

Altered States of Consciousness and New Horizons of the Sacred*

Philipp Tagirov

Department of Social Philosophy
Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN)
Moscow, Russia
E-mail: tagirov-fv@rudn.ru

Through psychedelics we are learning that God is not an idea, God is a lost continent in the human mind.

*Terence McKenna, Food of the gods
we're so poor we can't even pay attention*

Kmfdm, Dogma

Abstract—The article studies the complex and rather equivocal discourse set around the altered states of consciousness and so-called “emerging scientific paradigm” which claims to return to human existence a certain supreme transcendental meaning that could help rebuilding a universal symbolic space, and thus return a man himself to the sacred reality. The psychedelic trend unites concepts and approaches that differ significantly from each other both in their degree of proximity to academic science and in their conclusions regarding the dominant mental paradigm. However, representatives of this trend, despite all the differences, stand together for that the so-called altered states of consciousness are the key to comprehending the cosmic reality of the sacred. The technique for achieving these states varies from the use of semi-legal and illegal psychoactive substances (A. Huxley, T. McKenna, T. Leary) to yogic breathing practices (S. Grof) what makes the studied discourse evidently ambiguous.

Keywords—*altered states of consciousness; anthropology; dominator cultures; ecological thinking; human evolution; nature; partnership cultures; the sacred; transcendence*

I. INTRODUCTION

Raising the question of the forms of sacral discourse adequate to the modern cultural order, we should ask: are there any new models of deterritorialization in the field of the divine that are accessible to a person of a non-traditional society?

A number of discursive models claim to directly inherit religious or mystical tradition. Whether the real continuity of tradition is carried out in them or not, on the external level they try not to differ from the typical traditional ones. When we talk about new models of the deterritorialization of man in the field of the divine, we are in search of new masks, which the sacred puts on today. No longer seeing the sacral behind its traditional masks but still longing for it, a man

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goes through the greatest existential intensities of modernity — and we follow him. Violence in the name of the sacred, being one of such intensities, is based on the making the Radical other (the Monstrous other) of another human being [1], thus demonizing the opponent [2]. The current study addresses different kind of intensities when a person striving for the Radical other (the Divine other) radically transforms himself. And radically transforms our usual ideas about human being.

The American 1960s are known as the “golden 60s”, like The Golden Age. Their other name is “psychedelic 60s”. And this name is inextricably linked with the psychedelic culture due to the discovery and wide spread of LSD and other artificial hallucinogens, a volcanic eruption of interest in the plants used in shamanic techniques (a natural source of psychoactive substances), as well as unprecedented experimentation with the so-called altered states of consciousness .

The general cultural situation, the flourishing of the hippie movement, its focus on love and naturalness, sexual and spiritual emancipation proved to be fertile ground and perhaps the most appropriate mental basis for the blossoming of psychedelic culture. For its part, the culture of altered states of consciousness could not fail to enrich the culture as a whole, endowing it with altered states of itself. The mass enthusiasm for techniques of expanding the boundaries of consciousness led to the expansion of the social practices, and the mass loosening of the rigid hierarchical superego dictatorship over other areas of the psyche led to loosening of cultural stereotypes.

II. THE END OF “THE GOLDEN AGE” AND THE BEGINNING OF THE NEW ANTHROPOLOGICAL REVISION

The political animal, *zoon politikon* as Aristotle called man, is undergoing a new incarnation today. The political machine acts as a modern incarnation of a political animal.

The overwhelming presence of machines, their purposeful functioning requires the order of a different nature than the one of a political animal. The man himself, while remaining a biological being at the level of his natural basis, has never been *only a* political animal, but also a willing, dreaming and transcending animal. And if “being a political animal” can be expressed through the language of functions, *these* essential characteristics of a person never fit entirely the framework of functionalism. The “emancipation” of the 60s was, first of all, rebelled against the established order of political machines, disrupting this order, abducting a person from a function, averting him from the machine itself. However, the order of political machines triumphed. As it usually happens at the time of the crisis of the social system, the way out was found in the consolidation of society around the violence committed against the Monstrous other and protection of its God. *Violence in the name of the sacred* (or secular pseudo-sacred principles and ideals), carried out in Vietnam, put an end to the era of hippies and psychedelics. The artificial Paradise of expanded consciousness was, through a complex operation of its narrowing and editing, turned into “hell on earth”, psychedelic drugs were banned even for scientific research, and at the market of illegal substances psychedelics and hallucinogens were ousted by such strong drugs as cocaine, heroin and crack cocaine. And all this was carried through despite the fact that, according to a number of specialists, the belonging of psychedelics and hallucinogens to narcotic substances and their detrimental effects on human health have not been adequately proven.

