International Journal for the Study of New Religions 7.2 (2016) 153–174
ISSN 2041-9511 (print) ISSN 2041-952X (online)
10.1558/ijsnr.v7i2.31949

The DMT Gland: The Pineal, The Spirit Molecule, and Popular Culture

Graham St John

University of Fribourg and Griffith University

graham.stjohn@unifr.ch

With clinical psychiatrist Rick Strassman's *DMT: The Spirit Molecule* as a vehicle, the pineal gland has become a popularly enigmatic organ that quite literally excretes mystery. Strassman's top selling book documented groundbreaking clinical trials with the powerful mind altering compound DMT (*N,N*-dimethyltryptamine) conducted at the University of New Mexico in the early 1990s. Inflected with Buddhist metaphysics, the book proposed that DMT secreted from the pineal gland enables transit of the life-force into this life, and from this life to the next. Since that study, the hunt has been on to verify the organ's status as the "lightening rod of the soul" and that DMT is the "brain's own psychedelic." While the burden of proof hangs over speculations that humans produce endogenous DMT in psychedelic quantities, knowledge claims have left the clinic to forge a career of their own. Exploring this development, the article addresses how speculation on the DMT-producing "spirit gland"—the "intermediary between the physical and the spiritual"—are animate in film, literature, music and other popular cultural artifacts. Navigating the legacy of the *DMT gland* (and DMT) itself in diverse esoteric currents, it illustrates how Strassman's "spirit molecule" propositions have been adopted by populists of polar positions on the human condition: i.e. the cosmic re-evolutionism consistent with Modern Theosophy and the gothic hopelessness of H. P. Lovecraft. This exploration of the extraordinary career of the "spirit molecule" enhances awareness of the influence of drugs, and specifically "entheogens," in diverse "popular occultural" narratives, a development that remains under-researched in a field that otherwise recognizes that oc/cult fandom—science fiction, fantasy and horror—is a vehicle for religious ideas and mystical practices.

Keywords: occulture, DMT, entheogenic esotericism, Rick Strassman, popular culture

© Equinox Publishing Ltd. 2017, Office 415, The Workstation, 15 Paternoster Row, Sheffield, S1 2BX

equinoxonline

The entheogenic turn

Even Dr Gonzo wouldn't touch "extract of pineal." It was the limit. "One *whiff* of that shit would turn you into something out of a goddamn medical encyclopedia! Man, your head would swell up like a watermelon, you'd probably gain about a hundred pounds in two hours…claws, bleeding warts, then you'd notice about six huge hairy tits swelling up on your back." He shook his head emphatically, "Man, I'll try just about anything; but I'd never in hell touch a pineal gland" (Thompson 1971, 46).

While Raoul Duke's Samoan attorney in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* respectfully avoided the pineal, others have made this enigmatic gland, and its status as a possible brain site for the production of DMT (*N,N*-dimethyltryptamine), a *cause célèbre.* Remote from the misshapen grotesqueries conjured by Hunter S. Thompson—who made no allusions to DMT—for clinical psychiatrist Rick Strassman, the "blinding light of pineal DMT" (Strassman 2001, 83) enables transit of the life-force from this life to the next. Such was the contention in Strassman's best selling *DMT: The Spirit Molecule,* based on federally approved research at the University of New Mexico Hospital Clinical Research Centre, Albuquerque, between 1990–1995. Administering over four hundred IV doses of DMT to sixty healthy volunteers, it was the first sanctioned study on the clinical application of psychedelics in the US for a generation. Observing the phenomenological effects reported by his volunteers, Strassman documented their "mystical" experiences, notably contact events with "entities" reported by over half of his participants, ontological events compelling Strassman to revise existing hermeneutics on DMT. Parsing the character and role of endogenous DMT through Buddhist-influenced metaphysics, the idea of the "spirit molecule" was born, with the role of naturally produced DMT in mystical experience, prophecy and consciousness elaborated upon in later work (Strassman *et al.* 2008; Strassman 2014).

As explored in this article, speculative science on the *DMT gland* has inspired writers of fiction, screenwriters and musicians who've appropriated the pineal-DMT meme as a device to advance narratives vested in diverse metaphysical perspectives on the human condition. That is, it demonstrates how popular cultural artifacts have, in their adumbrations of the DMT "spirit gland" mythos, furthered, at one extreme, the spiritual re-evolution of humanity implicit to the Theosophists and those subsequently seeking techniques to access higher consciousness, and at the other, the gothic horror propagated by H. P. Lovecraft. These idealistic and nihilistic polarities find animation in encounters with DMT "entities" or "beings"—e.g. in the

© Equinox Publishing Ltd. 2017

form of clowns, elves, angels, demons, aliens, robots and insectoids reported by DMT users—possessing converse intentions (on a loose spectrum from benevolent to malevolent). In doing so, the article contributes to the study of "popular occulturation" initiated by Christopher Partridge, who recognized that psychoactive drugs have had an important role in the "re-enchantment of the West," a development apparent in literature, film, TV, music and other cultural media that have themselves become integral to "the construction of new sacralized plausibility structures and worldviews" (Partridge 2004, 141). This investigation of "psychedelic spirituality" heralded a new phase in the study of religion. Not only did Partridge's work have an early bearing on the study of popular culture through its application, for instance, of Troeltsch's "mystical religion," and Colin Campbell's "cultic milieu," attention to "psychedelic occulture" (Partridge 2006, 117), and the charting of the revolutionary phases in "religio-psychedelic transformation" into the contemporary period (Partridge 2003, 2006, 98) has significance, not least because the non-pathological role of drugs has been typically acknowledged in academia at safe distances only: i.e. spatially, in studies of non-Western drug-using cultural contexts, as in ayahuasca shamanism, and temporally, at the safe margins of history.

From the turn of the 1970s, the War on Drugs rendered research on the then newly prohibited psychedelic drugs taboo within the academic study of religion. A virtual research moratorium was established in which there was, for example, little support or encouragement to study the shaping role and impact of molecules like LSD, DMT, and MDMA, or plants like psilocybin containing mushrooms, or for that matter, mescaline or marijuana, on religious movements, spiritual practices and cultural artifacts. Given this situation, much important research has been typically conducted in the cultural underground or published at the margins of academia—where the conceptualization of the *entheogen* arose.

