



ANN & SASHA SHULGIN SPEAK...

IN DISCUSSION WITH EARTH AND FIRE EROWID

Adapted from an interview recorded at Mind States Costa Rica, June 15, 2007



EARTH: What question do you get asked most often?

ANN: We were just remembering that—the one we have heard too often: What is your favorite material?

SASHA: Probably a moderately inexpensive Zinfandel.

FIRE: Is that question asked both in interviews and by people who just come up to you at conferences?

ANN: Yeah, over and over again. I would ask it myself. Yet by the two-hundredth time, I wish that I could come up with something really clever and different in response...

FIRE: But your favorite substance doesn't change every time people ask, so...

ANN: Well, I don't really have one.

FIRE: Oh. Even worse.

ANN: Right!

EARTH: Do you like caffeine?

SASHA: Yes, except that it makes me urinate too much. So I drink decaffeinated coffee. Do you know how they get caffeine out of coffee?

ANN: Oh my God, no... (audience laughter)





EARTH: Let's hear it.

SASHA: Many people say, "Oh they extract with super-heated water," or solvent, or something like that. While that would remove the caffeine, it would also remove the flavor of the coffee. So suddenly you are standing over here with a little beaker filled with caffeine and coffee flavor, and you still have to separate them. After looking for it for years, I finally got the answer a couple of years ago. You remove the caffeine *before* you roast the coffee, so there is no flavor. Then having removed the caffeine, you roast the coffee and generate the flavor. It's so simple.

EARTH: We interact with a lot of people through our web site, many of whom are younger. When you were young, what were the social pressures or the constraints around drug use? Were you worried about getting arrested? Your first time trying peyote/mescaline/goop, or whatever, were you concerned about your parents finding out? What was it like back then?

SASHA: My interest in the area of drugs was *psychoactive*, not psychedelic, because there really were very few psychedelics back then.

But I tried all sorts of things that were known to affect your attitude and your feelings, from yohimbe—presumably giving you an erotic point of view, to amphetamine—presumably making things go faster. Then I had my experience with mescaline, and that was what really directed me in this way. It was about 1955 or so, and it was not illegal.

FIRE: Was there a sense that it was somehow socially unacceptable, even though it wasn't illegal?

SASHA: No, it was socially unknown—almost unknown at that point. Some people had heard of peyote. But there are areas in Mexico where peyote

is grown, where the "peyote" has no mescaline. They call it peyote, because in Tarahumara, "peyote" is any small cactus that has a medical use. Our peyote is one of those, but there are many others. The term, even there, is ambiguous. So I had no concern about the legal situation, as there was no law to be concerned about.

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FIRE: Among your peer group at the time, was there any hesitation to talk about those experiences? Did you think that there would be any judgment against them?

SASHA: I was working for Dow Chemical Company at the time as a research chemist. I had the good fortune of having seen that they were working on an interesting compound. The person in whose lab I was working at Dow had found a very easy way of making an almost unknown compound. They said, "We'd like to find some use for this," and I said, "Gee, if you added a methyl group on this side instead of on this side, as well as on this side, and put an amine down there and make the carbamate, you'd probably have an insecticide." "Oh?" So they put the methyl group over here, and put an amine down here—a dimethylamine—

and a carbamate, and it became a commercial insecticide. And the attitude there was, "Gee, if you can predict things like that, you can just go do whatever you want to do!" That was about the time I had first tried mescaline, and I knew what I wanted to do. So I started synthesizing new compounds like mescaline, and patenting some of them. They paid not quite a dollar for your patent. You could technically get a dollar with your patent. But the patent officer would flip a coin; if it came up the way you called it, you would get an extra dollar, and if it came up wrong, he got the dollar. So it averaged out to a dollar. Eventually, they were a little bit disturbed by the fact that I kept *publishing*





all of this information, and they said, “We don’t like you publishing with the Dow return address in the literature.” “Okay, I’ll use my home address,” which I did. When I left Dow to go back to medical school, I decided that since I had already been using my home address, I might as well make my lab there as well, and I did. I still publish from my home address, but it is my lab.

FIRE: So even though you were working at Dow doing the synthesis work for them, you were publishing without the Dow address.

SASHA: Well if you get a patent, then you are free to publish it. I just kept publishing the early stuff that I did on psychedelics in the 1950s.

EARTH: Did you mention your mescaline experience at work?

SASHA: Oh yeah, they were quite interested in it. I think I helped probably half a dozen people duplicate the experiment.

FIRE: Is there any different answer for you Ann, so far as your social group at the time?

ANN: When I was growing up, you got faint noises about narcotics and people getting into very strange places. I don’t think anyone talked about the law. It was just something that some people did, and they got “addicted,” whatever that meant. When I was a young working woman, I mostly worked in hospitals, and the first I ever heard or read about psychedelic drugs was in the famous *LIFE* magazine article by Gordon Wasson. Everything that I had always been interested in—why people were the way they were, and certain kinds of experiences that had happened to me when I was small—all of a sudden this whole psychedelic world seemed to promise some answers. I had never even conceived that drugs could be involved with these sorts of things, and I thought, “Wow, that’s what I want to find out about.” My great ambition in life was to test out telepathy and different forms of psi, with or without psychedelic drugs. It never happened. Well, I think it *did* happen, but other people did it.