However, despite the legal persecution and cultural condemnation of psychedelics, the 60s did not pass without a trace not only for modern culture, but also for science influencing the formation and development of such “frontier” scientific disciplines as exo- and ethnobotany, ethnomedicine, psychopharmacology, transpersonal psychology, and so on.

As we may know, Stanislav Grof introduces the term *holotropic* for a certain category of unusual states of consciousness, achieved, in particular, with the help of psychedelic drugs. He implied that in these states of consciousness “we can transcend the narrow boundaries of the body ego and reclaim our full identity” [3], to achieve “the Self”, speaking in terms of Carl Gustav Jung. Holotropic states of consciousness are, in fact, the gateway to what traditional religions and metaphysicians call *the divine* or *the cosmic*. The “transpersonal paradigm” proposed by Grof contributes the coming “macroshift” from Logos to Holos as Ervin Lazlo [4] put it. The new concept of the reality states that “the world is more like a big thought than like a big rock” [5]. “We are seeing the emergence of a new image of the psyche, and with it an extraordinary worldview that combines breakthroughs at the cutting edge of science with the wisdom of the most ancient societies” [6]. However, mainstream science, as Grof notes, remains especially conservative and ... conformist. What does the “conformist science” adapt to? According to Terence McKenna, it conforms to the existing mental order, the dominant paradigm of cognition, knowledge and consciousness.

“Psychedelic 60s”, in his opinion, were not just an accidental phenomenon, an erroneous surge, a side son in a tree of history. The “psychedelic 60s” were an unusually broad breakthrough of the archaic, more archaic than even the ancient traditions, the opportunity to return to the origins of the human and find the lost harmony with the world. Based on his research, as well as materials developed by his colleagues, or rather “comrades-in-arms”, and also on the rich visionary experience of representatives of different cultures and professions (from scientists to shamans), including his own experience, relying on the existing traditions of shamanism and analysis its role in cultures that have not yet forgotten it, McKenna forms his “radical” view of human evolution. Is it necessary to add that in his vision the evolution of man is closely linked with substances that contribute to the expansion of human consciousness? Before the advent of artificial psychedelics, they were successfully preceded by the ones of the plant world (in particular, mushrooms) accompanying humanity, according to McKenna, from the earliest days of its existence. His study is dedicated to the “search for the original Tree of Knowledge” and is defined by him as “*a radical history of plants, psychoactive substances and human evolution*” [7].

III. NEW ECOLOGICAL THINKING, AND THE WAY PSYCHOACTIVE PARTNERS OF MAN HELP RE-WRITE THE HISTORY OF HUMAN EVOLUTION

The universe, according to McKenna, is not blind and it doesn't confront us. Materialistic philosophy put physics ahead of biology: organics evolve from non-organic world, organisms are more complex form of material organization but their very existence is founded in the world of physical principles. McKenna suggests that we should reconsider ourselves not as material elements but as processes too. He sees nature as “process of processes, and processes within processes” [8] and supposed that the original natural reality is a kind of primary organism. “Biology is concerned with the larger processes that are organisms, whereas physics concerns the smaller processes, which are likewise organisms, in that they experience a reference to things past, immediate, and future,” [9] — he writes. If the process of processes is organic than it seems to have its teleology and so does consequently any of smaller processes. Moreover McKenna believes that the primary organism possesses an internal horizon of self-awareness the same way we, being the smaller processes, are capable of knowing themselves.

In the beginning of human evolution man acted as a partner to the transcendence of nature. “With the appearance of man, transcendence awakened to itself and henceforth accompanies his doings with the bated breath of suspense, hoping and beckoning, rejoicing and grieving, approving and frowning – and, I daresay, making itself felt to him” [10]. Modern cultures, called the *dominator* cultures by McKenna, have replaced the *partnership* cultures of the archaic man. By domination he means a special cultural style, based on, above all, the broken harmony between man and the Earth and also between man and man. Partnership cultures extinguished when man lost not only mystical, but also chemical and biological connection with the planet,

including communication through *food*, and when man and the planet, personified by McKenna in Greek way as Gaia, stopped acted as *partners*.