In the last two decades, the study of religion has taken an *entheogenic turn*, in no small way due to pioneering natural products chemist Jonathon Ott's assiduous attention to the spiritual potency of a compendium of drugs in his *Pharmocotheon: Entheogenic Drugs, Their Plant Sources and History*. The product of a long search for appropriate non-ethnocentric terminology, referring to plants, compounds and practices that effectively "awaken the divine within," "entheogen" is a concept Ott co-invented in the late 1970s (Ruck *et al.* 1979). Today, this concept enjoys interdisciplinary cachet, especially among those establishing the therapeutic value of a range of compounds, plants and concoctions, including psilocybin and ayahuasca (Griffiths *et al.* 2006; Ellens

© Equinox Publishing Ltd. 2017

equinoxonline

2014). Among the notable aspects of Ott's work is his entheo-millenarian understanding of the *gnosis potency* of entheogens, a view not far removed from that posited by psychonaut philosopher Terence McKenna (despite the latter's preference for the word "psychedelic"). In this view, a pharmacopeia of botanicals are capable of redeeming "hypermaterialistic humankind" in the otherwise dire conditions of the Anthropocene. The experience conferred by these "wondrous medicaments" could inaugurate, Ott averred, "the start of a new Golden Age," thereby constituting "humankind's brightest hopes for overcoming the ecological crisis with which we threaten the biosphere and jeopardize our own survival." Here, a litany of "ethnopharmacognostic" agents take their place in a vast compendium of plants, techniques and practices that have been adopted in response to the disenchanting conditions of modernity, notably alienation from nature. Gnosis is thus implicit to this perspective. "When people have direct, personal access to entheogenic, religious experiences, they never conceive of humankind as a separate creation, apart from the rest of the universe" (Ott 1996, 58, 77, 59). Integral to this view is the awareness of the absurd and unjust folly of prohibiting plants and their products—what Richard Doyle (2011) calls "ecodelic"—that are themselves integral to an evolved consciousness. In the case of DMT—which occurs everywhere in nature, including the human brain—the folly is magnified when, under national and international legal frameworks implemented at the turn of the 1970s—i.e. in which it is deemed to possess no recognized medicinal or therapeutic value—everyone is ostensibly born criminal.

The recent work of Wouter Hanegraaff offers a notable formulation of the gnosis potential of entheogens. In a revision of his classic *New Age Religion and Western Culture* (Hanegraaff 1998), in which the role of psychoactive substances were overlooked as gnostic technologies within an otherwise thorough investigation of modern esoteric practices, Hanegraaff acknowledged psychoactive compounds to be "catalysts of new spiritual revelations" (Hanegraaff 2010, 293), regarding McKenna as the figurehead of "entheogenic esotericism" (Hanegraaff 2013, 404), while challenging closed epistemologies of "religion" in his wider "entheogenic religion" formulation (Hanegraaff 2011). Despite this trajectory, as Hanegraaff observes, the research lacunae endemic to Studies of Religion—where Christian-theologically motivated agendas are closely connected to research funding priorities—continues.

Spirit gland and spirit molecule

A symptom of this research moratorium is the absence of formal studies into the human experience with tryptamines, including DMT—a circumstance

© Equinox Publishing Ltd. 2017

that, for McKenna, was unconscionable, given that, as "the quintessential hallucinogen," DMT was championed as a human "birthright," as much as "our sexuality, our language, our eyesight, our appreciation of music" (McKenna n.d.). Principally via a relentless public speaking schedule, McKenna would play a pivotal role in the underground popularization of DMT in the 1980s and 1990s. A frequent haunt was The Esalen Institute in Big Sur California, where in 1986, Rick Strassman had a pivotal meeting with McKenna and Rupert Sheldrake, after which he began speculation on the "psychedelic pineal gland" (Strassman 1991, 188).

While DMT was a relatively obscure compound at the time of his study, Strassman's federally approved research raised its cultural profile. A potent short-lasting tryptamine suspected to be associated with dream visions, DMT is known to effect out-of-body states, and to produce profound changes in sensory perception, mood and thought. While an integral component of the Amazonian brew ayahuasca, DMT has an independent modern history, inspiring an underground community of enthusiasts typically embracing the entheogenic propensities of this and other compounds (Gallimore and Luke 2015; St John 2017). Sometimes compared with a near-death experience, the DMT "breakthrough" potentiates significant outcomes associated with perceived contact with "entities" and the transmission of information often in the form of visual language (Luke 2011). Since its psychopharmacological actions were discovered in the mid-1950s, DMT has been a vehicle for the fears and hopes of a cavalcade of scientists and seekers (St John 2015), not least of all Strassman, who questioned the prevailing speculation in psychiatry that endogenous DMT might be the cause of psychopathology.

Challenging the prevailing "psychotogen" paradigm, Strassman's "spirit gland" hypothesis emerged at the juncture of Buddhist-inspired esoterica and an interest in the brain function of psychedelics. Early in his medical science training and Buddhist practice Strassman contemplated the similarities between the psychedelic experience and what Buddhists call *bodhicitta*, the awakening towards compassion for all sentient beings that is accompanied by a falling away of the attachment to the illusion of an independently existing self. He also recognized that LSD was especially influential for a large number of those attracted to Buddhism (see Badiner 2015; Osto 2016). To explain the apparent similarity of the mystical experiences occasioned by psychedelics and meditational practice, it was deduced that we must look to the brain—i.e. endogenous biological mechanisms—for answers to questions about religion.[1]

1. While Strassman was then developing an approach that some have identified as "neu-

© Equinox Publishing Ltd. 2017

Strassman's relationship with Tibetan Buddhism guided speculation concerning the natural function of DMT in humans and the role of the pineal—i.e. the "spirit gland." The idea that DMT effects a near death experience was intuited from a synchronicity that bridged Strassman's spiritual and medical training. He'd learned that the forty-nine days transit in which the soul reincarnates—as taught in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*—is exactly the interval from conception to the first signs of pineal formation in the human embryo, and nearly exactly the same moment that the fetus' gender is evident. This understanding triggered speculations concerning the hidden role of the pineal gland—what René Descartes called "the seat of the soul"—in death and rebirth.

It seemed less hypothesis than conviction that Strassman's "spirit gland" was "the intermediary between the physical and the spiritual" (Strassman 2001, 160). It was proposed that the pineal gland excretes large quantities of DMT during extremely stressful life episodes, notably in the event of birth and death. The pea-sized organ's central position in the epithalamus, between the two hemispheres, could allow DMT synthesized in the pineal to be secreted directly into the cerebrospinal fluid and affect visual and auditory pathways. When we die (or indeed have near-death experiences), it was supposed, "the life force leaves the body through the pineal gland," where a DMT release is speculated to be like the floodwaters carrying the soul into the liminal phase (or bardo) between life and life, as depicted in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. And functioning as a kind of spirit antenna, "pineal DMT release at forty-nine days after conception marks the entrance of the spirit into the fetus." Although the burden of proof remains, Strassman conjectured that "pineal tissue in the dying or recently dead may produce DMT for a few hours, and perhaps longer, and could affect our lingering consciousness" (Strassman 2001, xvii, 76).