With the first psychedelic I ever had—I think it was DMT, given to me by two friends, one of whom read from *The Book of the Dead* before I launched—I don’t remember the experience. So I don’t think it was *much* of an experience. But no one mentioned the law. I don’t think that anybody knew about the law. Nobody cared. This was just experience, and life opening up, and no one talked about legalities. However, I think most of us knew, intuitively at least, that you don’t broadcast inner experiences of any kind unless you know your audience very, very well. People sometimes described strange, weird stuff that had happened to them, and you didn’t tell too many people about that. So nope, there was no concern about legality at all.

EARTH: That seems very different than people’s experiences today.

ANN: I’m not too sure. I’ll make you a bet that any high school kid who wants to have a psychedelic experience never thinks about the law either. They may, if they have had a DARE class, know that there are certain people whom one doesn’t tell. But I don’t think the illegality concerns them that much. Most people don’t know half as much about the laws as they should, and so they get trapped very easily. One of the great attractions for very young people is that, if they find out something is illegal, then it’s worth exploring.

EARTH: Right.

FIRE: So Sasha, obviously you had been publishing in peer-reviewed journals for many years before you guys wrote *PIHKAL*. How did the idea first come about for that book? Was it a project that you had been thinking about for a long time? How did you decide to include the narrative content with the chemistry, and put it together in the way that you did?

SASHA: One of the things that convinced me that I should do a book like *PIHKAL* was... what was the name of that fellow?

ANN: Wilhelm Reich.





SASHA: Right. He was the one who could shoot bullets at clouds and make it rain...

ANN: And he invented the orgone box, I think...

SASHA: The orgasm box?

ANN: Orgone.

SASHA: Orgone box, that's right. I get things mixed up. But he was arrested for some reason or other in New York. He was being held in jail, preliminary to a trial, and he died. The New York authorities went to his house, took all of his notes and papers and burned them in the I03rd Street incinerator. They destroyed all of his records. It occurred to me that if I were ever to get into that situation myself, I would want those things indestructible. The answer was a book like *PIHKAL*—put in both the background and the actual wet chemistry information.

FIRE: When did that idea come about?

SASHA: In the later part of the 1980s. The book was published in 1991, I believe.

ANN: I'm trying to remember exactly when we came up with the idea. Or was it always sort of floating there? I mean it was pretty obvious that we should write a book.

SASHA: We decided to write it together. We both have names that begin with an "A," so "A. Shulgin and A. Shulgin" works very well.

ANN: And I asked my older daughter if I could borrow her name, so I'm "Alice" in the book.

SASHA: By changing the names of people you know here and there, the book becomes totally fiction. We call it a fictional book, and from the government's point of view, it is fiction. Although there

is a lot of chemistry in there, none of the chemistry has ever gone into *Chem Abstracts*. I sent a copy to *Chem Abstracts* and they sent it back saying, "This is fiction." Many times people have to refer to the book as the source of the chemical information, as they can't have a *Chem Abstracts* number.

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ANN: I was very glad on the day that the invasion happened, which is described in the first chapter of the second book. I looked the agent straight in the face; he was asking me, "Who are the members of your research group?" I said, "Mr. So-and-so, the research group is *total fiction*." He looked at me with a look that said, "I do not believe you, lady," and remarked, "Well, that may be, ma'am, but if we ever find out who is in your research group, we would really like to have a long talk with them." I replied, "It has never existed." That's my story, and I'm sticking to it.

EARTH: Was *PIHKAL* the first time that you put your name, Ann, on a document published about psychoactives, fictional or not?

ANN: Yes, absolutely. I wrote interesting letters before that, but nothing else.

EARTH: How big a decision was that for you? How much anxiety did it produce?

ANN: Writing was something I knew I wanted to do all of my life, except that I hadn't found the right subject, and this was the right subject. No, I was not nervous about that. We did have visions of black-masked men coming in the middle of the night with baseball bats to destroy the lab. But nothing happened for about four years. Washington, DC did not discover *PIHKAL* for about four years.

FIRE: They're kinda slow.





ANN: Thank God. And then everything hit the fan.

FIRE: So you did predict, or think, that you might attract legal attention.

SASHA: Oh yes.

FIRE: As we have gotten to know you guys, Ann, in some ways you are a more private person, a quieter person than Sasha.

SASHA: She doesn't have the same sense of humor.

FIRE: Did you expect the level of cultural attention to the book that it got? Obviously you expected some legal attention, but did you expect as much of being invited to conferences, interviews...

