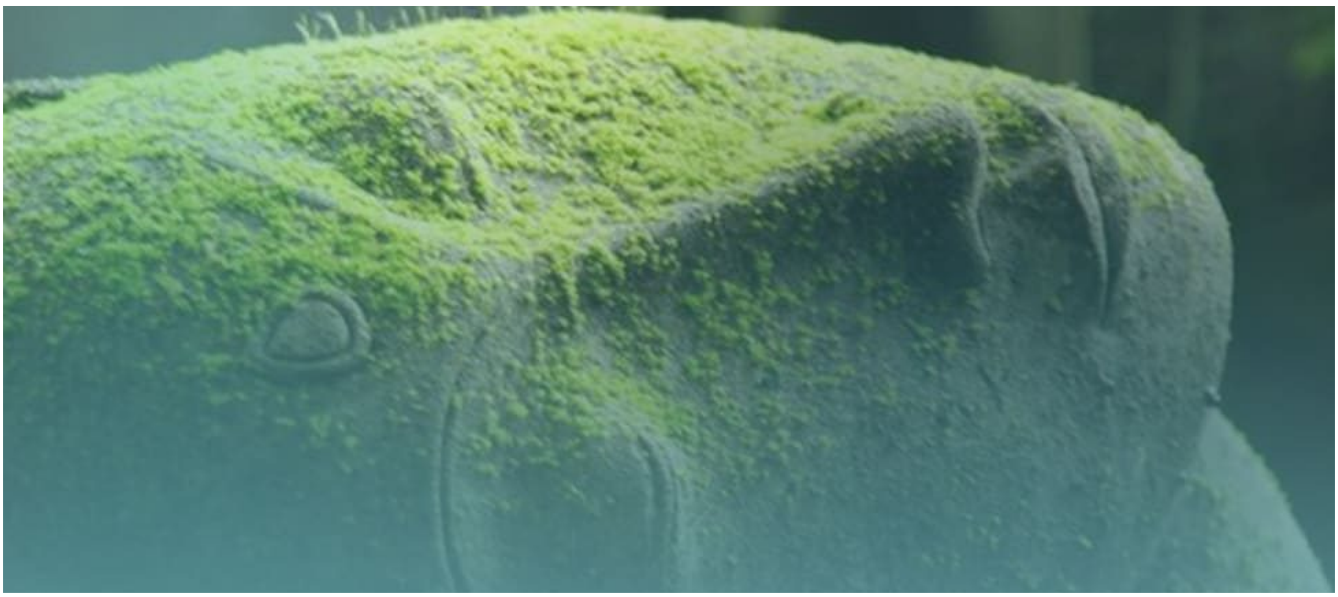
MIND FOUNDATION

Beyond experience

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> gestalt: something that is made of many parts and yet is somehow more than or different from the combination of its parts" Miriam-Webster dictionary"integration: coordination of mental processes into a normal effective personality or with the environment" Miriam-Webster dictionary

The use of psychedelics and entactogens is a cultural fact in Western societies today1,2. According to the Global Drug Survey, the largest international online survey on drug use, the use of psychedelics is on the rise among drug users: In 2017, 20% of the people who use illegal drugs reported the use of LSD within the last 12 months. Easier access through the darknet, but also through clearnet webshops retailing new psychoactive substances has increased the availability, especially for young people. And although we don't have any data on this, the non-pharmacological induction of expanded or altered states of consciousness (ASC)3 might also be on the rise4,5 and is closely linked to broad societal phenomena like yoga and meditation practices.

The „psychedelic renaissance" in medicine and neuroscience has lead to increased interest, and it even landed a portrait of Sasha and Ann Shulgin, the godparents of new psychoactive substances, on the front page of the British Journal of Psychiatry in 2015. MDMA and Psilocybin are likely to become prescription medications for a narrow spectrum of mental disorders within the next decade and are discussed in main-stream media again. While science had turned a cold shoulder to the possibilities of psychedelic research for several decades since the prohibition of LSD in the late sixties, the recreational use of psychedelics has never halted since their introduction to the US and Europe.

