

Erowid Extracts

A Psychoactive Plants and Chemicals Newsletter

June 2005

Number 8

Erowid.org is a member-supported organization working to provide free, reliable and accurate information about psychoactive plants and chemicals.

The information on the site is a compilation of the experiences, words, and efforts of thousands of individuals including parents, health professionals, doctors, therapists, chemists, researchers, teachers, and lawyers and those who choose to use psychoactives. Erowid acts as a publisher of new information as well as a library for the collection of documents published elsewhere, spanning the spectrum from solid peer-reviewed research to creative writing and fiction.

Ten years have passed since we first registered the Erowid.com domain name and started putting pages about psychoactives on the web. In that time, the landscape of information and communication technologies has changed dramatically. So dramatically that it's sometimes difficult to remember what the original challenges and goals of the project were.

There has been a dramatic increase in access to diverse information about psychoactive plants and chemicals. In a surprising moment of realization about the global reach of the site, last year we met an individual who told us that while visiting Zimbabwe, he met a group of people who had recently gained access to ketamine. When he asked how they knew how much to use, they replied that they had looked it up on a website called Erowid.

Some of the most pernicious drug myths, once believed by experimenting students on campuses across the country, are now easily dismissed. Physicians faced with a patient reporting use of an unheard-of substance can quickly access needed details. Others, interested in the effects of psychoactives on the mind, brain, and consciousness, can stay current on the latest data and research.

Many questions remain, but they are now more focused and accurate. What are the potential negative effects of the occasional use of MDMA? Does cannabis pose risks to the mental health of the average user? What elements distinguish healthy and positive use from harmful and negative experiences? With many other colleagues in the field, we're doing our part to illuminate the answers.

Most importantly, the lines of communication are now open. We're actively working to engage a diverse array of people in the continued development of the site. We network together researchers and

physicians, writers and teachers, students and experimenters, to share their perspectives in the furtherance of the evolution of knowledge. Everyone has something to contribute, whether it's reviewing a book, sharing an experience, writing an article, or analyzing recent research.

Erowid friends and members are key to the success of the project, and over the years you've all shown amazing support. We love the notes, gifts, and stories we receive, from beautifully crafted origami cranes, hand-drawn artwork and illustrated poems, to a few dollars anonymously mailed with a

"We do not grow absolutely, chronologically. We grow sometimes in one dimension, and not in another; unevenly. [...] We are mature in one realm, childish in another."

— Anaïs Nin

simple "Thanks".

Along with these letters of support, we often receive questions about how and why Erowid was started. We've taken this opportunity to write a history of the first ten years of Erowid (see page 12).

Erowid is a small organization with minimal paid staff, but we're big on ideas and technology and have a large network of volunteers and friends in virtually every relevant field. We are actively trying to engage more members to help us see more clearly where the organization stands and what opportunities lie ahead. Friends of Erowid are invited to participate in this revisioning process (see page 14).

We've enjoyed the past ten years and look forward to working with and hearing from you all in the future.

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Recent News & Updates

NIH Requests Papers Be Public

As of May 2, 2005, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) has asked researchers and investigators who receive NIH funding to submit their final manuscript to PubMed Central, where the full text will be archived and made publicly available. PubMed Central (www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov) is a digital archive of peer-reviewed research maintained by NIH.

NIH is asking that authors voluntarily submit their final manuscript upon acceptance for publication in a peer-reviewed journal, and provide timing for public posting (within 12 months of journal publication).

While compliance is voluntary at this point, we're extremely pleased to see NIH moving in the direction of requiring free public access to the results of publicly funded research.

Death of James Arthur (1958 - 2005)

James Arthur (Dugovic), author of the book *Mushrooms and Mankind*, died April 15th, 2005 while incarcerated in Madera County California. He was 47 years old. According to news reports, he was found dead in his jail cell with a sheet tied around his neck. His death has been ruled a suicide, although some controversy has been aired on public forums regarding the circumstances surrounding his arrest and death.