ANN: No, I don't think that you ever quite expect that. *PIHKAL* was not the first thing written about psychedelics for sure, but it was certainly the first book written with the second part as *recipes* for psychedelics. I mean, that was sort of asking for trouble. But we felt that such a presentation would make the book more interesting, and that if we did not separate them—in other words, story in one volume, recipes in the second—it would be much harder for any government, anywhere in the world, to censor one of the volumes and allow the other. You either took the whole thing, or nothing. We felt that if we wrote it well, it would be meaningful to a lot of people. But we had no idea how much. That was pure guessing. And the greatest satisfaction is in how many other people who had been wanting to write about psychedelics decided that if we could do it, they could have the courage to do it, too. So a lot of writing started after that.

SASHA: That was quite a nice compliment.

FIRE: Do you know of any place other than Australia where the books are specifically banned? Well, that's not *exactly* correct about Australia, but it is close.

SASHA: It may be banned in Australia, but the last time we were in Sydney I went into a bookstore and it was on a shelf.

FIRE: It is illegal to import into Australia. I *thought* it was illegal to sell in Australia. I don't think that it is illegal to buy, and I don't think that it is illegal to possess. But I know that it is illegal to import. Is there anywhere else that you know of where that's the case?

SASHA: I don't know. I have not kept track of that.

FIRE: I wonder about Asia...

ANN: I know Japan has a very active psychedelic underground. But I don't know how much reading they do, whether it has to be in Japanese, or whether they are familiar enough with English.

SASHA: I was just transcribing the title of a Japanese book on MDMA to go in my new book, the *Psychedelic Index*, and it had a five-syllable slang word for MDMA meaning "to jiggle the head." They had the Japanese term in English, so I am putting that in the book as a synonym.

ANN: China may or may not have a psychedelic subculture, but they do a heck of a lot of the cooking of drugs that are scheduled in this country.

FIRE: One person we've talked to went to China and said that there was an active rave culture with MDMA being taken by large groups of people.

ANN: I wish we knew more about Asia in general.

Earth: How difficult has the transition to being interviewed in *TIME* magazine, and on national television, and international media been? Has that worked out for you okay?

SASHA: It's worked out fine, but the trouble is that it takes lots of time. When you're talking to journalists and they're writing things about it, you don't get any writing done yourself. That's annoying.

ANN: It's very seductive. You keep being invited to places, and your way is paid. All you have to do is give a talk, which is always a little hard for me. But it's so easy to say "yes." Because you don't know if any other invitations are going to come along and you'd like to see that country anyway. We have done





far too much traveling in the last few years. We've seen some interesting places, but *Book Three* has only got a few chapters written, and travel is part of the reason.

EARTH: Are there particular places where you would like someone to invite you to speak? Countries you would like to travel to?

ANN: I'd like to see New Zealand. I was born there, and I haven't seen it since.

SASHA: We are glad to see Costa Rica. We hadn't been here before.

So these events are little treasures, in their own way.

ANN: And the other seductive thing is seeing people we know, and other people we haven't met before who have the same interests. I really believe that the psychedelic network contains *the* most interesting people in the entire world. They are people interested in consciousness, and psychedelics, hypnosis, psychic experience—these are people with open minds and they're fun to talk with. A lot of them are doing very important work in the world. I'm *so* glad to be part of that. That's a really nice thing. My feeling has been, if I get on the other side—after death—and I discover that I was totally wrong, and what I did was really bad, so I go “down” instead of “up,” or whatever, that I will *still* be happy that I did it (laughs).

FIRE: Are there any particular visionary or wisdom traditions that you have wanted to participate in, but haven't had the right opportunity for. Have you wanted to participate in an *iboga* ceremony, or a sweat lodge?

SASHA: Well, we had always wanted to go to Burning Man, and we did last year.

EARTH: As wisdom tradition, it's long-standing (laughs).



ANN: We're going again this year, as a matter of fact. I can't imagine why.

EARTH: Can you say a few words about your experience at Burning Man last year?

ANN: It's interesting. A lot of people we know are really scared of Burning Man. They want to experience it, but they're afraid some-

how, that it's going to be... I dunno, shocking. Or afraid that they are going to see things they don't want to see. It's the great unknown. First of all, the artwork is amazing. It's five miles in some direction, on an ancient lake bed. The one great negative, which you learn to live with—it's not really dust, it's like powder: like fine baby powder. It rises from the lake bed all of the time, and it gets into everything: every camera, every R.V. motor, all of your hair. It's very discouraging. You wash your hair, and it is all nice and healthy looking, and then...

SASHA: ...and then you comb it the next day and the comb is filled with hair.

ANN: The artwork is sometimes in big yurts around the outside of the lake bed. Then in the middle of the lake bed, scattered across it, there are art installations. There are these marvelous pieces of work that belong in museums, every one of them.

There are two burns: one Saturday night, which is the burning of the Man—a great big electrical blue thing that sits on top of a building that itself is





filled with artworks. But those artworks are taken out before they burn the Man. The burning of the Man is a big revelry. People get a little drunk, a little stoned. Not everyone uses psychedelics at Burning Man—just about a third of the people, I gather.