The role of psychoactive plants as human satellite partners, according to McKenna and his co-workers, was in providing man, who lived in dynamic harmony with psychedelic plants, with a kind of “plant gnosis”. We must note that while contemporary epistemological theories tend to see knowledge as a structure self-organizing from chaos [11] McKenna seeks to return the cosmic foundation to the theory of cognition. Moreover, it was thanks to our plant “partners” that we became who we are, having made an unprecedented evolutionary leap. Plant mediation in some way allows McKenna to link Darwinian idea of natural selection with shamanism and mysticism. Partnership with psychoactive plants gave the tribes that participated in it a distinct advantage over the rest. Firstly, the eyesight has sharpened, and the invention of such “chemical binoculars”, as McKenna calls it, was important for hunting and gathering. Secondly, aphrodisiac substances stimulated the growth of a tribe’s population, and, besides, the sequencing of sexual activity according to certain natural cycles, for example, the lunar cycles of mushrooms growing, may be considered as the first important step on the way to ritual and religion. And, thirdly, and maybe most significantly, psychedelic plants contributed to enriching the experience with completely different intensities than any ordinary experience (“a rapture whose breadth and depth is the despair of prose” [12]), the *development of language*, the expansion of horizons of consciousness, the discovery of the *sphere of the spiritual*, transcending practices and the acquaintance with what was later called the *Divine*.

The plant hallucinogens, as McKenna assumes, transferred the knowledge of *superhuman* nature to the *human* beings, attaching them to the harmonious living system of the planet. The Transcendent Other, known to the believer as God, to the traditional metaphysicist as the First Principle of Being and to the existentialist as Nothing, is for the first time encountered by man, according to the American researcher, in the experience of psychedelic intoxication. Being the Transcendent Other, it still does not acquire the status of *the Radical Other*, since its very transcendence is being regularly overcome by human beings that transcend their here-and-now existence. “From one point of view the Transcendent Other Is Nature correctly perceived to be alive and intelligent,” McKenna writes about this. “From another it is the awesomely unfamiliar union of all the senses with memory of the past and anticipation of the future. The Transcendent Other is what one encounters on powerful hallucinogens. It is the crucible of the Mystery of our being, both as a species and as individuals. The Transcendent Other is nature without her cheerfully reassuring mask of ordinary space, time, and causality” [13].

The thrill of experiencing unity with the Transcendent Other gave us harmony, never achieved afterwards, harmony, which we post-factum called “paradise”. The loss of this harmony lies at the heart of that “nostalgia for paradise”, longing known to almost any culture... Today, people become more and more convinced, and McKenna is an

example, that they were banished from Paradise not at all for encroaching on the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge, but for the very wish to “have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth” (Genesis: 1: 26 ESV). The right to *dominate*, which the Bible attributes to man as a God-given, is reinforced by modern time technical rationality and pragmatic priorities fortifying the supra-natural, dominant position of man, albeit cursed, but nonetheless the only one created *in image and likeness* and endowed with *soul*. “Paradise”, contact with the transcendent was lost, when humanity passed on from the “partnership culture” to the “dominator culture”, dominating over nature and, later, over consciousness.

Gradually, mankind loses its connection with natural gnosis, its history is now spun as a history of oblivion of the paradisiac harmony, that had been given to man in a single union of the spiritual and the physical. The growing of human kind as psychedelic specie is interrupted; there remains only anguish, a painful vacuum that cannot be filled with any forms of domination.

The East turned out to be in a better position due to the greater traditionalism of its cultures, which did not make harsh breaks with the archaic past, but remain more rooted in it than The West. “Repressive episodes in the evolution of Western thought effectively closed the door on communication with the Gaian mind. Hierarchically imposed religion and, later, hierarchically dispensed scientific knowledge were substituted for any sort of direct experience of the mind behind nature [...],” writes McKenna, “Yet even the West has retained the thin thread of remembrance of the Archaic, hierophantic, and ecstatic potential that certain plants hold” [14]. These memories spawned periodic bursts of interest in instruments capable of causing altered states of consciousness, which marked the entire history of European civilization. The 60s were the last burst of such kind that humanity experienced, and in terms of its potential — the extraordinary one, capable, according to McKenna, to overturn the whole general trend of the modern world. However, no overturning happened.