He had been arrested April 25, 2004 on six child molestation charges "involving three children younger than age 14". It has also been alleged that he was a registered sex offender stemming from a 1996 conviction in Fresno County. He was being held on \$300,000 bail.

James Arthur was known for his writing and lecturing on the topic of mushrooms and religion. He was working on a book with Jack Herer at the time of his arrest. Though it's unlikely that Arthur will be remembered for his scholarship, many enjoyed his presentations that drew connections between religious historical art and psychoactive mushrooms.

1. "News from the San Joaquin Valley." *SF Gate: AP Breaking News*. Apr 12, 2005.
2. "Inmate's death is ruled a suicide." *Fresno Bee*. Apr 12, 2005.

U.K. Legislation Targets Mushrooms

As predicted, on April 7, 2005 Britain's parliament passed a new drug law which adds fresh mushrooms to the list of class A substances.

Part 4, section 21 of the new Drugs Bill specifies that "Fungus (of any kind) which contains psilocin or an ester of psilocin" is included in class A. Previously, only dried or otherwise prepared mushrooms met the legal criteria of "preparation or other product containing psilocin or an ester of psilocin".

Although the British government has not announced a date, it has been suggested that the new law may go into effect in June 2005. This will make possession and sales of fresh mushrooms illegal, effectively shutting down the burgeoning fresh psychedelic mushroom business.

1. U.K. Drugs Bill. HL Bill 32; Part 4, Sec. 21. Erowid.org/extracts/n8/drugs_bill.shtml

Death Related to 5-MeO-AMT, Not LSD

The death of 18-year-old Gloria Discerni in Oct 2004 received public attention as it was attributed to LSD supposedly put in her drink by friend Cameron Jester. When the case was first reported by a number of media sources, we responded with speculation that the substance was unlikely to have been LSD. Indeed, when toxicology results were returned, the material was identified as 5-MeO-AMT.

According to media reports, Jester purchased the 5-MeO-AMT believing it was liquid LSD, and brought it to a party at the request of friends. He put 10 drops of the liquid in a glass of orange juice for Discerni, and also shared some of his drink with her. After ingesting the orange juice Discerni quickly began vomiting and losing consciousness. She was taken to the hospital, where she was in a coma for three days before being taken off life support by her family.

Jester was sentenced to 2½ years in prison, but the sentence was suspended by the judge in favor of probation.

1. "Man gets probation for supplying drug." *Spokesman Review*. Apr 22, 2005.
2. Erowid. "Reported LSD-Related Death Was Not LSD". Apr 2005:v1.4. Erowid.org/extracts/n8/5-meo-amt_death.shtml

Operation Web-Tryp

In July 2004, the DEA implemented Operation Web-Tryp, which targeted online research chemical vendors and led to the arrest of ten people. Following are updates on several of these cases:

- 1) On March 21, 2005, Michael Burton of American Chemical Supply plead guilty to a single count of distribution and possession with intent to distribute a controlled substance analog which resulted in a death. He faces a prison sentence of 20 years to life.
- 2) David Linder of Pondman.nu was convicted of related charges (we have not yet learned what the exact charges were) and is expected to be sentenced in May 2005.
- 3) The case against April Curtis of RACResearch is still pending.

Strangely, as of May 1, 2005, the websites of several research chemical vendors are still available online.

1. U.S. Attorney's Office Press Release. Mar 21, 2005. Erowid.org/extracts/n8/burton.shtml

France Bans Ayahuasca Components

In January 2005, a French court decided that ayahuasca was not illegal because it did not qualify as a preparation of DMT. In response, on May 3, 2005, the French government added the following plants and chemicals to its list of controlled substances: *Banisteriopsis caapi*, *Banisteriopsis rusbyana*, *Peganum harmala*, *Psychotria viridis*, *Diplopterys cabrerana*, *Mimosa hostilis*, harmine, harmaline, tetrahydroharmine (THH), harmol, and harmalol.

