggest that there can be a dimensional breakthrough into a language that is seen with the eyes. I think that the breakthrough that we're waiting for is not going to come out of a political movement, or a redistribution of wealth or anything which could be called political, it's going to come out of a shift in the body. These things happen; it's very mysterious how they happen. Think about ordinary language. Here you have two people: one is mute, the other has the ordinary powers of speech. They look exactly alike, you can't tell a mute person from anybody else, and yet there is this extraordinarily complex behavior. Language is a behavior of some sort, and it's very hard to imagine that it slowly insinuated itself into our being. It looks to me more like it was a kind of quantum leap, and probably appeared very suddenly.

There have been other, less dramatic but more recent, things like this going on. For example, you go to school and they teach you that in the 15th century, perspective was the thing for me to understand. I mean, perspective was discovered? How could it be discovered? And yet, before 1425, people didn't know that the part of the house farther from you was smaller than the part nearer to you. You can't understand, it doesn't make any kind of sense. Another example is Saint Augustine, who was this great father of the Church and who was, by the way, African. He was known as the most brilliant theologian of his age, and the way he would prove to people that he was an exceptional and holy man was that they would open a book of theology in front of him and let him look at it for a few minutes, and then they would close the book and he would be able to tell them what was written there. As far as we can tell, Saint Augustine was the the only man in Europe who could read silently. Can you imagine this? It was a miracle. They would say, "We don't know how the bugger does it! You just show him the book and he can tell us what's written there." Now we've completely assimilated this, although there are still a few among us who move their lips as they read. Vladimir Nabokov used to cruelly sneer at these people, he said once in an interview, "I didn't write books for people who move their lips when they read."

A final example, which will indicate that we've come to the end of the line in terms of sudden behaviors emerging, is that, according to my friend William Gibson in his book *The Difference Engine*, oral sex was virtually unknown in England until the middle of the 19th century. It was brought in by French prostitutes, and it was just a mind-boggling concept to these Victorians, they could not wrap their mind around it. From our vantage point, we probably assume that people have been into this since the Stone Age. Maybe they have, but at least for several centuries in Victorian England, it absolutely died out as

inconceivable. Breakdancing is another one of these, where a behavior suddenly emerges, completely coherent and formed, and then it recedes; or, if it has cultural utility, it's stabilized, such as my previous example.

What these tykes seem to be trying to say is that there is a way for you to use your voice in order to activate a language which is not culturally taught. It isn't that you learn it from your parents, but that it's in the bones: a poetic language, a language scripted into your genes, and not only is it an *ursprach*, an original speech, the vehicle of primal poetry, it can be seen. It's interesting how in our culture, when we talk about how somebody is a gifted speaker, we always reach for visual metaphors. We say, "I see what you mean." In Spanish, if they're talking to you and they want to know if you follow, they say, "Is it clear, *claro*?" It's a visual metaphor. We say, "She paints a picture," or, "His words have great clarity." What this means is that, unconsciously, we trust the eyes and we don't trust the ears. Telepathy, which most people think of as being able to hear somebody else think, is not that at all. Telepathy is when you *see* what other people *mean*, because when you see what somebody means, it's like standing in their shoes. Point of view: that's a very visual-oriented framework. If you can understand somebody else's point of view, you *are* that person for that moment, for that purpose.

It's amazing that the human world has evolved as far and as fast as it has, glued together by nothing more than small mouth noises. As monkeys, we're set up for this. You can talk longer than just about any other activity that you can do without becoming exhausted. I'm the living proof of it. A very small amount of energy is required to keep the old tongue and lips going with the air moving out. Imagine if we had to communicate as deaf people do, with sign language all the time. This is exhausting, nobody communicates like that for four or five hours at a stretch, and yet Castro can give a four-hour speech at the drop of a hat. So, we're set up for this. The problem is that it requires a congruence of interior dictionaries, because what happens is that my words go across space as an acoustical signal, they enter your ear, you are very rapidly looking up each word as it comes in and comparing it to your definition, and as long as we don't look too closely at this, communication seems to be happening.

