

Music Lessons

Individual and Group Lessons
in Folk and Classical Guitar
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AVAILABLE ONLY ON EARTH YOU SAY...
PITY...

Andrew Weil,

Andrew Weil's apparently radical ideas on the use of hallucinogens, on the placebo effect and on the medical practice in general have earned him a somewhat controversial reputation. But his background as a medical doctor, a Harvard research associate and first hand observer of medical practice among many primitive cultures gives his ideas authority that cannot be denied. Author of two books, *The Natural Mind* and *The Marriage of the Sun and Moon*, Andrew Weil spoke to *Ubyssy* staffer Charles Campbell.

You've written about vomiting as a way of altering consciousness. Now at first that sounds like a very strange concept. Perhaps you could explain it and relate it to your ideas about keeping the mind and body in harmony.

I'm interested in finding a general psychological model to explain altered states of awareness. Now I don't think that we know enough about the brain to answer any really interesting questions about the brain and the mind; our knowledge is just too primitive. But I find I've moved toward a model based on a change in the relationship between the conscious and unconscious parts of the brain. I think that when people experience a high state it's because there's some sort of freer interchange between those parts of the mind.

Now vomiting is controlled by one of the most vital parts of the brain called the medulla which connects the brain and the spinal cord. There are techniques in yoga for getting control of vomiting. Now I think that by doing that you can not only acquire a practical tool that can help you get rid of headaches and allow you to purge yourself, but you can get a conscious foothold in an area of the brain that is normally considered to be involuntary.

There are people who get a high from vomiting, in fact there are people who get addicted to it. It's particularly a problem with people who have a condition called anorexia nervosa who often become completely emaciated because of their addiction to vomiting. If you talk to some of them, one of the things that has become fascinating to them is the physiological rush (which is not necessarily unpleasant) that's associated with vomiting.

You believe that psychoactive drugs can also be valuable tools. Yet for most people in our society the taking of drugs seems to be an end in itself. People take drugs to become socially acceptable. What do you see as being the idealized role of psychoactive drugs?

They have the potential to show people ways of using your mind and body that you otherwise wouldn't have thought possible.

The problem with them though is that if you rely on them to achieve certain states they very quickly don't work for

you as well. Their great advantage over other techniques is that they work. Ideally they make you see that things are possible that you otherwise wouldn't have believed. But once you've done that I think you have to look for other techniques to achieve those things.

The prevalent attitude in our society toward psychoactive drugs other than alcohol, tobacco and caffeine seems to be one of fear and that appears to be fairly deeply rooted in our culture. Are you optimistic about the possibility of these attitudes changing?

In some ways I think I was more optimistic some years ago. But I don't think we're that much different from other cultures that way. Most cultures accept some drugs and prohibit others. We always seem to create taboos around things that have a strong emotional connection for us: sources of pleasure, food, sex, drugs. People create these taboos because they have a fundamental psychological need to divide the world into good and evil. As a result I don't think they change very easily.

When a new drug begins to be used in a society, one for which there's no tradition, there is usually some disruption caused by it. Usually its use is taken up by people who are deviant in the eyes of that society and that reinforces society's fears. Certainly that's what's happened with psychoactive drugs in recent years in North America.

As for attitudes changing, I think it's possible but I think it's going to take time. I think that one positive sign is that growing numbers of people have learned about psychoactive drugs and how to use them. Certainly there's more information around now than there was 10 or 20 years ago. Even the admission that alcohol, tobacco and coffee are drugs is more widespread.

Yet we still seem to have bad relationships with those drugs...

One drug that we have a really bad relationship with is



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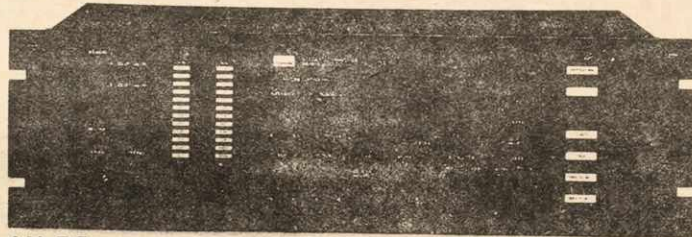
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