Such speculations have appealed to a diverse audience. For instance, the Buddhist-inflected DMT meme made its cinematic debut in Gaspar Noé's 2009 epic *Enter the Void*. The film opens with a point-of-view sequence in which young American drug dealer, Oscar (Nathaniel Brown), smokes DMT in a genuinely narcotic scene with a psychedelic star gate effect. Much vaunted by psychonauts given its "lengthy extemporized sequences, involving fantastic voyages through fractal geometries and transmogrifying amoe-

rotheology" (Newberg 2010), he would later articulate his approach as "theoneurological," a position that appears to give agency to an external divinity, namely the Hebrew God (Strassman 2014). For a more detailed discussion of Strassman's background as lay member of a Zen Buddhist community, the influence of his religious practice on his scientific worldview, and the adverse reaction from of his superiors to his DMT research, see Strassman (1996) and St John (2015, Chapters 5 and 12).

© Equinox Publishing Ltd. 2017

boid forms, evoked both internal and external space adventure" (Keen 2016), the film is influenced by Noé's experience drinking ayahuasca and smoking DMT. And as Noé has stated in various interviews, the story was informed by his exposure to the idea that "DMT's inside your brain already" and by reading that it is likely essential to dreaming (Lambie 2010). Following his DMT experience, Oscar is informed by a friend that DMT occurs in the human brain and is released at the time of death to give you the "hardest trip" you'll ever get. Oscar is also made familiar with the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, which offers a guiding narrative on the death/rebirth experience portrayed after he is shot dead by police in a seedy Tokyo bar. *Enter the Void* has been received as a masterful cinematic approach to "the void," in which the "gradual dissolving of Oscar into other people and pure matter traces out his becoming-imperceptible, or becoming-voided" (Brown and Fleming 2015). With the film depicting Oscar's post mortem out-of-body event, his soul departs on a terrifying ride down through his past and up above the Toyko underground, a Bardoic journey amplifying in death—and by implication, pineal-DMT release—the little bardo of his earlier exogenous DMT experience, offering a first cinematic impression of Strassman's speculations.

While the pinecone shaped pineal gland is a melatonin-secreting endocrine organ integral to the circadian rhythm, its function has been debated throughout history (Shoja *et al.* 2015). Joining this debate, Strassman speculated that if the pineal gland was found to secrete DMT at certain times, might its proximity to crucial sensory relay stations in the brain "explain the highly visual and auditory nature of many mystical and other endogenous psychedelic experiences"? (Strassman 2008, 40). Speculation on the psychedelic function of the pineal reawakened interest in a brain organ that has exerted a magnetic influence on esotericists for centuries. Long extolling the spiritual and paranormal propensities of the pineal, they have championed its capacity, once activated—by way of a host of practices—to arouse previously dormant powers of perception, especially those associated with vision: clairvoyance, seeing auras, and being awakened to information from other dimensions. Within the esoteric milieu, the visionary capacity of the pineal has been elucidated via interwoven trajectories. The results of the New Mexico DMT study appealed to spokespersons of diverse spiritual practices and scientists of the paranormal. Whether Left Hand Path practitioners, scholars of the *Kabbalah*, post-Christians and others not uncommonly conflating truth claims with facts, the research struck a chord among those recognizing the value of neurochemical explanations for extrasensory abilities and extraordinary states of consciousness (see St John 2015, chapter 5).

© Equinox Publishing Ltd. 2017

equinoxonline

The pineal enigma and popular esoterica

Before I explore the cultural impact of the DMT gland mythos, it is necessary to give some background on two esoteric cultural narratives in which this mythos would become implicated. Much information presented in *DMT: The Spirit Molecule* is broadly commensurate with Western esoteric agendas taking their cues from Modern Theosophy, and especially The Theosophical Society, a clearinghouse for new spirituality which, from the late nineteenth century, had its agendas shaped by Eastern spirituality. The condensation of many self-reported episodes among Strassman's volunteers finds favourable comparison with interests typifying theosophists. To begin with, as volunteers were rapidly transported into other states of consciousness, often identified (in deference to the public pronouncements of McKenna) as higher dimensional "hyperspace,"[2] these travels resemble mobilizations on the "astral plane" where, in methods advanced by theosophist practitioners, travellers become witness to the "astral body," access "higher consciousness," and awaken their inner divinity. Additionally, with many of Strassman's volunteers reporting contact experiences with veridical "entities" that transmit a spectrum of visual information subject to a wide range of interpretations, we find parallels with the channelling of wisdom from the "hidden masters" integral to Theosophical Society founder Helena Blavatsky and others.[3] Furthermore, despite the clinical limitations of the trials, a few volunteers reported the significance of their contact experiences for the greater human condition, an outcome echoed in the wider DMT-using community, and demonstrating some resemblance with "intelligent cosmic evolution" as described in Blavatsky's magnum opus, *The Secret Doctrine*. While these comparisons deserve further attention, they are broadly evocative of "entheogenic esotericism." Techniques, such as smoking DMT, drinking ayahuasca or consuming other "teacher plants" like psychoactive mushrooms, are recognizable as practices facilitating what Hanegraaff identified as the first major trend in "new age religion"—i.e. *channelling*, or specifically "articulated revelation," where "messages" interpreted to derive from sources outside of the individual's (or medium's) "normal consciousness" (1998, 24), potentiate revelatory gnosis, or a form of guidance in which crucial information is transmitted.

2. Another appropriate concept is that which psychedelic philosopher Patrick Lundborg (2012) refers to as "innerspace."

3. Entities or "intermediaries" purported to operate covertly to "perform benevolent acts to the transformation of the world and the salvation of humanity" (Asprem 2015, 648), have been reported throughout the history of Western esotericism.