1. France Controls Ayahuasca Plants & Chemicals. May 5, 2005. Erowid.org/extracts/n8/france_ayahuasca.shtml

Supreme Court to Hear Ayahuasca Case

In August 2002, the União do Vegetal (UDV) in the United States won a preliminary injunction protecting their use of the ayahuasca tea until a federal case against them is decided. This preliminary injunction was appealed by the U.S. Attorney General, and on April 18th, 2005, the U.S. Supreme Court agreed to hear the case. No date has been set for the hearing. ●

The vast majority of feedback Erowid receives is positive. Negative comments may be over-represented below in our attempts to show diverse opinions.

Thank you for the amazing thing you've done. I work in a library, and I have a particular understanding of libraries (of all kinds) as statements of a certain view of the world, and the one you've constructed is one of the most graceful I have seen.

— A
Member's Email to Erowid

It's very sad that you have dedicated your time and energy to helping young people risk their lives. Those of you who think you are "expanding your mind" or experiencing something that other people are too stupid to understand are very misguided. I was once one of you and am very glad that I grew up.

— SAD
Erowid Guestbook Entry

I've been using your site since 9th grade, almost five years now. I'd like to thank you for the first time on molding me as a person, and the entheogen explorer I consider myself today—and see myself continuing to be in the future. Your site continues to offer me information that no other site comes close to. The vast knowledge in this vault will be remembered for the rest of modern history. I meet people all over the world who use it, and I just hope that one day I will have as much influence on people and their views on psychoactives as Erowid does.

— SKY
Erowid Guestbook Entry

Your site has been so helpful to my friends and I. You always have just the information we are looking for to help us make wiser choices (dosage, drug tests, effects).

— KATIE
Erowid Guestbook Entry

When someone reads this site about a drug then goes out and takes it, their mind is polluted toward a new experience and their trip loses all value. Don't talk about it, just do it. Erowid Sucks!

— PAT
Erowid Guestbook Entry

I have been following your site for years and have a lot of respect for what you have accomplished. I can't even remember when I started viewing the site. It must have been around 1995 when I started college. I have kept a close eye on it ever since for one reason or another.

As a behavioral pharmacologist I believe in the integrity of information posted about drugs. As scientists, we rely on the previous work of others and the information they have brought to light in order to carry out our experiments whether they be to create a new drug to cure a disease, or understand the mechanisms of action behind addiction and mental illness. The importance lies in the conveyance of truth and validity of information.

The Vaults of Erowid should be commended for providing unbiased, useful information for the professional and recreational scientist alike.

— S.K.
Email to Erowid

All the energy put into erowid would be better put into something else. What a shame.

— FOLLOWER
Erowid Guestbook Entry

I'm a mental health counselor for the US Army, and as such see a fair number of persons who've gotten themselves into trouble carelessly using psychoactives. Invariably, I use your site as a positive part of an educational process. Keep up the good work!!!

— SP
Erowid Guestbook Entry

To all of you pussys out there who are scared of free information and think that Erowid is hurting people with information on drugs, get the fuck out of America. This is supposed to be a free country where information can be passed among people, without government interference.

Erowid does not sell drugs, it provides information to those that seek it. If you don't like Erowid, don't view the website. If you don't want your children to view it, may I suggest Net Nanny or another censorship software device.

— JORDAN KLASS
Erowid Guestbook Entry

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KNOW YOUR BODY
KNOW YOUR MIND
KNOW YOUR SUBSTANCE
KNOW YOUR SOURCE

Cannabis & Psychosis

a guide to current research about cannabis and mental health



Recent research into whether cannabis causes “psychosis”, mental illness, or schizophrenia has received a great deal of attention in the media and has triggered calls for the British government to move cannabis from Class C back to its former, more punitive, Class B designation.

This is, of course, not the first time people have said that cannabis causes mental illness, with assertions of a connection going back at least as far as the British Indian Hemp Drugs Commission’s investigation into similar charges in 1893. It concluded that “[when the] alleged evil effects of the moderate use of [cannabis are] subjected to careful examination, the grounds on which the allegations are founded, prove to be in the highest degree defective.”¹

“Smoking cannabis virtually doubles the risk of developing mental illnesses such as schizophrenia, researchers say.”