The modern world, built on the dominator culture, created a new catechesis developing our contemporary attitude to the psychoactive substances step by step, and these steps are: *Habit, Obsession, Addiction*. However, contrary to our ordinary understanding, McKenna adds that “these words are signposts along a path of ever-decreasing free will [...] with the notion of addiction as disease, the role of free will is finally reduced to the vanishing point” [15]. The world protects itself from what, as mentioned above, can debunk it, giving rise to a completely different kind of sociality, not so much political, but perhaps “ecological”, planetary. At the same time, “analysis of the existential incompleteness within us that drives us to form relationships of dependency and addiction with plants and drugs will show that at the dawn of history, we lost something precious, the absence of which has made us ill with narcissism” [16].

It is amazingly noticeable how today the search for the sacred, the search for genuine being, is intertwined with ecological consciousness. Today, when all forms of our existence are under the sign of an ecological questioning, is it purely accidentally that the sacred wear a mask of planetary natural gnosis in the era of understanding of a long list of our problems as global ones (though globalization project can be also built on the “replacement of organic cosmos horizon” [17], and that includes the questions of our environmental existence?

IV. TELEVISION AND OTHER “STRONG SYNTHETIC DRUGS” AT SERVICE OF MECHANIZING CULTURE

However, the search for the human self in this direction, the search for new forms of the sacred in psychedelic horizon that can violate the status quo of the modern system expectedly meets with such a fiercely working machine for “discrediting” and “substituting” (as McKenna believes), that the very putting of such a question seems at least irresponsible. And all this is despite the fact that our civilization has long since developed its own mechanisms, material and not only, that makes a person dependent, and, moreover, every now and then harms his body, his soul or his spirit – being narcotic. Among the agents of dependence embodied in the material elements of our everyday life, McKenna marks out such things as sugar, coffee, chocolate, tobacco, etc. And, speaking of synthetic drugs, also called strong drugs, he unhesitatingly puts electronic “drugs”, in particular television, on the same board with heroin and crack cocaine.

The issue of television addiction was raised more than once, as well as the “younger” problem of computer and Internet addiction. However, it is not only a phenomenon of addiction and destructive effects on human health that worries the prophet of “natural gnosis”: “Most unsettling of all is this: the content of television is not a vision but a manufactured data stream that can be sanitized to “protect” or impose cultural values. Thus we are confronted with an addictive and all-pervasive drug that delivers an experience whose message is whatever those who deal the drug wish it to be. Could anything provide a more fertile ground for fostering fascism and totalitarianism than this? In the United States, there are many more televisions than households, the average television set is on six hours a day, and the average person watches more than five hours a day — nearly one-third their waking time. [...] no drug in history has so quickly or completely isolated the entire culture of its users from contact with reality. And no drug in history has so completely succeeded in remaking in its own image the values of the culture that it has infected” [18].

To such narcotics, which structure human needs and human consciousness in accordance with the will of the sociopolitical order, the words of Baudrillard, not deprived of logic in another context, are no longer applicable: “all melodramatics aside, what exactly do they protect us from, from what even worse scourge do they offer us an avenue of escape? (Could it be the brutalizing effects of rationality, normative socialization and universal conditioning?)” [19]. On the contrary, these drugs themselves are agents of

programming and conditioning and hidden, and sometimes still so obvious, unification.

We can continue talking about many other cultural forms, synthesized in such a way that a person no longer imagines his or her existence in isolation from them. Obviously, being unable to close the gap in human existence (perhaps no one has yet succeeded), the rift through which he vents his longing for authenticity into oblivion, modern civilization first tries to satisfy genuine passion with surrogate substitutes, and then stimulates simulated needs, the art of satisfaction of which it masters more and more. Gradually existential, but almost unsatisfied, needs are supplanted by artificial, but guaranteed to be satisfactory, and the person increasingly begins to resemble a mechanized, castrated model of himself, his own simulacrum. The clones do not march out of the laboratory — they elusively and still unstopably march in the endless waves of secondary socialization.