I've looked at this, and there are models for this kind of verbal communication. Whenever you think you're about to take a step that nobody has taken and go a place where nobody's ever been, if you look back at mother nature you can usually find that you've been scooped. A very interesting example of this vis-à-vis language is what's going on with octopi. What we've all learned from watching these wonderful TV shows about nature is that octopi can change color; most people think it's because they're into camouflage. It isn't that at all, it's something much more profound. It's that all over the surface of octopi are these specialized cells called chromatophores, and they can change into many colors. Not only can the octopus change colors, but the ordinary rubbery, smooth surface of the octopus can be made like goosebumps, but more dramatically wrinkled, very suddenly. The other thing about an octopus is, because they're soft-bodied, when they're in water, they are very adept at folding and unfolding various parts of their body. They can reveal a part of their body and

then fold in and show another part; they're like a silk scarf. What's going on here is that octopi communicate with each other by the way they look. At first this doesn't seem so profound, but when you analyze what's happening, you realize that this is a profound evolution in the project of communication, because there is no culturally-sanctioned dictionary among octopi, and really what is happening is that the octopus wears its mind on its surface. They have a vast repertoire of dots, blushes, traveling patterns that move across their surface, and these behavioral displays indicate the internal state of the organism; literally, it wears its language on the surface of its skin. It is a syntactical creature: its behavior is its syntax.

Octopi as a whole are molluscs, they're not even vertebrates. These things split from the line of development that leads to us 700 million years ago. If you want to talk about an alien form of life, an octopus is about as far away from the human experience as you can possibly get. They evolved in shallow coastal waters, but because so many things were evolving in those shallow waters, some of them evolved into the benthic depths, and in those depths there is no light. In order to preserve their ability to communicate, over long periods of time they evolved phosphorescent chromatophores all over their body. Some octopi even have eyelid-like membranes at the surface of their skin so that they can blink very rapidly and modulate the phosphorescent light. You can imagine that in the darkness, in the benthic depths of the ocean, the communication between two octopi is just a dance of lights in utter darkness; it's naked mind in the water. When they are in communication like that they are, for all practical purposes, one organism. This is why octopi excrete ink into the water: it's so that they can have a private moment. Essentially, the octopus ink is the equivalent of correction fluid: you just have to erase, say, "I didn't mean that at all, here's what I really meant."

This is why I'm interested in virtual reality, because it seems to me that what we're trying to do is some kind of striptease of the mind. We want to get the mind naked, because if it can be made naked, we will understand each other. We are clothed in flesh, and then clothing and then class difference, race difference, age difference, income difference, but if you could see the mind naked, the commonality of human beings would be reinforced and the presence of ego among us would be diminished. Also, there's no ambiguity in visible language. It's interesting that in the Book of Revelations there is this talk about a sword which comes out of the mouth. It's describing a word which can be seen. The whole history of the evolution of the Western mind is, in a sense, the birth of the Logos. The Logos is making its way toward self-expression, and it's doing this by claiming dimension after dimension of manifestation. I think that electronic media, electronic culture, drugs, the mixing of all our world cultures together, what this is empowering is a visible Logos, a Logos that is beheld and therefore lacks ambiguity.

Mind and soul, in my estimation, tend to migrate toward each other. In the late medieval period you get a lot of talk about, "Is the spirit the same thing as the soul? And are these things the same as the intellect?" I mean, yes, we are soul, but mind is the visible manifestation of soul. That would be a

good Catholic definition because, you see, that keeps soul out of animals. If you say that mind is the visible manifestation of soul, then you have restricted the existence of soul to the human species. The mind is not a form of intelligence, the mind is the theater in which intelligence is manifested; you don't want to confuse the garage with the car. Everything goes on within the confines of mind: it's like the light that you switch on when you walk into a darkened room, and then everything else is the furniture within the room. Mind is simply the light which is shed over the landscape of appearances. This is only my definition, I'm aware of the Neoplatonic emphasis on the mind, I think they called it the *ennoia*, but in modern psychological terms, the mind is just the theater of cognition in some way. Consciousness is something which happens in the mind, there is an unconscious mind as well. Mind is the inclusive category, I think.

The hardest thing to figure out is a mirror, because what a mirror shows you is yourself, but a mirror is not yourself. A mirror is a piece of glass with silver vapor deposited on the back of it, but that's a very different thing from yourself. In the psychedelic space, you are not simply perceiving that space, you are creating it with your expectations as well. If you have strong expectations of a certain sort, that will be the character of the thing. We talked about this yesterday, about how here we have peasant *A* chopping wood, and suddenly a ripple of heat passes in the forest and a hackle-raising sense of weirdness. This guy throws down his axe and looks over his shoulder, and a light is descending from the sky. What happens next, interestingly enough, depends on the year and the place. If the year is, let's say 1000, and the place is Southern France, then the Virgin Mary will be descending from the sky. If the place is Kansas and the date is 1958, then the space people are descending from the sky. What happens is that when there is cognitive dissonance, the mind rushes forward to provide explanation. For some people it's Jesus, for somebody else it's Maitreya, so cultural expectations are inextricably woven into these strange encounter scenarios.