— BBC Reporting, Mar 19 2005

Medical and epidemiological research has come a long way since 1893, or so we’d like to believe, and many papers have been written about what physical and mental harms might be caused by the use of cannabis. In recent years, there has been a flurry of news regarding the analyses of several large longitudinal surveys that show an apparent link between cannabis use and mental illness: “The link between regular cannabis use and later depression and schizophrenia has been significantly strengthened by three new studies...”²

It is easy to dismiss the current Reefer Madness scare as yet another in a long line of such offerings by politically-driven drugabusologists, but there is more to it than hype, even if it is hardly the “drug induced mental health crisis”³ that some allege. The following is an overview of the current state of the debate.

Recent Articles

In the last few years there have been dozens of journal articles touching on this issue. A PubMed search for “cannabis psychosis” shows over 60 related articles published since the start of 2004. New additions to the now massive literature include a handful of important papers that present original analyses of survey data, at least three systematic literature reviews (summarizing, comparing, and synthesizing the results of other research), numerous editorial “reviews” of the evidence, and at least one academic book.

The Correlation Exists

The first thing to know about this topic is that it is indisputable that there is a *correlation* between the repeated use of cannabis and a variety of mental health issues.^{4,5}

Many large scale studies conducted in the last 30 years have found that people who have clinically-meaningful symptoms of schizophrenia or other psychotic disorders tend to use cannabis more often than apparently similar members of the general population. These findings were replicated in two major recent papers by Henquet *et al.* and Fergusson *et al.* (see Recent Articles sidebar).^{6,7}

This same data can be read to suggest the opposite, that cannabis users are more likely to have psychotic symptoms than the general population. “Drug abuse” is said to be “comorbid” with schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders, which means that these two problems occur in the same person at a higher than average rate. Comorbidity does not imply any causal linkage, although comorbid conditions may be causally related. Unfortunately, from there, it gets very complicated very quickly.

Correlation Is Not Causation

This bears repeating: correlation does not imply, and should not be assumed to mean, causation. This is especially true in epidemiological surveys, which are based on self-reports. The indirect nature of these

studies—compared to controlled experimental designs—makes it infeasible to show actual causation with much certainty.

What Is Psychosis?

One of the problems I first encountered when trying to understand these issues was figuring out what exactly “psychosis” refers to. The article by Fergusson *et al.*, one of the important recent analyses suggesting a causal relationship between cannabis and psychosis, focuses on “psychotic symptoms” and reports that cannabis “may increase risks of psychosis”. But there is no single definition of what constitutes “psychosis”. The *DSM-IV* (the standard Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for psychiatry) defines a variety of psychological problems as “psychotic disorders”. Psychotic symptoms include hallucinations, paranoia, and delusions, which are characteristic of schizophrenia, the most common and widely known of the psychotic disorders. However, there is no universal method for diagnosing psychotic disorders, and each of the surveys related to cannabis and psychosis used different diagnostic methods. This makes simple comparisons difficult. When reviewing the current literature, Macleod *et al.* noted, “Although some measures were similar across studies, no two studies measured either illicit drug exposure or psychosocial outcome in the same way.”⁴

Perhaps most important to the current discussion is that both the Fergusson and Henquet papers identify “psychotic symptoms” from self-reports on surveys. These self-reported “psychotic symptoms” include items such as “having ideas or beliefs that others do not share” and do not reflect actual diagnosed, clinically relevant schizophrenia or psychotic disorders.