The second night, Sunday, is the burning of the Temple. The Temple is different every year. It is made, I think, of plywood. It is very delicate, like a Siamese, Burmese, or Thai pagoda. There are 37,000 people seated in a huge circle around this Temple, and they are absolutely silent. When the Temple was set on fire and began burning, we were with Etienne Sauret, who's a documentary filmmaker, and I told him, "Look to the back of you." All the faces were turned to the Temple, and all of them were absolutely serious—a sort of daydreaming, focused on the fire. Not a word was said. Not a sound. Somebody started to whoop, and somebody else must have clobbered him on the head immediately. It was the most *moving* thing I have seen in a long time. 37,000 people is a lot.

FIRE: So you didn't expect that.

ANN: No.

EARTH: Burning Man is a big space, it's extremely tiring for *me* to walk around. How did you guys get around?

ANN: You have to have a golf cart. Without a golf cart, you have to have... youth. But the one thing that everyone has to have is lots of lights to put on everything. It is so much fun at night.

FIRE: Are there other non-Burning Man traditional ceremonies or wisdom traditions that you have not had a chance to but would like to participate in?

EARTH: Ayahuasca, peyote ceremonies... have you participated in those?

ANN: A traditional peyote ceremony? No. I think that would be wonderful. We did try ayahuasca...

SASHA: ...in a ceremonial way, but not in South America.

ANN: That was a funny experience.

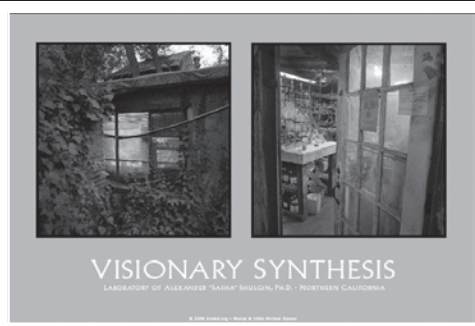
SASHA: It had its good and its bad. The second day, the fourth time that I had it, I went into a strange place in which, with my eyes closed, I would have almost no color. Then I would have a very deep blue, becoming a red, becoming an orange, becoming a yellow, becoming a white—blinding white. I would open my eyes and vomit into the little vomit bucket, then sit back and close my eyes and go through it again. And again. And again. And I said, "I don't really think I'm advancing in this manner." That was my last ayahuasca experience.

EARTH: That sounds lovely.

ANN: I would like to try Holotropic Breathwork. I don't really think that I will have the time to do it here. But I would *really* like to experience that. And a native peyote ceremony would be just great—that would be wonderful.

TO BE CONTINUED...

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ANN & SASHA SHULGIN SPEAK...

IN DISCUSSION WITH EARTH AND FIRE EROWID, PART TWO

Adapted from an interview recorded at Mind States Costa Rica, June 15, 2007



FIRE: Have you ever done a sweat lodge?

ANN: No, I'd love that.

EARTH: You people are from Northern California, right?

ANN: (laughs) Have you done that?

FIRE: We've done two sweat lodges.

ANN: How is it different from an ordinary peyote experience?

EARTH: Well, without the peyote. We did just the sweat lodge, with the heat, and the unpleasantness, and the singing... (laughter)

SASHA: You can probably use your imagination for the rest of it.

FIRE: It's an endurance ceremony. There's a practice of sitting with the heat...

EARTH: It's really, *really* hot.

FIRE: It's very interesting.

EARTH: And they don't let you leave. Theoretically you *could* leave, but you'd be a big wimp.

FIRE: (laughs) It's peer pressure.

EARTH: Yeah, I think that it is a *lot* of peer pressure. Sweating, like in a sauna, but for two hours...

FIRE: ...three hours.

EARTH: It felt like *forever*.

ANN: But what does it do to you?





EARTH: You sweat.

FIRE: It's a bit of a meditation. In the way that sitting for three hours anywhere, not reading or entertaining yourself in some other way is a bit of a meditation. Then add in changing physical circumstances.

ANN: How do you feel when you come out?

EARTH: Very soft. Like jelly or something, poured into... whatever I was. For four or five hours, until I went to sleep that night after my sweat lodge experiences—I felt like I was on MDMA.

ANN: Really?

EARTH: I felt love for the world. I felt so good. "Everyone's so great!" It was very pleasant, except that the experience was *not* pleasant. However, it was *more* than just the feeling of being glad to be *done* with something unpleasant, definitely. I felt cleansed, and moved, and tired, and...

FIRE: ...connected to the people who had been part of the ceremony.

ANN: Wow!

EARTH: The ceremonies that we took part in, which were both led by the same person, included content that was part of his tradition. There was often singing, and the person led chanting. Fairly innocuous Native American stuff.

ANN: Was it rhythmical?

EARTH: Very rhythmic.

ANN: Was there any drumming?

FIRE: I can't actually remember.

EARTH: There was a beat. It might have just been clapping, but there may have been a drum. It has been a while.

ANN: I remember a didgeridoo performance in Jamaica, where I really had my consciousness altered, just listening to that. Do you think that the rhythm is the reason that you have the alteration?