© Equinox Publishing Ltd. 2017

equinoxonline

It is no small item that Blavatsky regarded the pineal gland as integral to re-evolution. Blavatsky popularized the Hindu-inspired idea that "the eye of Shiva" had atrophied through the course of devolution, calcifying into the pineal gland—a witness to "the early spiritual and purely psychic characteristics in man" (Blavatsky 1888, 267). While inferring that the Third Eye had effectively closed during the middle period of the "Fourth Root Race" (the Atlanteans), as a quoted esoteric "Commentary" conveyed, the "inner vision" could be "awakened, and acquired by artificial stimuli, the process of which was known to the old sages" (Blavatsky 1888, 294). While offering no clear formula on how this was to be achieved, it was Blavatsky's view that the pineal is the key to higher consciousness. "This seemingly useless appendage is the pendulum which, once the clock-work of the *inner* man is wound up, carries the spiritual vision of the EGO to the highest planes of perception, where the horizon open before it becomes almost infinite" (Blavatsky 1889). Blavatsky gave cause for subsequent esotericists to celebrate the means by which, like an opened Third Eye, the re/activation of the pineal gland enables lucid dreaming, out-of-body experiences, hypnagogic imagery, near-death experiences, astral travel, and ultimately, the evolution of consciousness. In the wake of the "spirit molecule" thesis, champions of the evolutionary effects of reactivating the "deva-eye" could fashion practices or update techniques now presumed to enable DMT synthesis or release from the pineal.

In the fiction of H. P. Lovecraft, designs on the pineal gland are directly subversive, mocking even, of the agendas of Blavatsky and other theosophists. Apparently exposed to esoteric literature in which the pineal gland was championed as an esteemed apparatus in cosmic re-evolution, Lovecraft subverted the ancient virtues of this organ, now exploited as a literary device whose manipulation could re-open "cracks in the world." In the horror culture Lovecraft inspired, the pineal was no longer the "deva-eye" whose reawakening will allow *us* to re-evolve, but an ancient gateway whose modern day disturbance at the hands of foolish and shortsighted scientists, allowed *them* in. In Lovecraft's fiction, the pineal became an antenna that not only detects signals from the cosmic horror show beyond, but as evident in his 1920 short story "From Beyond," effectively ushers malevolence into our world (Lovecraft 1934). Here, not the "seat of the soul," the Third Eye, or the gateway to higher consciousness, a reactivated pineal gland exposes humans to the dimension favored by the Great Old Ones of the nihilistic Cthulhu Mythos.

The narrator in "From Beyond" recounts a gripping tale of the estranged scientist, Crawford Tillinghast, who has discovered in the dark confines of his attic in a house set back from Benevolent St the true function of the pin-

© Equinox Publishing Ltd. 2017

eal gland, that "great sense organ of organs"—a revelation which had apparently rendered Tillinghast a "shivering gargoyle." The story has at its centre an essentially malevolent pineal gland, the atrophied status of which is reversed by an electrical machine "glowing with a sickly, sinister violet luminosity" that generates "waves" stimulating the dormant gland, making transparent to the senses properties of a dimension overlapping with our own. "Those waves will open up to us many vistas unknown to man and several unknown to anything we consider organic life," announces an excited Tillinghast. Making "the beyond" available to the senses, the unspeakable horror of Tillinghast's machine is that, according to Lovecraft, *It* exists in the here-and-now, all the time, albeit outside normal awareness. Not only are humans newly sensitive to an alternate dimension in which entities dwell, but these entities can see humans, who become susceptible to their interventions.

The character of these interventions was expanded, if not exaggerated, in *From Beyond,* the film adaptation (Gordon 1986), in which Tillinghast becomes assistant to the kinky Dr Pretorius. Consistent with the Lovecraftian subversion of the pineal's role as a conduit for spiritual evolution, albeit adopting an erotic subtext foreign to the original story, when the gland is aroused it activates, not higher consciousness, but an inhuman specter, sadistic and all consuming. Vibrations from Dr Pretorius' electromagnetic machine with a large tuning fork awakens the "sixth sense" that is naturally dormant in any nearby human. That is, it activates the pineal, which literally expands, emerging from unsuspecting foreheads like engorged third-eye snakes. Not only does this expand the visions of and interaction with a parallel dimension—including wriggling worm-like creatures—an activated pineal stimulates erotic sensations among anyone with a pineal gland inside the widening energy field. That an activated pineal becomes associated with unbridled lust, and even sadomasochism, is wildly at odds with Blavatsky, given her teaching that sensual abstinence and celibacy is essential for Third Eye reawakening in the spiritual aspirant, and therefore essential to the development of psychic and occult powers in a re-evolved humanity. For Blavatsky, drawing on Hindu texts, the function of the pineal had disappeared "owing to the materiality and depraved condition of mankind" (Blavatsky 1888, 274). Faithful to Lovecraft's subversive intent, the narrative potency of *From Beyond* is nevertheless diminished by an overcrowded plot line. While Drs Tillinghast and Pretorius are abducted and disfigured by their own invention, when they return with an apparent appetite for brains—echoing the slapstick zombie motive of *The Return of the Living Dead* (1985)—such complications unsettle the horrifying logic in the original.

© Equinox Publishing Ltd. 2017

After causing the disappearance of Tillinghast's servants, who return to bring about Tillinghast's own grizzly demise, the narrator of the original "From Beyond" recounted a psychedelic horror show. "Suddenly I myself became possessed of a kind of augmented sight.… Indescribable shapes both alive and otherwise were mixed in disgusting disarray, and close to every known thing were whole worlds of alien, unknown entities." I use the word "psychedelic" here with purpose. At least one commentator (Eldritch 2013) has noted the similarities between the effect of Tillinghast's resonator on the narrator of "From Beyond" and the experience of some of Strassman's DMT volunteers, with the implication that Lovecraft may himself have been under the influence of dream-state endogenous DMT.

Regardless of the origins of Lovecraft's visions, we will see that the DMT gland mythos has provided neo-esoteric fuel for both occult schools of thought outlined. While commenters may want to hold that Strassman's research provides "a kind of real-life, experimental verification of Lovecraft's 'hypothesis' in 'From Beyond,' minus most (but not all) of the cosmic-horrific overtones" (Cardin 2011), what that seems to imply is that, sans most of the horror, the "spirit molecule" offers a verification of modern esoteric currents—currents that, even in a satirical sense, gave inspiration to Lovecraft. In the end, even though these narratives diverge dramatically—one is hopeful, the other despairing—as an enigmatic reagent for the transit across dimensions, a bridge between matter and spirit, a chemical medium for the passage between life and death, DMT has had a catalytic role in both traditions.