Contexts and modes of use have varied, however, and today they range from purely hedonistic party use over psychonautic self-exploration to ceremonial, religious, neo-shamanic, or paratherapeutic settings. While concepts like set and setting are already firmly embedded within most psychedelic communities and harm

reduction strategies have long been publicized by many organizations6, such as Eclipse e.V. in Berlin or Rave it Safe in Switzerland, the integration of the psychedelic experience has only become a focal topic within the psychedelic community in recent years. The widespread availability and use of psychoactives, as well as non-pharmacological methods leads up to several questions:

- How to make sense of your experiences?
- How to draw beneficial conclusions from your experiences?
- How to cope with difficulties, fears, and possible re-traumatization?
- Generally, how to integrate insights acquired in altered states of consciousness?
- And finally: If you manage to integrate psychedelic experiences into your life positively, how do you make those benefits last?

“Psychedelic Integration“ can be understood as the process of synthesizing insights and experiences gained during altered states of consciousness with one’s pre-existing mental framework, including worldview, moral assumptions, and individual patterns of (re)action to the world around us. The shift from focusing on having an experience to maintaining and incorporating it is something that often follows the experience, but even insights that were considered extremely valuable may be lost over time or lead to no change in behavior. They lose their palpability or fade to the extent that they cannot be evoked at will anymore – for many this is the case when the so-called afterglow7 disappears. Or the opposite: challenging biographical topics or traumas that were considered “dealt with” can re-emerge with sudden urgency later on.

While many people learn to structure and shape their inner and outer landscapes well in and around expanded states of consciousness, the long-term effort of creating lasting benefit is often neglected or replaced by the search for new, strong experiences. This often leads to the repetitive use of psychedelics or other induction methods, leaving material yet to be integrated piling up in a corner of your consciousness or squashed under the fresher impressions of recent experiences.

Severe cases of mental upheaval following psychedelic experiences should be treated by experienced therapists. In some urban areas like Berlin (St. Hedwig Krankenhaus, Charité Universitätsmedizin) or New York (e.g. the private psychotherapy practice of Ingmar Gorman) professional consultation hours or outpatient supplies have been established in clinics.
In Berlin, the OVID Clinic is offering both psychedelic integration therapy and augmented psychotherapy. Yet professional services like these, which are working beyond a strictly pathological or addiction-based paradigm, are rare. We could also say that there is still little understanding of extraordinary experiences and the ambivalent roles they play in peoples lives.

Beyond experience

Most people trying to better integrate their expanded states of consciousness don’t need therapy, but rather self-experience groups with facilitators that do support integrative efforts. Participating in these groups may be considered as attempts at self-healing after being challenged by disturbing information. Facilitating integration in a structured way that is linked to professional insights and science-based theories is a challenge that has been taken up by different groups already, ranging from integration circles sometimes provided by the growing psychedelic societies movement (e.g. Vienna Psychedelic Society) to InnerSpace Integration in the U.S. These groups are mainly based on sharing in circles and provide a platform for peer exchange and support from experienced facilitators, helping people to put their experiences into words and work from there.

At the MIND Foundation, we have decided on a different approach. A group within the organization that consists of medical doctors, psychotherapists, researchers, social workers, and others has developed a semi-standardized program for integration. It is designed as a focused process within a closed group over the duration of five consecutive days, and it addresses the psychedelic experience through a multidimensional approach.

Many layers of these experiences are non-verbal and multimodal: they include sensory, imaginary or mainly emotional aspects. We embrace all these dimensions in our workshop series, including basic forms of bodywork and (trance) dance expression, breathing exercises, creative artwork, and interventions from mindfulness practices. On top of these experiential methods, we include psychoeducation and harm reduction in our setup, trying to enable participants to be more aware of themselves, their motives, abilities, and achievements, and the role of others during future psychedelic experiences.

These intensive 5-day courses are embedded in a guided group process, thereby serving as a safe incubator for personal development. The facilitator team consists of therapists, coaches, bodyworkers, harm reduction practitioners, and others, giving us the unique opportunity to transfer the integration manual into an open and flexible practice that allows for maximal exploration while creating the most beneficial environment.

Over a period of more than three years, the development group has come together regularly with up to fifteen contributors and teamed up in smaller task forces to create the "BEYOND EXPERIENCE' workshop. The courses are being held in English (sometimes also in German) and take place in Berlin, Amsterdam, Mallorca, Cluj (Romania), and Vale de Moses (Portugal) with several courses per year. We are looking forward to meeting participants from very different social origins and are interested in your ideas and contributions to the further development of the program.

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PROPOSALS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

http://www.lucialightexperience.com

https://holotropic-association.eu/breathwork