On the one hand, man is a cultured fruit, a cultural being. On the other hand, the culture itself may be different. And it is far from always that it should abolish Nature, and not merge with it. “Our culture, self-toxified by the poisonous by-products of technology and egocentric ideology,” writes McKenna, “is the unhappy inheritor of the dominator attitude that alteration of consciousness by the use of plants or substances is somehow wrong, onanistic, and perversely antisocial. [...] [The] suppression of shamanic gnosis, with its reliance and insistence on ecstatic dissolution of the ego, has robbed us of life's meaning and made us enemies of the planet, of ourselves, and our grandchildren” [20].

The ghostly chance to return to the psychedelic transcendental (60s) was missed, but the American author and his associates do not lose hope to convey to modern man knowledge of his true nature and true existence, and thus lay the foundations for the subsequent human's ascending to a higher level of being, being in the world of the infinite.

V. DISCOURSE OF ALTERED STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS AS A CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL PHENOMENON

The true nature of man, his true existence ... How many truths, the last and the only ones, the ones for all times the man has already had, yet how many ultimate truths still awaits his worship? But regardless of the fidelity or fallacy of the approach presented here by Terence McKenna, what's important for us is the vector where today man lets the arrow of anguish and under what masks he is looking for the highest justification for his existence. And the search for this justification in the field of altered states of consciousness as a sign is very indicative. On the one hand, the whole order of modern culture increasingly multiplies reality, making it more complex than it was typical even for a religious worldview. Let us not now remind once more what a person may possibly sacrifice, gaining a multiplicity of “realities” in exchange for a single one, we'll still have to ask ourselves this question, which is but not an unequivocal one, in future. At the same time, turning to altered states of consciousness is a reaction to the current order of things, appearing not only as a search for truth, but also as a protest, a revolt against the dominant cultural paradigm. Without a rebellion and the

assertion of one's own independence, without the clearing of a symbolic and political field, no search for a "new" truth will succeed, at least because of the opposition of the "truths" already found and dominant ontological and epistemological models. Karl Gustav Jung, who, in fact, is not recognized by conservative classical psychoanalysis, writes that "We must therefore look in the obscurest corners and summon up courage to shock the prejudices of our age if we want to broaden the basis of our understanding of nature. When Galileo discovered the moons of Jupiter with his telescope he immediately came into head-on collision with the prejudices of his learned contemporaries. Nobody knew what a telescope was and what it could do. Never before had anyone talked of the moons of Jupiter. Naturally every age thinks that all ages before it were prejudiced, and today we think this more than ever and are just as wrong as all previous ages that thought so. How often have we not seen the truth condemned! It is sad but unfortunately true that man learns nothing from history. This melancholy fact will present us with the greatest difficulties as soon as we set about collecting empirical material that would throw a little light on this dark subject, for we shall be quite certain to find it where all the authorities have assured us that nothing is to be found" [21].

However, if we look closely, it is not a young and immature truth that, in spite of all the convictions of today's scientific picture, is clothed in the clothes of the "new" truth.

Speaking of the other shore, for which man sends an arrow of longing (as Nietzsche put it) today, we should not ignore the increased attention that numerous studies throughout the twentieth century, have devoted to the connection of religious practice in various cultures with unusual states of consciousness. Most likely, we have reason to define this research interest as a certain significant tendency and as something greater than just idle curiosity.

This interest isn't drying up. David Armstrong's book, "Alcohol and Altered States in Ancestor veneration Rituals of Zhou Dynasty China and Iron Age Palestine. A New Approach to Ancestor Rituals" [22], published in 1998, could be an example. The very name of the book is already quite representative. Studying the phenomenon of trance states caused by alcohol, which played a significant role in the religious practices of two above-mentioned cultures, Armstrong relies on research in various fields: anthropology, ethnography, sociology, archeology, theology, philosophy, psychology, physiology, chemistry, and history, which allows, according to critics, him to create a complex, rich narrative that opens the way to further research on this issue.

Ask yourself what makes a scientist on the threshold of XXI century to address a topic like that, gathering material from so many, related and not at all, disciplines, almost reviving the ancient understanding of philosophy as the queen of sciences? Is it only the insufficient development of the topic? But aren't there many other poorly illuminated moments in the history of world civilizations? Probably we can find one of the answers, starting from the fact that the author himself specializes in the field of religious studies. Titles of sections of his book eloquently describe the field of

the study: "alcohol and religion", "alcohol and religious ritual", "alcohol and gods", "alcohol and magic", "sacrifice and offering to the gods". The author tries to deduce an adequate definition of religion, taking into account the far from the last role that alcohol trance played in religious practices in the regions mentioned in the indicated historical periods. Dividing the normative and ritual use of alcohol, Armstrong draws our attention to the significance of alcohol intoxication in the phenomenon of "obsession with spirits" when a person acts as the personifier of the dead (China), as well as the ritually achievable communication that was believed to connect the living and the dead (Palestine).