I remember a didgeridoo performance in Jamaica, where I really had my consciousness altered, just listening to that.

FIRE: I think that it is a combination. The ceremony itself, the focus, and the physical conditions are clearly playing into it, the chanting...

EARTH: It felt like entering into a waking dream state. In a lot of ways I think of visionary substances as catalyzing waking dream states—a kind of softening or breaking of the veil between consciousness and the subconscious in some ways.

ANN: Yeah, okay, right. A little bit of a sort of telepathic feeling?

EARTH: It definitely felt as though the group had merged in some way. Like I was aware of the people around me, yet it was dark—totally dark.

ANN: Which gives you a good clue that you don't need drugs to get into that sort of a state. One day I met a lady standing in line to get tickets for something. She had just come back from the Peace Corps. We got into a discussion—it was a long, slow line—about different cultures. I remarked, just casually, that every culture in the world seemed to have a plant that could be used for alteration of consciousness. She had been, I think, in Kenya—wherever the Watusi live. So I asked, "What do they use?" She said that it's pretty well desert and there's no plant. But if you've seen them in documentaries, they are tall and thin, and they leap up and down, and the hair on their headdresses sort of swirls around—and she said that's the way that they go into an altered state. I said, "Oh my God."

FIRE: That sounds like a lot of work.





ANN: But that's the way that they do it. If you haven't got a plant, you use what you've got. It was very interesting.

EARTH: There are definitely quite a lot of traditional dances that intentionally create an altered state through physical duress, exhaustion...

ANN: Yes.

FIRE: Are there any classic visionary states of consciousness that you haven't ever had, which you wish that you had had? Out-of-body experiences, or...

EARTH: ...entity encounters, auditory hallucinations...

SASHA: People often say, you should have tried this, you should have tried that. But my main interest is not in exploiting a drug and getting all of the possible effects out of it; rather, it is keeping my liver in reasonably good shape and making new drugs. That's my main contribution: new things.

EARTH: How is your liver, by the way? Have you had it tested?

SASHA: It's in good shape.

ANN: It's a Zinfandel color.

SASHA: That's why I stick to inexpensive Zinfandels. Actually, what's that thing with the five-letter last name that I get the Burgundy of? Carlo Rossi. Marvelous stuff. I've been following that now for several years. Four liters used to cost you \$12.99. Four liters is *now* \$7.99. Gas prices are going up per gallon, wine prices are coming down, and I am kind of interested to see...

FIRE: Wine-powered vehicles?

SASHA: No, what do you call this thing—2012—the Armageddon day, Timewave, whatever it is. The price of gasoline and wine may become the same.

EARTH: The heralding of the Apocalypse.

SASHA: There's only a couple of things wrong with the Carlo Rossi \$7.99 per four-liter thing. That's less than \$2.00 a liter, which is okay. The thing is, if you get the Cabernet, or you get the Merlot, or something, it's yuck. But if you get just the plain Burgundy, which doesn't mean much other than the fact that it is red, then it is rather okay. I had a nice experience at the Bohemian Grove a couple or three years ago. A very good wine expert came out with some \$30 or \$50 bottles of wine to have them tasted and compared, and I just happened to have a little bit of the Carlo Rossi \$7.99 per four-liter thing there. While he was preparing something else, but he had one sample ready to go, I switched glasses with him. He came back to try this, and made a comment. His face went into a strange place, and with a hint of curiosity he said, "This particular bottle has a slightly different bouquet than the one I am familiar with." Then he gave quite a complimentary series of comments, and I decided not to tell him that I had switched wines, as a courtesy. But the other disadvantage of the Carlo Rossi is that, usually when you buy a case of wine, you get 10% off. A case of four-liter bottles is four bottles, and you don't get 10% off. So you lose a little bit there.

FIRE: Back to any other types of effects that you haven't had...

EARTH: Alien/entity encounters? Have you ever met a DMT elf? One of Terence's friends?

SASHA: DMT is not a warm thing to me. I've tried it about half-a-dozen times. I find myself lying back in bed, completely stoned, completely in a strange place, asking myself, "Why am I doing this?" I mean, it is a ridiculous statement, but I don't get positive feedback, as many people do. I just don't get that, and I have not explored it any more since.

FIRE: I assume that you get visuals.

SASHA: Oh yes. But so what? They're not exciting visuals. They're not interesting. They're just there. I would rather use my energies and time on new things.





FIRE: Is there a particular material that you feel has the most interesting visuals?

SASHA: What are the visual situations with the flies? How many people have experience with 2C-B-fly, for example?

ANN: None?

FIRE: Nobody raised a hand.