Pop goes the gland

Although knowledge propositions have been conflated with knowledge, shining light on the phenomenal implications of DMT's endogenicity in human consciousness, *DMT: The Spirit Molecule* sparked renewed interest in the pineal gland, consecrating the agendas of those who have held it in differential regard. It became apparent in cultural and esoteric movements emerging at the turn of the twentieth century that, liberated from dogmatic religion and materialistic science, humanity could assume an heroic role in averting what was otherwise recognized to be its tragic fate, associated with industrialization and possessive materialism, imperialism and escalating global conflict, and the alienation from *nature* (both within humans and without). With training, discipline, and technique—what some might today call "entheogenic," "shamanic," or "visionary"—aspirants could intervene in the disenchanting trajectory of modernity. Such cosmic heroics have inspired cultural movements, notably science fiction and fantasy, with consumers in the turbulent

© Equinox Publishing Ltd. 2017

wake of Romanticism offered, for example, the choice of the "blue pill or the red pill" (see Roeland *et al.* 2012, 419). By the end of the twentieth century, it is this heroic sensibility that inspired McKenna and a cavalcade of psychonauts towards experiments with "heroic" doses of tryptamines, where the "breakthrough" experience associated with assays of, for example, DMT and 5-MeO-DMT (see St John 2015, Ch 10), could potentiate visionary experiences intended not for the psychotherapeutic enhancement of the individual, but for "the redemption of the human spirit" (McKenna 1991). With assistance from "allies," whether in the form of "ascended masters," "teacher plants," or "spirit molecules," in this model humans are agents (mediums, students) of cosmic re-evolution. *The Matrix,* in which the above chance at "red pill" popping liberation was offered, was among the most powerful contemporary vehicles for substance inspired gnosis. That film offered a towering illustration of the post-romantic cultural artifact in which semi-fictive substances—in that case, apparently loosely based on MDMA—achieve virtuous agency, and where psychoactivating compounds and plants are cast in heroic roles. Following Strassman's efforts, as "the spirit molecule," DMT adds potency to this model.

I begin with an example of how Strassman's propositions have been transposed in fiction. Graham Hancock's *Entangled: The Eater of Souls* is epic dark fantasy in which DMT, ayahuasca, psychoactive mushrooms, ketamine, and other "allies," are integral to a narrative alive with wormholes, out-of-body states, and the telepathic powers of Neanderthals. Inspired by sessions drinking ayahuasca, and apparently more in sympathy with the world-saving struggle for consciousness optimization model than its dystopian alternative, *Entangled* was Hancock's first hand at fiction having established himself as an author of alternative history. While demonstrating a continuing passion for alternate histories, *Entangled* shows Hancock's interest in Strassman's speculations on the role of endogenous DMT, alongside ideas cribbed from quantum physics, the study of NDEs, and time travel. In *Entangled,* a fictional project is conducted at present day UC Irvine by maverick DMT researcher Dr John Bannerman who is on the hunt for "the holy grail of quantum physics. . . . Proof of the existence of parallel universes and a reliable method for getting volunteers into them and back again in one piece." An obvious treatment on Strassman's project—whose research is recognized in the book's acknowledgements—Bannerman's team introduces DMT to volunteers in a clinical study designed to test for "an alternate system of human perception—a sort of sixth sense that might be harnessed to explore other dimensions of reality." Having received an IV injection of DMT, world-saving heroin Leoni appears to be apprentice to an interdimensional molecular technology (Hancock 2011,

© Equinox Publishing Ltd. 2017

117). A theme underwriting this style of fiction is that the entheogen inducing "breakthrough" experience potentiates the *break from* oppression, and in this case from ruthless masculine cultures of domination. It is a theme not unfamiliar to readers of fantasy and science fiction, where magical practices and scientific innovations are confabulated to achieve liberating objectives—only now, entheogens (like DMT) are integral to the emancipation.

The "spirit molecule" has also gained appeal for musicians among whom it has been appropriated, sampled and lyricized. As a music culture heir to agendas of the Modern Theosophists, mixed with other occult traditions, the meta-genre of psychedelic trance has seen the most prolific transposition. For example, a quick examination of Discogs at the time of writing found "spirit molecule" occurring as an artist, track, and album title over sixty times. While most titles are within the psychedelic trance (or psytrance) classification, other music styles are also represented. Indeed the pineal-DMT meme has spoken to proponents of a range of styles. For instance, bass player and founding member of LA heavy-metal band DMT, Alistar Valadez, acknowledges the influence of Strassman, claiming DMT is "a gateway to higher dimensions or astral realms" (O'Donnell 2011). Kentucky country singer Sturgill Simpson's "Turtles All the Way Down" provides an example on the opposite end of the popular music spectrum.

> There's a gateway in our mind that leads somewhere out there beyond this plane
> Where reptile aliens made of light cut you open and pull out all your pain
> Tell me how you make illegal something that we all make in our brain
> (Simpson 2014).

Psytrance is the principal carrier of the DMT meme. For instance, Spanish outfit Hypnoise's track "Demetrium" samples the following lines: "And then I noticed there is this woman off to my right with a real long nose, green skin. She was turning this dial and I realized she was turning the volume of lights up and down on the city in the distance. And as soon as I looked at her she noticed I was watching her and she said, 'What else do you want?' I said, 'What else do you have?'" (*Transmissions* 2012). Detective work reveals this spoken description of an entity encounter belongs to Chris Mueli, among Strassman's original volunteers, with the sample lifted from the documentary film also titled *DMT: The Spirit Molecule* (Schultz 2010). Like media shamans who remix, and often repurpose, the detritus of popular culture—typically cinematic and documentary film sources—in audio compositions made and performed for the interactive theatre of the dancefloor of events and festivals worldwide, psytrance producer-DJs create dance music layered with

© Equinox Publishing Ltd. 2017

equinoxonline

such narratives to evoke/induce/burlesque non-ordinary states of consciousness (St. John 2013). With DMT and other tryptamines accessories to the cultural *remixticism* of psychedelic electronica, sampled material amplifies the fascination that producers and fans have with tryptamine gnosis, while speaking to a hankering for experiences with "intermediary" beings, and illustrating an implicit awareness of endogenous psychedelics.

As already inferred, such trends offer one side of the DMT gland story as it has impacted popular culture and spiritual practitioners. As opposed to opening communications with benevolent intermediaries and facilitating the path towards enlightenment, the activated pineal that conversely causes chaos and confusion—and invokes sinister entities—is a theme gaining momentum in contemporary cinema, buoyed by the mythos of the "spirit molecule." The main entry here is Blair Erickson's 2013 "found footage" style cult horror film *Banshee Chapter*. Inspired by Lovecraft's "From Beyond" (and its film adaptation), *Banshee Chapter* weaves together the shadowy legacy of the CIA's MKUltra "mind control" research—in which DMT (alongside other psychoactives) was actually tested on human subjects—and the now popular suspicion, c/o Strassman, of DMT's production in the human pineal gland.