Just like in Freudian attempts to reduce religion to the Oedipus complex, religion, as a not quite welcomed lady who came to court today, is rationalized with an emphasis on one or another of its components. One can say that this is the approach of the century of science, when science (calling the spirit of José Ortega y Gasset, let us say it in words) from the Science mostly became the science of the masses and for the masses, the means of spending time, self-realization and making unquestioned judgment about world, and in fact, its sentence: to reduce the phenomenon to anything, just do not listen to what it says about itself. If what it says contradicts the postulates of contemporary science.

Nevertheless, any historical study has two opposite vectors, one of which is directed back centuries, and the other one — into the future, forming it with the results obtained during the study. No wonder Armstrong speculates about the "pharmacological perspective" of alcohol. Strictly limiting the future possibilities of religious discourse, a scientific approach, however, as it seems, protects a person creating of yet another illusion (our allusion to "The Future of an Illusion" by Freud). Provided, of course, that the language of today's science is consonant with the nature of the phenomenon that it hopes to describe.

Aldous Huxley, whose one of the most important goals was to comprehend the phenomenon of perennial, or eternal, philosophy, also draws attention to the abundance of practices of the ritual use of hallucinogenic and narcotic drugs in the history of religions. He concludes that "we are therefore dealing not with exceptional facts, which might justifiably be overlooked, but with a general and, in the widest sense of the word, a human phenomenon, the kind of phenomenon which cannot be disregarded by anyone who is trying to discover what religion is, and what are the deep needs which it must satisfy" [23]. This again raises the eternal question of the nature of man and his essential needs. Together with, let's say, Mircea Eliade, who defined man as homo religiosus, Huxley emphasize religious need among human deep needs — deep, that is, not manifested everywhere, but at the same time not as easily satisfiable as surficial daily needs. In its definition, he is somewhat close to Heidegger's understanding of man as a transcending being: "The urge to transcend self-conscious selfhood is, as I have said, a principal appetite of the soul. When, for whatever reason, men and women fail to transcend themselves by means of worship, good works and spiritual exercises, they are apt to resort to religion's chemical surrogates — alcohol and "goof pills" in the modern West, alcohol and opium in

the East, hashish in the Mohammedan world, alcohol and marijuana in Central America, alcohol and coca in the Andes, alcohol and the barbiturates in the more up-to-date regions of South America" [24]. And then he concludes: "Ideally, everyone should be able to find self-transcendence in some form of pure or applied religion. In practice, it seems very unlikely that this hoped for consummation will ever be realized" [25].

At first, it seems that typically for our civilization Huxley contrasts the path of self-transcendence with the help of "worship, good works and spiritual exercises" to another path where a person had to resort to "religion's chemical surrogates". He unequivocally notes that the second way is inferior to the first, and that people turn to it without being able to transcend themselves in the framework, as we would say, of culturally acceptable forms. However, the last words in the above passage suddenly drastically change the picture, and bring some new dimension to the world of our stereotypical ideas. The "surrogates" of religion is unexpectedly equalized with the "pure" religion, with which it is postulated that there is no fundamental difference between these two phenomena. A world where each person strives to transcend himself, no matter which way he puts his steps, following religious orthopraxis or wandering through the worlds of your imagination as a psychonaut, is not a mix of truth and falsehood, but an unrealizable Huxley's dream...

From here you can draw another conclusion. It is not institutionalized religion that is thought to be the highest goal for homo religiosus. As well as it is not a drug, or another "substitute" of religion. Continuing our reasoning, we can conclude that when a person builds a temple and begins to pray for a religion substitute, he becomes an alcoholic or a drug addict, but if he prays for religion itself, he will inevitably become a fanatic or a fundamentalist. Religious fundamentalism and fanaticism are, in a certain sense, analogous to drug addiction with all the ensuing consequences — the dulling of critical abilities and critical perception, increased manipulability, categoricalness and intolerance towards the other, aggressiveness in the period of abstinence and gradual degradation of the personality. The ultimate goal, we repeat, is not religion itself or its "substitutes", but what they can open to man, those opportunities, new horizons and new worlds, which he finds — in short, where they can lead a person.