There was an interesting UFO theory a few years ago that I thought was kind of cute, I didn't exactly believe it. These people, Michael Persinger and Gyslaine Lafrenière, wrote a really amusing book called *Space-Time Transients and Unusual Events*. One of the things they came up with was that along earthquake faults you get the grinding of enormous masses of rock together, and if these rock masses have a high percentage of quartz in them, you can get what is called piezoelectric phenomena. Piezoelectricity is simply a peculiar form of static electricity, but what it would do is that it would create ball lightning in the sky which would follow these stress lines in the earth. There is a connection, not understood, between earthquakes and the appearance of UFOs. One of the interesting things that Persinger discovered about piezoelectricity is that if you, in the laboratory, build piezoelectric generators that generate fields of enormous strength, then as a person is exposed to these things, they actually mess with your mind. People become more and more confused, uneasy and ultimately panic-stricken in the presence of these piezoelectric fields. Once you pass the panic moment, your mind is going to start telling you what's happening. It's going to say, "You're having an encounter, something weird is going on,"

and then out of the unconscious comes the projection: the flying saucer, the Virgin Mary, the elf invasion, the manifestation of Maitreya. Mind goes to meet the unknown, but not without a hell of a lot of baggage of its own which it immediately tries to unpack and put into the drawers of the Other as soon as it arrives. The mind is not intelligence, it's not the soul, it's sort of the theater in which all these other things take their place.

I think there's one transcendental object that exerts attraction wherever it can. What evolution seeks to do is to stop itself. Every organism wants to evolve into what's called a climaxed ecosystem: that's where everybody has their chair and nobody moves, so there are no empty chairs. Where you get evolution is where you have a room half full of empty chairs; then you have a choice of where to sit. Most animal species and plant species are not evolving or are evolving very slowly. Evolution tends to dead end itself. Take cockroaches, for example; cockroaches achieved their present evolutionary status 200 million years ago. They haven't changed an iota. We can dig up fossils from the Pennsylvania coal beds that have cockroaches no different than the ones running around in your apartment. This has clearly been a very successful strategy for cockroaches if the only thing that matters is the propagation of more cockroaches. Nevertheless, their cultural accomplishments have been dismal.

It's thought by the straightest people in the biz that before human beings, the major force creating evolutionary opportunity were rivers. This happens because the course of rivers will vary over time, and that means that rivers expose and inundate a lot of land. Along rivers you find unclaimed territory, sandbars and large areas where nothing grows. Into those kinds of areas what are called volunteer species, or invader species, can make their way, and these invader species evolve very rapidly. For instance, in a climaxed tropical rainforest what you find are enormous trees and vines, and then the epiphytes and stuff that grow on them, but these trees may flower once every twenty years or so and when they do flower they often produce a very limited amount of fruit. What you find along rivers and places like that are what we call weeds. A weed is a plant that is annual, it flowers every year, and that produces an enormous amount of seeds. A weed strategy is a strategy for the rapid invasion and claiming of empty land, and before human beings, rivers were the major creators of empty land. Carl Sauer, who was a biologist and a geographer, said, "Man found the earth a climaxed rainforest and he will leave it a weedy lot." What that means is that we create so much waste land that these annual, heavy-seeding, rapacious plants are replacing the products of climaxed evolution, which are enormous trees and vines and that sort of thing.

I have a lot of respect for most of Jacques Vallée's work. I thought that book *Messengers of Deception* was so off the track that I actually went to a book signing of his and leafleted the crowd with an attack on it; that shows you what a nut I am. For those who don't know, Jacques Vallée had a very interesting approach to understanding flying saucers, and I still think this is the best method. His argument went something like this: it's not productive to ask where the flying saucers come from or what they want; he said the way to understanding flying saucers is to analyze their effect. If you can analyze their

effect, that's what they're doing, that's what they want to achieve. So, what are flying saucers doing? What they are doing is that they are causing vast numbers of people to doubt science. If you analyze what the effect since 1948 of the flying saucers is, it's that they have caused millions of ordinary people to think that scientists don't know what they're talking about. It offers a new alternative. Here's an interesting analogy, it's Jacques Vallée's. We've been talking so much today about the late Roman Empire; here's another take on the late Roman Empire. The Roman Empire was this immensely successful civilization in that it was able to export its vision of an imperial center over vast parts of the world. The problem with the Roman Empire was that it was an ethical disaster. First of all, it ran entirely on the backs of slaves, so anybody who starts talking to you about the grandeur that was Rome should be reminded that it was a bargain basement on three floors masquerading as a military brothel. It was not a great civilization.