As a contemporary vehicle for the mystery gland, *Banshee Chapter* fictionalizes the abominable outcomes of exploiting the pineal. Shadowy beings in the form of long-clawed ashen-faced entities who appear to own their victims are unleashed as a result of pineal-DMT harvesting experiments gone awry. In faintly plausible experiments, CIA scientists struck the "primary source" ("DMT-19" yielded from the pineal gland of newly deceased test subjects). That this extraction procedure causes a sinister strain of DMT offers a salute to Hunter S. Thompson, who had fictionalized the vile effects of "extract of pineal" in *Fear and Loathing*. This is no minor point given the film's rogue literary figure, Ted Levine's Thomas Blackburn, strikes a Thompsonesque pose. But rather than cause tits to grow on your back, the mutant CIA DMT has inaugurated an unexpected disaster of greater interdimensional proportions (not unlike Tillinghurst's resonating machine). One interpretation of this story is conjectural towards the shadowy exploits of drug manufacturers from the otherworld: "The beings on the other side of the abyss are actually the ones sending the formula for the drug, fine-tuning the brain into a receiver so they can come through into our plane of existence. That is, they use us to… become" (Cowan 2015, 138). While I guess this provides all the more reason to "just say no," the film's complex story calls for further insights. It becomes apparent that Blackburn was among the original test subjects, but is now controlled by dark entities. As a product of CIA-backed science gone wrong,

© Equinox Publishing Ltd. 2017

he makes the big reveal himself: "the government turned something beautiful, something transcendent and powerful like pure dimethyltryptamine and fucked it up, turned it into something dark, something ugly" (in Erickson 2013). As DMT (or "DMT-19") is noted to act like "a receiver"—i.e. "it lets them in"—it becomes apparent that, faithful to the original "From Beyond," corrupted "scientists" are complicit in the calamity. After all, the entities can only make their appearance once US Government experiments with DMT on live test subjects produced a concentrated hybrid extracted from the pineal glands of their deceased brains, which is then administered into further live subjects, who are then terminated and harvested for their post-mortem pineal-extract, and so on, and on. The murkiness of this story is consistent with the cloaked nature of MKUltra (records of which were destroyed in the early 1970s), lending a weird plausibility to the narrative.

For writers of horror cinema, DMT is horrifying because it is associated with agendas that are shrouded in uncertainty, with the agents that it invokes and unleashes in the world possessing appallingly unreadable motives. As Cowan notes in his discussion of *Banshee Chapter*, "DMT, it turns out, acts as a catalyst for communication, a receiver for messages from beings who occupy orders of reality that pass unseen in our world. But a receiver for what, precisely, and what is transmitting?" (Cowan 2015, 138). Cowan's discussion points out the way Lovecraft storytelling is definitively horrifying since—unlike "supernatural" horror that offers restitution to a disrupted divine order (Cowan 2008)—it "challenges the conventional, convenient, and comfortable understanding that the universe is a friendly place and that if there is a Creator it either knows or cares about us" (Cowan 2015, 139).

While DMT has then come to play a curious role in horror culture downstream from Lovecraft, it also cameos in productions cleaving closer to what Cowan identified as cinema's horrific "metataxis," where the terror derives from the inversion or invasion of established religious order. The presumed role of endogenous-released DMT is, for example, exploited in 2014 supernatural horror film *The Possession of Michael King* (Jung 2014) where, following the tragic death of his wife, an aggrieved atheist sets out to make a film disproving the existence of God, the Devil, and life after death. In one scenario, the protagonist finds himself in a graveyard at night smoking DMT given to him by a necromancer who earlier explained that DMT is "released when we die. It helps us pass to the other side, but taking it while we're still living simulates a near death experience." It's a deeply disturbing experience for the former skeptic, who appears to have contact with his recently departed wife during the episode, and himself becoming possessed soon after.

© Equinox Publishing Ltd. 2017

equinoxonline

That the DMT gland appeals to writers of science fiction horror who seek new devices to dissolve the boundary between life and death is evident in *The Lazarus Effect* (Gelb 2015), where pineal DMT is "the base-compound" for "Lazarus," a serum that ostensibly brings back the dead. "The moment you die, right then, your brain just floods your system with a massive blast of DMT, which is the most potent psychedelic on the planet." This is the matter-of-fact assertion of serum-inventor Frank (Mark Duplass), who early in the film engages in a friendly debate with his co-researcher (and girlfriend) Zoe (Olivia Wilde). While they disagree about what transpires when pineal DMT floods the brain—Frank: "its just a big trip": Zoe "it helps souls get to where they're supposed to be"—there appears to be no argument that something happens when you die and DMT is there to lubricate the event. When the research team, who are based at an unnamed university in California, find success with the DMT serum, first reviving a dog named Rocky, and then Zoe herself— who had been killed in an electrical accident in the laboratory—we learn that things might have been better off if the dead weren't tampered with. With Zoe resurrected into a nightmarish Hell-realm and endowed with dark paranormal abilities—exploited to slay other research team members—pineal DMT offers a fresh means of replaying the tragic consequences of attempts to conquer mortality (and "play God") that have been a staple of science fiction horror since Frankenstein.

Divine ambivalence

While DMT has been reported in the pineal gland microdialysate of rats (Barker *et al.* 2013), the burden of proof still hangs over the DMT gland—i.e. that humans are capable of producing endogenous DMT in psychoactive quantities. Despite the science, as the above examples from literature, music and film illustrate, the DMT gland mythos has been bent to the purposes of disparate agendas broadly consistent with competing perspectives on the human condition. In staking their claims, musicians, screenwriters, and other cultural producers have effectively exploited the unknowns associated with DMT. Far more than LSD, the profoundly unpredictable out-of-body effects of DMT render it a quintessentially liminal compound ripe for these imaginative appropriations. Such unpredictable outcomes—which, so far as exogenous DMT intake it concerned, are related to a range of predictive factors associated with what is conventionally recognized as "set and setting," as well as production techniques, botanical source, administration practices, and dosage—makes for great storytelling. But what emerges from these now interwoven storylines is a drug that has attracted a high degree of ambivalence. This

© Equinox Publishing Ltd. 2017

circumstance is consistent with conflicting attitudes towards human nature articulated through cosmologies that, for example, have wrestled over the meaning of the "spirit gland," whose function as a conduit between spirit and matter is thereby vested with markedly discrepant significance.