VI. ARTIFICIAL PARADISE: A LONGING FOR AUTHENTICITY OR ESCAPISM

Where does a person go, following a particular path of self-transcendence? According to Huxley, it turns out that, first of all, a person seeks to get away from this world. Using the well-known Ortega y Gasset's formula (though from a rather different point of view) "I am I and my circumstance", we say that, by transcending himself, that person first of all tries to surpass his circumstances. In this perspective, transcending oneself, whether on the path of traditional religion or on the path of various psychedelic techniques, appears, justifying numerous expectations, as one of the forms of escapism. This escape path seems to be rationalized, well-founded and justified in best traditions of Freudian

denial, rationalization and displacement as well as other psychoanalytic horror stories. Then, however, the category of escapism will inevitably cover most areas of culture that have arisen and developed due to the unquenchable thirst for transcendence. "That humanity at large will ever be able to dispense with Artificial Paradises seems very unlikely," says Huxley. "Most men and women lead lives at the worst so painful, at the best so monotonous, poor and limited that the urge to escape, the longing to transcend themselves if only for a few moments, is and has always been one of the principal appetites of the soul. Art and religion, carnivals and saturnalia, dancing and listening to oratory — all these have served, in H. G. Wells's phrase, as Doors in the Wall. And for private, far everyday use there have always been chemical intoxicants" [26]. (By the way, Huxley, as well as McKenna and other researchers of the similar kind, draws attention to the fact that today alcohol and tobacco are the only chemical "doors in the Wall" legally allowed for use.)

"Escapism" is a convenient label for all forms of human activity that go beyond practical, everyday needs. Any action based on the feeling of insufficiency of the world or society, of their essential imperfection, if it diverges from the pragmatic model, in a sense, is escapism. It is necessary not to confuse fundamentally different levels of denial or rejection of the world, the lower ones of which extend into the realm of spiritual death and oblivion, and the highest ones may lead to Creation, including the creation of the New World.

Even less the term "escapism" is applicable to those "non-practical" practices to which a person devotes himself, inspiring not by the insufficiency of his being and desperate longing, but by a feeling of his or her redundancy. I wish for more not because I lack something, but because I already have this more ... — the surplus being says.

In Huxley's attitude, which served as a beacon and guiding star for many researchers of psychedelic horizons, both from science and from art, we find not only an escapist desire to get away from the world, but also the desire and hope to finally find the world — in all its wholeness, or at least embrace the world more deeply than it is generally available to us in everyday life.

According to theorists of this discourse, what is so necessary for man is the Artificial Paradise. It's artificial — but can we correctly raise the question of its authenticity or non-authenticity? What answer do we get to this question in the era of simulacra? Was there ever a paradise of some different kind accessible to man? The history of being, Heidegger writes, begins with its oblivion. The history of man begins with his exile from Paradise. Perhaps the history of Paradise begins with the experience of artificial one — and with longing for authenticity awakened by this experience, with a strange *déjà vu* feeling, an ecstasy-born recollection of something that may never had happened. Who knows what if a man once saw God and decided that they once had been together, that he too possesses the same divine nature? And since then he has found two meanings of life: the backward hope to return to the lost paradise of

harmony with the divine and daring aspiration towards some tomorrow, when man himself becomes like gods.

Having a rich visionary experience, Huxley concludes, contrary to the basic provisions of the modern scientific paradigm, that the experiences available to man in altered states of consciousness cannot be rooted solely in the matter of the brain, i.e. the brain is not the exclusive source of our knowledge of the world. Rather, it acts as a filter that transmits only a small part of the information and rejects all other signals of the cosmic order, protecting the unprepared consciousness from overload. This more than resembles the rather common among traditional teachings statement that man in his earthly existence is not allowed to see God in all the greatness of the latter, but not because God does not want this, but because of the weakness of the mind of an ordinary person unprepared for the correct comprehension of the divine. The eye will go blind, the mind will not stand. What signals does our brain let through? It is much easier to answer this question (which Western science did all the time) than the question of truths remained beyond our perception. Throughout the history, man has tried to perceive the invisible, giving it various names. And he has kept hoping that he is pursuing not a mirage, but some reality, no less real than the ordinary one of his everyday experience, and perhaps even more real. For sometimes the invisible suddenly became partially visible (or so it seemed), and what opened up to a person, fascinated him and amazed him with its greatness. Huxley calls those, who still strive to study and comprehend the areas of our existence that are unknown to the ordinary perception, "naturalists of the mind."