What happened to Rome? Well, they had all these people inside the empire, among them Jews, and over there in Jerusalem, a long way from Rome where communication was difficult, this story got loose among the Jews. From the point of view of the Roman Imperium, the Jews were a barbarian people. They were Semites, they had some strange religion. They were looked upon, in other words, as primitives. If you were to have sat down to have dinner with a typical Roman bureaucrat of the Imperium, you would discover that the table talk would be all about Democritean atomism, Epicureanism, Stoicism and Skepticism. In other words, they were thoroughly modern people, and they thought they had very advanced bullshit detectors. So it comes to the attention of this Roman noble that the house slaves, the kitchen boys and the gardeners are all whispering and all excited about some Galilean magician who is running around the Eastern Mediterranean, telling people that not only can he rise from the dead, but so can you. A Roman sophisticate looking at this would say, "These primitive, uneducated, colored people that we have to put up with, why don't these people step out of their own private Idaho and get with the program and study a little Greek philosophy? They're just superstitious."

Well, in a world where information moved no faster than a horse could gallop, within a century these uneducated, superstitious people and their irrational religion of magical redemption were hammering at the gates of Rome. A century after that, the emperor himself, a god for political purposes, has to make Christianity the official religion of the Empire. What happened was that political, technological and architectural accomplishments got way out in front of ethics, and at that point the unconscious said, "I'm going to pull the rug out from under these Roman dominator types. I'm going to unleash a religious system in their very midst that will be an informational virus. They'll be dead before they ever know what hit them." This is what Christianity is. It was a religion of the displaced underclasses of the empire, and within 300 years it took over and began its own pogroms and genocidal programs of extermination. The flying saucer is a similar thing. We have achieved great things in technology, in social organization and scientific research, but like the late Roman Empire, ethics and morality have lagged far behind, and so now the same unconscious that sent us

the mystery of the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection sends us the flying saucers. The flying saucers are destroying the faith in the scientific control systems and managerial theories at the very center of our civilization just as surely as the Roman Imperium was broken by this superstitious religion.

There is a force in this world — call it the unconscious, call it the cosmic giggle, call it whatever you want — but when a society gets all twisted and out of balance, it can pull it down in a hurry. I think the psychedelic thing in the '60s was viewed this way. The dominator society is incredibly fragile. Whenever you see somebody who has to pile up guns, it means they're not terribly confident of their ability to keep control of the scene, and we have so many kinds of guns pointed at us: propaganda, social engineering, manipulation of the media. They do it all to us and they still can barely keep ahead of it. They hate the spread of unreason, they hate psychedelic drugs, hell, they don't even like people to work up a sweat on the dance floor. Anything other than ladylike and gentlemanlike parlour-oriented English upper-class behavior completely drives them into a swivet, and yet they launch horror upon the world that makes anything the Roman Imperium undertook look like child's play. This stunt they pulled with Iraq, they don't even count the dead when they get pissed off. That's why I think this Archaic Revival is in full throttle right now. I think the dominator model is doomed, and all the things that are coming forward — the assertiveness of racial minorities, of sexual and intellectual minorities — people are just saying, "We're not going to take it anymore. Don't tell us what to believe, don't tell us what drugs to take and what's politically correct, because your record is a nightmare."

This general discontent spreading through society is keeping a lot of these dominator types up late at night trying to figure out what's going on. Can you imagine being in charge of the planet? Suppose you were the CEO of General Motors: every piece of data that crosses your desk says that you're in trouble, big trouble. I'm saying they're coming from another dimension of some sort that actually has a plan for the human race that is larger than the plan of the people who seek to run this society. Their plan is, "Let's keep everything as much the same as possible." Since World War II, they have been at war with the future. They do not want to let the future happen. Of course, the future is building up like a logjam in a river, and what it means is that when the future finally tears loose and overwhelms these structures that they have built, it's going to be more dramatic, more sudden and more violent than they could have ever dreamed of or imagined. They're forcing the evolution of language. The real cataclysmic future does not lie in the propagation of the errors of industrial materialism. The real transformation of the future is built into the rocks, the ocean, the animals; it's not coming from human beings. The people who think they're running the world are dreaming. I'm completely convinced that no one is in control and that this is very good news. Nobody is in control, not the Communist Party, the Vatican, the World Bank. There may be groups who dream of controlling, but their frustration level must be approaching infinity at this point.