I will conclude by discussing a recent instance of this antagonism. DMT plays a prominent role in "Limbic Resonance," the opening episode of sci-fi TV series *Sense8,* created by the Wachowskis (creators of *The Matrix* trilogy) and J. Michael Straczynski, and premiering in 2015. Introduced as a potential source of "truth, connection, transcendence," DMT's possible role in the special connection between the Sensates—the story's main protagonists who are distributed across the planet but are linked through their extrasensory perceptual abilities—is flagged. While there is no mention of the pineal gland, *Sense8* deploys DMT as a device to, as Straczynski explained in an interview, "show how the Sensates began to come in touch with each other" (Ricard 2015). Sensate Riley, an Icelandic DJ, is introduced to Nyx, who believes Riley's recent visionary experience—as shot in the opening sequences—is all "to do with this chemical, DMT." As Nyx explains, with echoes of Shulgin, Strassman, McKenna, and also ayahuasca (in which DMT is integral), "it's a simple molecule present in all living things. Scientists talk about it being part of an eco-biological synaptic network. When people take it they see their birth, their death, worlds beyond this one. They talk of truth, connection, transcendence." Later in the episode, Riley has been invited back to Nyx's London apartment, where she is among a group seated around a low candle-lit table. Smoke is drawn from a glass vaporising pipe making the rounds. Riley is scared, but Nyx reassures her. "I used to be like you… I never felt so completely alone. And then one day, a friend, she gave me a gift. She took away my armour. She tore down my walls. Her gift, it reminded me what it felt like to be alive." "What did she give you?," Riley asks. "This," Nyx reaches back and brings her the pipe, which she takes and puts to her lips while he concentrates a lighter flame beneath. She inhales deeply. There is blinding white light, and Riley is transported into the world and body of Will, a Chicago cop (and another Sensate) with whom she communicates and shares a vision.

While there is nothing remotely psychedelic about this sequence in which Riley also recalls her childhood, it might appear at this juncture that DMT provides the key to understanding the dreamlike extrasensory powers that are pivotal to the story. The Sensates evoke the evolved super-beings with Third Eye wide open prophesied by Blavatsky. Yet, a dark twist complicates matters, and conspires against the pretension that DMT might actually be implicated in such a development. Riley is suddenly pulled out of her trance to find Nyx

© Equinox Publishing Ltd. 2017

has been knocked unconscious and is being robbed of his money and drugs by two of Riley's acquaintances—who were only moments before smoking DMT. In a fast exchange of blows, everyone in the room is shot, stabbed, and apparently killed, except Riley, blood splattered and in shock. In a later episode, Riley gives Nyx's money to a busker. The season later reveals that Nyx survived, has located and abducted Riley, and tortures her for information about his missing money. The individual who had earlier conveyed the news that DMT potentiates "truth, connection, transcendence," is therefore exposed as a vicious and vindictive killer.

With smoked DMT implicated in greed, violence and revenge, the creators of *Sense8* express a seriously ambivalent, if not outright contradictory, attitude towards the "spirit molecule." It is not uncommon for producers, investors, studio heads and censors to sabotage or intervene in stories where illicit drugs are intended to play heroic roles. Regardless of whether such an intervention happened in this case, the extreme ambivalence, expressed as hope and fear, is consistent with the attitudinal polarity around this compound performed throughout its modern history of discovery and experimentation. It is also consistent with the competing agendas that its endogenous status has served, specifically in esoteric traditions fielding diverse perspectives on the "spiritual" function of the pineal gland. Among the more popular texts in contemporary "entheogenic esotericism," *DMT: The Spirit Molecule* popularized the endogenous mechanisms of spiritual experience by way of a compelling mythos that escaped the clinic to animate esoteric practice and cult fiction. Given the enigmatic character of the "the spirit molecule" and its ostensible glandular factory, it has proven quite versatile, rendering plausible worldviews competing for a share in the attention economy.

References

Asprem, Egil.

2015. "Intermediary Beings." In *The Occult World*, edited by Christopher Partridge, 648–658. New York: Routledge.

Badiner, Allan.

2015. *Zig Zag Zen: Buddhism and Psychedelics*. Santa Fe, NM: Synergetic Press.

Barker, Steven A., Jimo Borjigin, Izabela Lomnicka and Rick Strassman.

2013. "LC/MS/MS Analysis of the endogenous dimethyltryptamine hallucinogens, their precursors, and major metabolites in rat pineal gland microdialysate." *Biomedical Chromatography* 27(12): 1690–1700. https://doi.org/10.1002/bmc.2981

© Equinox Publishing Ltd. 2017

equinoxonline

Blavatsky, Helena P.

1888. *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion and Philosophy. Vol. II (Anthropogenesis).* London: Theosophical Publishing Company, Ltd.

1889. "Dialogue on the mysteries of the after life [Part 2]." *Lucifer* 3 (Jan 15): 407–417.

Brown, William and David H. Fleming.

2015. "Voiding cinema—subjectivity beside itself, or unbecoming cinema in enter the void." *Film-Philosophy* 19: 124–145.

Cardin, Matt.

2011. "H. P. Lovecraft, DMT, and the mysteries of the pineal gland." *The Teeming Brain.* http://www.teemingbrain.com/2011/07/04/h-p-lovecraft-dmt-and-the-mysteries-of-the-pineal-gland/

Cowan, Douglas E.

2008. *Sacred Terror: Religion and Horror on the Silver Screen*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press.

2015. "The crack in the world: New thoughts on religion and horror." *Religious Studies Review* 41(4): 133–141. https://doi.org/10.1111/rsr.12268

Doyle, Richard M.

2011. *Darwin's Pharmacy: Sex, Plants, and the Evolution of the Noösphere*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Eldritch, Tristan.

2013. "Towards the visionary antipodes of the human psyche, part 2: H.P. Lovecraft and the door in the wall." *A Few Years in the Absolute Elsewhere*. http://2012diaries.blogspot.com/2013/08/towards-visionary-antipodes-of-human.html. Accessed August 4, 2015.

Ellens, J. Harold.

2014. *Seeking the Sacred with Psychoactive Substances: Chemical Paths to Spirituality and to God.* 2 vols. Praeger.

Gallimore, Andrew and David Luke.

2015. "DMT research from 1956 to the end of time." In *Neurotransmissions: Essays on Psychedelics from Breaking Convention* , edited by D. King, D. Luke, B. Sessa, C. Adams, and A. Tollen, 291–316. London: Strange Attractor.

Griffiths, R. R., W. A. Richards, U. McCann and R. Jesse.

2006. "Psilocybin can occasion mystical-type experiences having substantial and sustained personal meaning and spiritual significance. *Psychopharmacology* 187: 268–283. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00213-006-0457-5

Hancock, Graham.

2011. *Entangled: The Eater of Souls*. London: Arrow.

© Equinox Publishing Ltd. 2017

equinoxonline

Hanegraaff, Wouter J.

1998. *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Hanegraaff, Wouter J.

2010. "'And end history. and go to the stars': Terence McKenna and 2012." In *Religion and Retributive Logic: Essays in Honour of Professor Garry W. Trompf*, edited by Carole M. Cusack and Christopher Hartney, 291–312. Leiden: Brill.