Taking into account the high ambiguity and controversy of everything that is somehow connected with psychopharmacology, it should be emphasized that for the "naturalists of the mind" narcotic drugs never act as a goal, but always as a mean, like the ally from Castaneda, helping to lift the veil of ignorance. The information that the filter of our brain usually passes to consciousness is enough for our survival, but perhaps insufficient for our true existence. The veil of ignorance is probably a veil of mercy and paternal care, but isn't it time for man to grow up.

In addition, our perception is limited not only by the possible internal filter, but also external, that is social. People mostly see exactly what they have been taught to see, what was proposed as a mimetic model. And in this case, psychedelics, able, according to McKenna, to remove the cultural conditioning, could not only open the inner "a reducing valve", as Grof called it after Huxley, but also make a person more autonomous in his or her evaluations and judgments.

Is it too unbelievable that the disposition of a person towards the modern incarnation of the Transcendent Other is, as a rule, mediated by the Doors of Perception. Not by the fire of faith, not by passion, not by ritual, not by piety or even knowledge in its sacral meaning, but by how clear is the channel of our perception and how wide its gateways are open. The name of Huxley's book is highly representative and it is not by chance that William Blake's words are taken

as an epigraph to it: "If the doors of perception are cleared, all things will appear to man as it is, infinite."

VII. CONCLUSION

Summarizing the above, we note once again that although this discourse arises in the era of the "psychedelic 60s", its theorists insist on the revival of ecstasy techniques known to ancient societies. With the development of civilization and the emergence of the materialistic model of the world's vision, these techniques have been lost, and their meaning has been forgotten or distorted. The psychedelic trend often is closely related to ecological thinking. Within its framework, man is usually thought of as an inseparable part of nature, from which he has gone far away in the course of his history. Expansion of the horizons of consciousness, achieved with the help of some particular practice, according to representatives of this trend, can help a person to rediscover his true nature, which exists in harmony with the nature surrounding him. Then it is possible, for example, to build a culture of partnership with nature instead of a culture of domination over it (T. McKenna).

Nature, however, appears not only as a physical habitat, but also as an embodiment of the Transcendent other, a container of sacred meanings. It is not just sacred herself (just as the romantics have deified her), it is the keeper of vital knowledge for a person and our teacher.

Still psychedelic discourse as a whole can be characterized as extremely ambiguous, now and then balancing on the verge of marginality and transition to the countercultural domain. The line between the pursuit of the cosmic totality of existence and escapist self-excuse for addictive patterns, sometimes anti-social and illegal, blurs. One of the fundamental reasons for this substitution is that due to the general order of the values of the modern world the infinite being, as it is, is hardly able to find in the soul of man a response of sufficient motivating force to put this infinite being prior to finite things. And whatever transcendental summits he would not conquer, the researcher is obliged to lower his knowledge closer to the ground, so that the fruits of his labors can merge or grow into the body of science or the cultural body of today's world as such. The infinite being, which is totally beyond the earthly pragmatism, the earthly practices can only seduce a rare monk, poet or philosopher. However, this may not yet mean the death of religious and metaphysical discourse, the complete loss of communication channels with the highest ground or superior justification of our existence. Religious and metaphysical discourse in a relatively pure, that is extremely transcendental, form was hardly in any epoch, and in any society the blessing or damnation of but a few people. The earthly vale of man does not so easily part with its prisoner, and religious need was realized in less uncompromising forms, intermediate between hic-e-nunc earth life and heavenly truth ad aeternitatem. But at the same time, it is obvious that regular ritual practice and a general cultural orientation focused human search for the real existence on the eternal truth with a completely different degree than it is focused today. Today, the eternal truth has to serve "here and now", and the more significant the activity

of the researcher is, if he succeeds in combining spiritual search and spiritual practice, aspiring to eternity, with the practice of the earth, related to the material life of man and its worries. Actually, this would be today the probable triumph of metaphysics and the realization of the metaphysical man — in unity, in harmony between the transcendent aspirations and the immanent existence in the world into which he is thrown.

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