The way to steer the Hermetic question toward the UFO question is to look

at this concept of the philosopher's stone. Alchemy arises out of Hermeticism. Hermeticism is the philosophy that stands behind alchemy, which is the work-bench activity of this magical system. The philosopher's stone is a concept of a universal medicine that cures all diseases, that confers immortality, that brings happiness and understanding, but it's more than that: it's everything you want it to be. The flying saucer is this same idea. The best book ever written on flying saucers was written just a couple years after the first flying saucers were seen. It's by Carl Jung and it's called *Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Sky*. He talks there about how the human mind has an appetite for what are called "totality symbols." The human mind is always trying to complete itself, to fix itself in some way. Mandalas and certain kinds of symbols have the quality of indicating that this completion is underway.

In the 15th and 16th century, before the rise of modern science, people didn't know what matter really was, they didn't really know what was possible with matter. They would get glass flasks and combine horse manure and blood, and they would cook it for weeks and weeks and they would observe color changes. They did not have the kind of very fixed notion of the separation between mind and matter that we have, because we have been trained to see mind and matter as tremendously separate categories. So these alchemists, working often day and night in remote areas on bad food, ergot-infested bread and what have you, eventually they began to enter into a kind of waking hallucination with their alchemical activity. What you have in these glass retorts, presumably, are swirling chemical mixes, but the alchemist looking at these things didn't clearly distinguish between what is going on in the alembic, the alchemical vessel, and what was going on in their own imagination. The two categories weren't separate. So Jung noticed that these descriptions of alchemical procedures are not to be taken seriously as real recipes: they are descriptions of psychic processes leading toward individuation.

In a sense, the flying saucer is nothing more than a modern rebirth of the philosopher's stone. The flying saucer is the universal panacea at the end of time. It's the thing which cannot exist but which does exist, and which, if we could obtain it, everything would be different. We've swapped out elementals for aliens and we've swapped out the philosopher's stone for the flying saucer. Nevertheless, if we were to obtain the flying saucer, it would be the equivalent of these 16th century people obtaining the philosopher's stone. We are so bound in to the concept of the fixity of matter and its separateness from us as a mental category that we rarely exercise our imagination in the way that these early people did. For us, everything stands still. A mental exercise you should do for yourself sometime: imagine that you had a material that could do anything. This is what the philosopher's stone is, it's a material object and it can do anything. What do I mean by anything? Well, if you needed to go somewhere you could take this material, stretch it out and then sit on it, and it would fly. If you were hungry, you could eat it. If you needed to take a shower, you could stretch it a certain way and hold it above your head and water would pour out of it. If you needed a piece of information, you could just address it and ask like a visual telephone. We have created the philosopher's stone in the diffuse



form of technology. We can do everything I just described — fly, talk to people at great distances, eat synthetic food and so on — but we have solved each problem separately.

In a way, the computer is an interesting leap toward the philosopher's stone, because if you analyze what a computer is, it's a machine which can do anything. You have to tell it what you want it to be. If you want it to balance your checking account, it can do that. If you want it to predict the weather, it can do that. If you want to play a game with it, it can do that. It's mind boggling to realize that anything that you can conceive of, the computer can simulate. The computer is the first in a long line of omnipurpose machines. We're going to move into a world where you don't have a telephone to call your friend, a fork to spear your meat and a comb to tease your locks: you have one thing, and this one thing does whatever you need to have done. Technology is beginning to concreate, and it will be of course be a kind of computer, but it will be voice-programmable to do anything. Well, this is a very Hermetic ideal. We are migrating toward this kind of a fusion of possibilities. This is the secret of how to dematerialize culture: make machines which can do more than one thing. Make machines which can do thousands of things, but always return to being a little ball or a little box.