2011. "Ayahuasca groups and networks in the Netherlands: A challenge to the study of contemporary religion." In *The Internationalization of Ayahuasca*, edited by Beatriz C. Labate and Henrik Jungaberle, 85–103. Zürich: LIT.

2013. "Entheogenic esotericism." In *Contemporary Esotericism (Gnostica),* edited by E. Asprem and K. Granholm, 392–409. Durham: Acumen Publishing.

Hunter, Jack.

2015. "'Between realness and unrealness': Anthropology, parapsychology and the ontology of non-ordinary realities." *Diskus: Journal of the British Association for the Study of Religion* 17(2): 4–20.

Keen, Roger.

2016. "Strange brew: DMT Cinema goes mainstream." *Reality Sandwich.* http://realitysandwich.com/320913/strange-brew-dmt-cinema-goes-mainstream/

Lambie, Ryan.

2010. "Gaspar Noé interview: Enter the void, illegal substances and life after death." *Den of Geek*. 21 Sept. http://www.denofgeek.com/us/movies/16358/gaspar-no%C3%A9-interview-enter-the-void-illegal-substances-and-life-after-death

Lovecraft, H. P.

1934. "From Beyond." *The Fantasy Fan* 1(10).

Luke, David.

2011. "Discarnate entities and dimethyltryptamine (DMT): Psychopharmacology, phenomenology and ontology." *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 75(1): 26–42.

Lundborg, Patrick.

2012. *Psychedelia: An Ancient Culture, A Modern Way of Life.* Stockholm: Lysergia.

McKenna, Terence.

1991. "Linking the past, present and the future of psychedelics." presented at The Bridge Psychedelic Conference, Stanford University, Stanford, California, February 2–3.

n.d. "DMT, mathematical dimensions, syntax and death." (from presentation). Uploaded to *YouTube* August 28, 2013. www.youtube.com/watch?v=VuEXBBaFAbw.

© Equinox Publishing Ltd. 2017

equinoxonline

Newberg Andrew B.
2010. *Principles of Neurotheology.* Surrey: Ashgate Publishing.

O'Donnell, Shauna.
2011. "Interview with Alistar V of D.M.T." *Muen Magazine,* January 17, www.muenmagazine.net/2011/01/interview-with-alistar-v-of-d-m-t/

Osto, Douglas.
2016. *Altered States: Buddhism and Psychedelic Spirituality in America*. New York: Columbia University Press. https://doi.org/10.7312/osto17730

Ott, Jonathan.
1996 [1993]. *Pharmocotheon: Entheogenic Drugs, Their Plant Sources and History.* Kennewick, WA: Natural Products Co.

Partridge, Christopher.
2003. "Sacred chemicals: Psychedelic drugs and mystical experience." In *Mysticisms East and West:* Studies *in Mystical Experience,* edited by C. Partridge and T. Gabriel, 96–131. Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press.
2004. *The Re-Enchantment of the West: Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture and Occulture Vol 1.* London: T&T Clark.
2006. *The Re-Enchantment of the West: Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture and Occulture*, *Vol 2*. London: T&T Clark.

Ricard, Sarah.
2015. "13 questions about Netflix's new series Sense8 answered. Co-creator J. Michael Straczynski explains all." *Rotten Tomatoes*. June 3. https://editorial.rottentomatoes.com/article/13-questions-about-netflixs-new-series-sense8-answered/

Roeland, Johan, Stef Aupers, and Dick Houtman.
2012. "Fantasy, conspiracy and the romantic legacy: Max Weber and the spirit of contemporary popular culture." In *Handbook of Hyper-real Religions,* edited by Adam Possamai, 401–422. Leiden: Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004226944_022

Ruck, Carl A. P., Jeremy Bigwood, Danny Staples, Jonathan Ott and Gordon Wasson.
1979. "Entheogens." *Journal of Psychedelic Drugs* 11(1–2): 145–146. https://doi.org/10.1080/02791072.1979.10472098

Shoja, Mohammadali. M., Lauren. D. Hoepfner, Paul. S. Agutter, Rajani Singh, and R. Shane Tubbs. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00381-015-2636-3
2016. "History of the pineal gland." *Childs Nervous System*. 32(4): 583–586.

St John, Graham.
2013. "Aliens are us: Cosmic liminality, remixticism and *alien*ation in Psytrance." *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture.* 25(2): 186–204. https://doi.org/10.3138/jrpc.25.2.186

© Equinox Publishing Ltd. 2017

equinoxonline

2015. *Mystery School in Hyperspace: A Cultural History of DMT*. Berkeley: North Atlantic Books/Evolver.
2017. "Hyperspace in cyberspace: DMT and meta-ritualisation." *Drogues, santé et société* 16(2) [Forthcoming].

Strassman, Rick.
1991. "The pineal gland: Current evidence for its role in consciousness." *Psychedelic Monographs and Essays* 5: 167–205.
1996. "Sitting for Sessions: Dharma and DMT Research." *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review* Fall: 81–88.
2001. *DMT: The Spirit Molecule: A Doctor's Revolutionary Research into the Biology of Near-Death and Mystical Experiences*. Rochester, VT: Park Street Press.
2008. "DMT: The Brain's Own Psychedelic." In Strassman, Wojtowicz, Luna, and Frecska, *Inner Paths to Outer Space: Journeys to Alien Worlds through Psychedelics and Other Spiritual Technologies*. Rochester, VT: Park Street Press.
2014. *DMT and the Soul of Prophecy: A New Science of Spiritual Revelation in the Hebrew Bible*. Rochester, VT: Park Street Press.

Thompson, Hunter S.
1971. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream*. Random House.

Discography

Simpson, Sturgill.
2014. *Metamodern Sounds in Country Music.*

Transmissions.
2012. Compiled by Boom Shankar and Alexsoph.

Filmography

Erickson, Blair, dir.
2013. *Banshee Chapter.* Sunchaser Entertainment.

Gelb, David, dir.
2015. *The Lazarus Effect*. Blumhouse Productions.

Gordon, Stuart, dir.
1986. *From Beyond*. MGM.

Jung, David, dir.
2014. *The Possession of Michael King.* Gold Circle Films, Quickfire Films.

Noé, Gaspar, dir.
2009. *Enter the Void.* Fidélité Films, Wild Bunch, BUF.

Schultz, Mitch, dir.
2010. *DMT: The Spirit Molecule*, Spectral Alchemy, Synthetic Pictures.

© Equinox Publishing Ltd. 2017

equinoxonline