SASHA: This is a series of compounds that were worked out in Purdue by David Nichols' group. How many people have even *heard* of flies? Okay, quite a few. They have flies, which are two rings, one up, one down, on either side of the benzene ring with a bromine down here and a two-carbon chain up there. Then there are what I call the pseudo-flies and the semi-flies. So you have semi-flies, pseudo-flies, flies, and dragon-flies. They are all simple compounds with a little ring plastered onto the side, looking like the wing of a fly. Another with a ring plastered on the side here and on the other side, but they are plastered at eight-o'clock and at four-o'clock, so they are opposite one-another, and those are the pseudo-flies. You have one with the ring plastered here and here, so they are opposite one another, so they are the regular flies. And if they are made aromatic by taking out a couple of hydrogen bonds, you call them dragon-flies. The ones that were most explored by Nichols at Purdue are the flies and dragon-flies. They are more active than the bare 2C-B itself. 2C-B-fly is about twice the potency of 2C-B, perhaps of comparable duration in time, and the erotic is every bit the same—even better. But the dragon-flies have not been talked about much. They are apparently quite a bit more potent. The potency is less than a milligram—you are down in the multi-microgram levels. So this is a weird little simple molecular structure that has the potential for a great deal of exploratory research. I can see putting a trifluoromethyl group in the four position, putting a nitro group in the four position, all kinds of neat things

in the four position, and all of the compounds would probably be comparably active, and new, and as dragon-flies could very well be active in the microgram level. It's a whole area to be explored that has not even been touched—I love it!

ANN: As soon as he has finished the book he is working on now, we are going to put him in the lab and lock the door.

As soon as he has finished the book he is working on now, we are going to put him in the lab and lock the door.

SASHA: They'll bring over food twice a day... I think. Of course, if I am experimenting with new things, I don't need food, do I?

EARTH: Leg irons. He's a tricky one. Locking the door might not be enough.

ANN: Two or three months in the lab, I think it's about time. A lot of stuff needs to be worked on. By the way, I would like to make a request of anybody who would really like to be of tremendous

help to Sasha—and especially people who know how to get onto Internet medical sites. I think that the only real hope—and I think that it is a real hope for the macular degeneration that he is suffering from, which is what they call the "dry" type, for which there is no present medical help—is stem cell research. I think that stem cell research is going to be the answer. I know that it is starting with eyes, because there is some sort of retinal work that, at least in animals, has been successful. If you find or hear of any research involving eyes and stem cells, please let us know, so that we can see if we can sign up for it. Otherwise, this is a very annoying thing to have happen.

SASHA: It is so maddening not to be able to hit letters on the typewriter—to miss them by about two inches.

ANN: It's not good for lab work.

FIRE: Two inches, here or there, how important can that be, really? (laughs) Switching gears a bit, are there any decisions that you have made about psychoactives in the past, that in retrospect, you





thought were very bad decisions that you regretted making, which you think that other people could learn from? So not just, “I shouldn’t have tried that 4-acetoxy-MJP-something” that no one else would ever try. Are there *ways* of using psychoactives that you have learned are better or worse?

SASHA: I have to kind of skirt around the question a little bit, because I don’t really *look* for ways to use psychoactives. My dream is still creating new ones, and letting others work out the combinations and the set-up. The one thing that I have done is put a lot of the ideas where I have made two or three things here, and I would love to make twelve more around the outer edge there, and I have not done it—because there are other things that I want to do also. But in writing up the commentaries for the books, I often tell what I have done and where I *would* have gone if I had had the time. And other people have exploited that nicely. For example, the whole 2,4,5-world, I’m pretty convinced is paralleled by a 2,4,6-world. Of the ones I’ve explored, some were potent, some less potent, but all interesting. There’s been dozens in the 2,4,5-world, but maybe only a half-a-dozen in the 2,4,6-world. I think that whole area could be explored very richly, and there are a lot of things to be found out there. This is the value of the commentaries in the last part of the second half of the books.

FIRE: So you are aware of a few substances that other people have made because of commentaries in *PIHKAL* or *TIHKAL*. How many would you say that there have been?

SASHA: Well, there have been a lot of them. For example the whole 2C-T world. I took it up to 2C-T-22 or -23. It’s now been taken, in Europe and on the East Coast, up into the 30s. People just kept going up, adding different marvelous groups on the sulfur and giving these creations the next numbers. But this is *your* territory. You probably have a lot of the 2C-Ts up on your web site, don’t you?

FIRE: Yes, but nothing in the 30s.

SASHA: They exist out there. If folks want their name attached, that can be done. But if they don’t want their name attached, it could be posted anonymously.

FIRE: Certainly.

SASHA: But the information should be up there.

FIRE: Although there is hesitation on the part of some people to want things published if they are not yet illegal, if those people are intending to market them.

SASHA: That’s right.

EARTH: Do you have any hard lessons that you have learned, Ann?

