

On Novelty, Psychedelics, and the Evolution of Language: An Inquiry into Consciousness and Technology

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Introduction

The rapid evolution of human consciousness, culture, and technology has created a dynamic force field of novel possibilities and existential challenges. The intersection of psychedelic states, linguistic evolution, and technological innovation offers a fertile ground for profound insights. This essay explores these topics, weaving together perspectives on history, linguistics, cultural critique, and the potential futures of understanding through the lens of psychedelics, novelty theory, and technological media.

Historical Shifts in Novelty and Technology

The discourse opens by mapping pivotal moments in recent history as markers of transitional phases in human novelty and technological evolution. The fall of 1993 initiated widespread public access to the Internet, simultaneously ushering in the era of the World Wide Web. These events laid the groundwork for what would become the informational singularity of the modern age.

A personal prediction placed the apex of novelty in 1996, a year that brought two watershed moments within days of each other. First, the announcement of potential Martian microbial fossils in meteorite ALH84001 prompted U.S. presidential acknowledgment of extraterrestrial life—a rare moment of public speculation on the cosmos. Days later, the cloning of Dolly the sheep marked a decisive technological leap, signifying humanity's capacity to push the boundaries of biological replication. These moments signify not only scientific thresholds but broader cultural and ontological questions about humanity's trajectory.

In a speculative vein, future medical technologies, such as brain transplantation into rapidly aged cloned bodies, challenge traditional notions of identity and the human body. Ethical dilemmas are compounded by the role of insurance companies in dictating affordability and methods, offering a grimly absurd vision of a woman carrying her husband's brain while awaiting a regrown adult body.

Psychedelics and the Transformation of Language

Psychedelics as Linguistic Catalysts

Psychedelics profoundly interact with the linguistically active portions of the brain, reshaping the mechanics of perception and self-narration. Psilocybin and its chemical cousin DMT (N,N-Dimethyltryptamine) seem to amplify the neural processes governing language. Terrence McKenna cited Henry Munn's essay, *The Mushrooms of Language*, as foundational in understanding psilocybin's capacity to enhance linguistic creativity. Similarly, Horace Beach's doctoral research highlights how psilocybin users conceptualize auditory phenomena during their altered states.

During DMT experiences, McKenna recounts encounters with "machine elves," entities embodying syntax itself. These beings perform linguistic gymnastics, producing self-transforming objects that collapse and expand meaning into multi-dimensional puns. Such experiences challenge the boundaries of language, as the ordinary levels of meaning fracture and reassemble into hyperdimensional linguistic art.

Language as Sound Made Visible

The psychedelic state reveals a dimension of language that transcends traditional linguistic constraints. Through psychedelics like DMT and ayahuasca, participants often experience a synesthetic fusion of sound and visual meaning. Language becomes visible—a three-dimensional, surreal phenomenon where auditory utterances manifest as intricate, tangible structures within the mind. Psychedelic language thus challenges the notion that meaning resides solely in acoustic space, pushing toward understanding meaning as a visual-spatial construct.

The Evolution of Language and Consciousness

Gestural Origins of Language

McKenna proposes that language did not evolve from grunt-like utterances, as often suggested by evolutionary theory. Instead, it likely emerged from a well-established gestural syntax used by early humans, akin to the complex social grooming behaviors observed in primates. This gestural precursor to spoken language may have persisted for millions of years before auditory language emerged as a sudden innovation.

Modern studies on pre-verbal infants support this hypothesis. Infants who learn sign language demonstrate sophisticated communication abilities long before mastering spoken words, revealing that the human capacity for gestural language precedes vocalization. McKenna speculates that psychedelics may have amplified this syntactical capacity, redirecting it from physical gestures to articulated speech.

Psychedelics and the Future of Language

The unfinished project of linguistic evolution may find its continuation in psychedelic states. These altered states destabilize the ordinary function of communication, opening pathways for new forms of understanding. Psychedelics reveal the possibility of "telepathic" communication, where meaning is transmitted directly as visual or experiential impressions, bypassing the clumsy medium of verbal articulation.

Ayahuasca ceremonies frequently embody this telepathic quality. In Amazonian traditions, participants often critique the visual forms evoked by shamans' songs, describing these vibrations as intricate patterns rather than sounds. This phenomenon underscores the potential for language to evolve toward more integrated and multi-sensory mediums.

Cultural Critique: The Repressive Nature of Culture

McKenna critiques contemporary culture as a repressive force that restricts individual understanding. He draws an etymological connection between "cult" and "culture," arguing that both function as systems of control. Psychedelics decondition users from these cultural constraints, enabling radical questioning of established norms. This deconditioning makes psychedelics politically subversive, as they challenge conventional paradigms across political and ideological systems.

Technological Singularities and Artistic Futures

The Psychedelic-Aesthetic Connection

Technology, particularly in the form of virtual reality and multimedia, acts as a kind of psychedelic. By creating immersive, walkable landscapes of imagination, these technologies democratize access to altered states of consciousness. Virtual reality offers tools to externalize the subjective experience of psychedelic states, bringing the ineffable into a universally accessible domain.

As McKenna notes, the "art of the future" will have teeth, delivering direct experiential truths rather than mere representations. Psychedelics and interactive technology combine to create a powerful medium for human creativity, rendering individual imagination into tangible, shared realities.

Novelty Theory and the Fractal Nature of Evolution

Novelty theory posits that the universe operates as a fractal system accelerating toward greater complexity. This principle can be applied universally—to neurons, economies, and stars—suggesting that creativity itself mirrors the fractal nature of the cosmos. Each act of creation reenacts the archetypal "Big Bang," radiating new possibilities into existence.

The rapid acceleration of technology and culture compels us to rethink our maps of reality. In the coming decades, the pace of change may render current paradigms utterly obsolete. McKenna emphasizes abandoning the assumption of stability and embracing the transformative potential of novel processes and experiences.

Conclusion

The intersection of psychedelics, language, and technology illuminates the cutting edge of human consciousness and evolution. From the gestural origins of language to the synesthetic realms accessed through altered states, these insights challenge existing paradigms of communication, culture, and creativity. As humanity accelerates into a singularity defined by technological and psychedelic innovations, we stand on the brink of realizing unprecedented modes of collective understanding and expression. The task ahead is not to resist these transformations but to actively engage with them, shaping a future that honors novelty, imagination, and the boundless potential of the human mind.