Newton is an interesting figure, because Newton is the great father of modern science, he was the one who figured out that the calculus was a tool for solving a kind of multivariable problem that up until the invention of the calculus, nobody had a clue. Modern science runs almost entirely on the calculus and the various techniques that have been derived out of it, like partial differential equations and that kind of thing, but Newton himself was a man with a foot in two worlds. He was a thoroughgoing occultist, his alchemical experiments and notebooks were voluminous, and yet he was one of the founding members of the Royal Society. The Royal Society was really the first think tank, it was a very modern institution. In the character of Newton we see the magical mentality and the modern mentality welded into one individual. There are other cases like this. Michael Maier was the greatest alchemist of his age and he was implicated in the Rosicrucian Enlightenment. There were a group of people around Frederick the Elector Palatine of Bohemia who wanted to establish a Protestant alchemical kingdom in Europe in the early 17th century, around 1619, and Maier was part of this group. They contrived to get this guy, Frederick the Elector Palatine of Bohemia, named emperor, because at that time the princes of the Hanseatic League chose the emperor, and they were actually able to do this; but then when word got back to the Hapsburgs in Spain, they raised an army and destroyed this alchemical revolution. If you're interested, read Frances Yates' book *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*.

This Hapsburg army which laid siege to Prague in the summer of 1620 and then destroyed this alchemical possibility; there was in that army a 21-year-old soldier who was soldiering and wenching his way across Europe, which was something gentlemen did in those days, and his name was René Descartes. After the fall of Prague, in early August of 1620 this Hapsburg army retreated across southern Germany toward Spain and they pitched their tents at Olm,

which, strangely enough, would be the birthplace of Einstein some centuries later. Descartes was not the mature philosopher of science that we know, he was just some punk mercenary getting his first taste of life, and that night he had a dream. In the dream, an angel appeared to him, and the angel said, "The conquest of nature is to be achieved through measure and number." Descartes awoke from this dream and he founded scientific materialism. He founded modern science based on the revelation of an angel. Science was founded by an angel. There are many instances in the history of science where these kinds of things have gone on.

The overarching theme here, the thing which serves to connect all this together; we've been talking today about alchemy and Hermeticism, it's an episode in Western history, a protoscientific movement. We were talking yesterday about how time is moving inevitably toward the production of some kind of transcendent object, or the coming into awareness of a kind of transcendent object. Well, the connection between these two notions is the idea that history itself is a kind of alchemical process. The idea that lies behind alchemy is that the alchemist can somehow step in as nature's helper and cause natural processes to occur very quickly. The belief in medieval Europe concerning precious metals was that these things actually grew in the earth, and in a sense they do: they accrete very slowly over time. The idea that lies behind alchemy is that if you could speed time up, the processes which require millions of years in the earth could perhaps be achieved in years or months. The goal of alchemy was the production of the philosopher's stone, this transcendental material, the universal panacea. What I've been saying here in all these lectures is that the goal of human history is the same thing. Therefore, human history is an alchemical process of some sort.

Human history is the story of the descent of spirit into matter or the ascent of matter into the domain of spirit, and the speeding up quality of it is what we bring to it. History is the catalyst of nature. This metaphor casts us in the role of elemental tykes. In the great alchemy of the redemption of the world we are the elementals, and we are causing a process to take place which will accelerate the emergence of the end state before it might ordinarily have happened. The idea is that history itself is an invoking and a moving toward a fusion with this alchemical mystery, which is, then, a *coincidentia oppositorum*. The words used to describe the alchemical goal can be used to describe the historical goal. The historical goal is then legitimately describable as *coincidentia oppositorum*, union of opposites, universal panacea, the diamond body. All of these alchemical metaphors of completion are metaphors which, if we would but awaken to the spiritual dynamics of history, we could enunciate as a goal. Imagine if the stated goal of global society were to produce a universal panacea. That means peace of mind for everybody, health and happiness for everybody. It's weird: millenarian or eschatological thinking has remained with us, even though ideological styles have changed. Marxism is a thoroughgoing millenarian cult. The withering away of the state is no less metaphysical a concept than the universal panacea at the end of time, and I daresay a good deal less likely. So we may have transcended Christian eschatological dreams, but we still are infected with utopian aspirations. Secular utopianism has never been more strong, it's just

that it's now couched in the terms of Christian democrats, or something like that. If we could raise to consciousness our alchemical heritage and our heritage in the shamanism of the archaic, then we could actually see that the purpose of technology is to liberate, not to enslave, and somehow we've lost the thread.