ANN: The more I hear about people experimenting, the more I believe in “sitters.” Having a sitter is very, very important. There’s so many people who have taken a lot of drugs, and they feel that they can handle anything. But you don’t know what might be around the corner. Anything might be unexpectedly rough, or worse than unexpectedly rough. Like the ayahuasca experience I had. It’s really funny looking back. You go to a special place where they do ayahuasca, you have an evening experience, then you sleep, and then you have an experience in the daytime. I think that’s usually the way it goes. Sasha and I had a perfectly nice experience the first and second time. I think we decided it was not going to be the greatest thing in the world for us, but it was pleasant enough. Six months later, we did not hesitate when we were invited to come and do it again. We knew the people conducting the ceremony—they were among our best friends. We knew a lot of the people who were in the group. It was a small group. And the second time, with the same people conducting the ceremony, just the sound of the dry palm leaves rattling was the most amazing experience—sort of holophonic. But the second time, we were very cautious about the level we took, because we tend to be very cautious anyway—even if we’ve taken something before. So we took a low amount. I think it was the same as we had taken before. We were not going to go higher. And this time, I had to try not to get run over by a fast-moving train. It was all lights and noise and it was coming at me. This was the first time in a long time that I began to be scared. I think of myself as pretty experienced. But holding on for dear life, trying to not get run over,





was not a very pleasant thing to go through. I didn't have any of the vomiting, or diarrhea, for that matter. That was perfectly fine. But the train just wouldn't stop. Then a voice came into my head and said, "Don't come here again." And I thought, "Oh, I can see why you might suggest that." (laughter) Sasha was having an equally bad time, but with a completely different kind of visuals, and he mentioned a little bit of that. We both agreed that was not pleasant to go through. But we were with friends, and we decided the next day, when everyone was having their daytime experiences, that we would take a teeny little tiny bit—less than half of what we had taken the night before—so that we could at least participate with the group. And here came the train again. It was just as nasty, and I was just as occupied with trying to stay alive.

EARTH: Maybe you should have listened to the voice? (laughter)

ANN: Wait a minute. The only difference is that it was a shorter duration. Sasha was having, I think, an equally bad time. So the voice came back, and it asked, "Didn't you hear me the first time!?" I have not taken ayahuasca since, and I am not going to.

So I think you have to be careful. There are some psychedelic drugs that are not your ally. It's your own chemistry. 2C-B-fly, to me, is one of the greatest things that has ever happened in the psychedelic world. But I do not know a single other person who has had the same results that I have had. So I have stopped explaining why it's the greatest drug in the world, because I think I may be one of the only people who has that reaction to it.

FIRE: Because of something in *your* brain.

ANN: You just can not forget that drugs are different in everybody, with the possible exception of MDMA.

SASHA: We had a somewhat similar "negative in some people" thing with the *Pachycereus pringlii*. We got a sample from Baha, California. The extract of the cactus had been put into four containers. There were twelve of us at the experiment. By threes, we took the contents of each container. All of the

people who had the contents of the second and the third container had to go downstairs because they were violently ill. Fortunately only one of them had diarrhea, and he locked himself into the bathroom. Each of us had different medical problems. The other six people had marvelous experiences. It all came from the same cooking of the same cactus. So we decided that maybe something had gotten into those two containers, that was not in the other two. I took a sample from residues in each of the good and the bad containers, to run mass specs on them. One of the people there was a biochemist—a bacteriologist—and he took samples to run bacterial growths, to see if something was growing in one of them and not in the other. We both came up with blanks. No explanation at all. I've looked at the contents of the *Pachycereus pringlii*, and there's no trace of mescaline in there at all. But there are a lot of isoquinolines, and there are a lot of interesting small and not-active phenethylamines. So I'm pretty convinced that—I'll call it *cactuhuasca* maybe—the isoquinolines inhibit the destruction of the phenethylamines that are otherwise not active, and that the cactus is active but none of its individual components are. So that's still being explored.

ANN: That brings up another cautionary thought. Wherever you are taking a drug, whether you have taken it before or not, make sure that there is a doctor on call—somebody who knows about psychedelics and who can come over pretty fast. And make sure there is some kind of sedative on hand. For instance with this cactus thing, I had an extremely rapid heartbeat, which was a little scary, and it happened to be in a house where there were no sedatives I could use. There was a Chinese herb, which didn't do that much. You need something that can smooth down the body if it is overreacting. You need something for the stomach, in case you have unexpected cramps or nausea. Be sure that there are the basic remedies available. It doesn't matter if it is the most familiar material to you or not. Because sometimes things happen that you don't expect.

FIRE: Agreed. When you said "having a sitter," one of the things that occurred to me is that it is surprisingly difficult to describe—obviously not to the





people who are here, but to the eighteen-year-olds who make up a not insignificant portion of the people who visit Erowid, for example—that it is worth their while to have somebody *not* be tripping. How do you describe to them that having a sitter is useful enough that somebody should be missing out on the fun? It's tough. It's like a designated driver, which is also difficult to adequately convey the importance of to eighteen-year-olds.

ANN: If not, then natural selection comes in again. You don't want it to be your kid who is selected out.

EARTH: Here's a thought experiment for Sasha...

FIRE: ...given two piles of 2C-B. Let's just imagine this in a world where it was legal, although that doesn't matter for the question. One pile you made, and one pile was commercially produced by a lab somewhere. They have been tested and identified as both being pure 2C-B. Do you have a connection to the one that you synthesized? Do you feel some sort of bond, an emotional connection...

EARTH: ...a *preference*?

ANN: A fatherly glow?

SASHA: Well, I know how I assayed its purity and its identity.

FIRE: Let's say that you assayed the purity of both of them, but one of them was the one that you made. Is a pure chemical a pure chemical, and you don't care at all?

SASHA: It definitely would not matter. I can not see where it would matter if it went through my criteria of identity and purity. They would be interchangeable.

EARTH: And for you Ann? If you had two piles of 2C-B, one that had been produced by Sasha, and one that had been produced by Sigma. Sasha verified that they were both identical. Do you have a feeling about that?

ANN: I know there are a lot of people who have taken MDMA that they *thought* was made by Sasha and not by someone else, and they felt that it had an extra something-or-other. I think out of politeness, I might take the Sasha-made one.

FIRE: You don't want to make him feel bad.

ANN: Well, I mean, you know... *loyalty*. (laughs) But I wouldn't worry about there being any real difference. Except I don't put down people who'd think that there *is* a difference. Because there is something in the spirit of the person—Sasha would never say this—who makes something, and some of that spirit does, perhaps, go into the material that emerges. In a lab, the people who make materials very often don't care—it's just part of their job. And you could argue that maybe there is something that is missing from that, which is present in the other.

SASHA: This answer has absolutely no scientific merit whatsoever, but it's believable. (laughs)

EARTH: It sounds like the two of you have a little difference there.

ANN: Oh yeah, sure.

SASHA: Not serious.

ANN: Well, I don't know... (laughter) We manage to tolerate each other's idiosyncrasies.

EARTH: Are there visionary artists, or particular psychedelic artists, whom you like?

ANN: Mati Klarwein is my favorite. He died a few years ago, and he is amazing. There's a little book called *Inscapes: Real-Estate Paintings*. He paints bushes, and rocks. In one bush you can see the Buddha face emerging. I stare at one of those paintings, and I go into what we call a "plus-two." It's just extraordinary. Looking at the Klarwein paintings is an inexpensive way of turning on. That's my feeling about it. What about you?

SASHA: Very much so, but also I'd mention Martina Hoffmann.





ANN: Martina Hoffmann, and Robert Venosa. Terrific work. But also the art of Van Gogh—take a look at his paintings and you will see the psychedelic experience without question.

SASHA: As he got older in age, they became quite different.

ANN: Yeah. The trouble is, it was an agonizing experience for him. But his consciousness was definitely... he was *seeing* the energy in trees. He couldn't have painted them that way if he hadn't seen them, or felt their life energy. And there are some other artists who were living during our time. Morris Graves, who did strange birds and strange trees. I remember the title of one of his paintings is *Little-Known Bird of the Inner Eye*. He was a pretty turned-on artist, too.

EARTH: If you could pick one currently Schedule I drug to make legal, where would you start?

SASHA: Just one? Or can I have the whole works?

FIRE: Just one, but who knows what happens from there. Maybe the choice would be because that drug would then break down the legal system into something more rational. A lot of people would pick *Cannabis*, because there are so many people who already use it.

SASHA: I think the idea of *Cannabis* may be a good one, because there is increasing understanding of its medical validity, and it is more widely accepted in state law than any other drug. I wonder if that might not be an easy way of breaking the tight lock on *all* drugs by the federal government—to take one that has already some body of approval. That would be my guess offhand.

ANN: Without question, MDMA. Because that, as far as I'm concerned, has proven itself to be an extraordinary therapeutic drug. There's nothing like it. So that would be my choice.

SASHA: On the other hand, with the MDMA... I have just been reading over some of the reports of death due to this, death due to that, death due to the other... probably ten or twelve causes of death

of young people—usually between seventeen and twenty-one, somewhere—they are publishing paper after paper after paper of lethality in the scientific literature. And this is an inventory of things that it would be very hard to have to battle against. These papers often start with the phrase, "This is a drug that has a general attitude amongst the users in the street of being without risk, but in truth it has very serious risks, and some of them lethal. Here's another example." Then they present their paper. I can give you a dozen examples.

EARTH: But you get to be God in this little fantasy world, so you can just choose which one to make legal. You don't have to worry about all of that.

FIRE: Let's imagine that you've finished the *Psychedelic Index*, and you magically have the time and energy for some other really large project—it could take twenty years. What else would you do? Maybe that's to go off and do something completely unrelated to chemistry, I don't know...

SASHA: If I could get this book done and get that out of the way and I had a number of years ahead of me, I would be back locked in that lab that entire length of time. I want to get back into really creative work.

ANN: I used to paint a great deal. I'd like to take up painting again, if I had the energy and the time. And I'd like to get *Book Three* done. And I'd like to go horseback riding and learn hula dancing.

EARTH: Are there any questions or issues that you think are really important that never come up in interviews?

ANN: No. I think some of the best questions that we've ever had have been asked today. We haven't been asked *once*, "What's your favorite drug?" That's so nice.

EARTH: Let that be a warning.

FIRE: And thank you very much! ☉