Self-Reporting and Surveys

Self-report-based survey data are particularly problematic when specific medical conclusions are based on them. Theoretically speaking, survey data, no matter how strong,

Recent Articles

The two most important recent papers suggesting a causal connection between cannabis and psychotic disorders are "Prospective cohort study of cannabis use, predisposition for psychosis, and psychotic symptoms in young people" by Henquet *et al.* (Dec 2004)⁶ and "Tests of causal linkages between cannabis use and psychotic symptoms" by Fergusson *et al.* (Mar 2005).⁷ For those interested in more technical literature reviews see the excellent book *Marijuana and Madness* by Castle and Murray, and the systematic review by Macleod *et al.* (2004).⁴

Henquet 2005 - A German Survey

Henquet *et al.* analyzed a longitudinal survey that was conducted in Germany between 1995 and 1999 in which 2,437 people aged 14 to 24 were surveyed on two occasions about four years apart.⁶ Their analysis showed that among those determined to be "predisposed" to psychosis, cannabis users were 23.8% more likely to report "psychotic symptoms" than non-cannabis users. There was a smaller (5.6%) increase in those symptoms among cannabis smokers without psychotic predisposition.

They also found a dose-response relationship between cannabis use and psychotic symptoms: heavier cannabis use was associated with higher rates of psychotic symptoms. Their analysis corrected for other known risk factors and also for direction of causation (does cannabis use cause psychosis or does psychosis cause cannabis use?). They found no evidence to support either the "self medication hypothesis" (see page 6) or the idea that predisposition to psychosis caused later cannabis use. The

cannot prove causation. Survey data can only imply causation by isolating and using statistical techniques to control for possible confounds, e.g. factors other than cannabis use that could cause psychotic symptoms in the survey respondents. When the cause of a disease is unknown, as is the case with psychotic disorders, determining which confounds to control for becomes an evolutionary process of educated guesswork.

Survey data can also present additional complications. It appears that people are more willing to report the use of cannabis and alcohol than they are the use of other illegal drugs.⁸ This would increase the apparent effect of cannabis relative to other

most striking element of their findings was that more frequent cannabis use increased both the percentage of people who reported psychotic symptoms and the number of symptoms reported.

Fergusson 2005 - New Zealand Survey

This paper sparked a huge amount of media attention in March and April 2005. Fergusson *et al.* analyzed the results of a longitudinal study conducted with 1,055 people born in mid 1977, in the urban region of Christchurch, New Zealand. At the time of the analysis, the participants were 25 years old. They looked at portions of the survey about psychoactive drug use and mental health and concluded:

"...daily users of cannabis had rates of psychotic symptoms that were between 1.6 and 1.8 times higher than non-users of cannabis... The present study suggests that [...] the association between cannabis use and psychotic symptoms is unlikely to be due to confounding factors..."⁷

This paper was notable because it appeared to show, through complex statistical techniques, that "the direction of causation was clearly from cannabis use to psychotic symptoms".

A Critique of "Psychotic Symptoms"

It is important to note that these two surveys measured "psychotic symptoms" and not actual diagnosed illnesses. The Fergusson analysis used ten "psychotic symptoms" identified from the survey including "having ideas or beliefs that others do not share" (18.8% of 21-year-olds)

psychoactive drugs. Findings could be exaggerated if people with mental problems admit to illegal drug use at different rates than healthier individuals (they may be seeking causes for their condition or just have less to lose). It may be that people willing to admit to cannabis use are also more willing to admit to strange thoughts. It is also a known issue that a certain small portion of the population simply lies on surveys, and the bias this could introduce is not examined in the respective studies.

In their literature review from May 2004, Macleod *et al.* state that "In other contexts, reporting bias has been shown to be capable of generating strong and substantial associa-

and "feeling that other people cannot be trusted" (15.7% of 21-year-olds). These are problematic because of social and legal confounds with the subcultural nature of the use of cannabis. It is almost a tautology to say that cannabis users (in societies where its use is prohibited or stigmatized) "have ideas and beliefs that others do not share" and/or that they "feel other people cannot be trusted".

Without additional information, these "symptoms", far from being obviously psychotic, may instead be rational and reasonable. The rates at which these symptoms were reported were 2-9 times higher than the more obviously psychotic symptoms reported such as "hearing voices that other people do not hear" (1.7% of 21-year-olds). It is worth noting that the incidence of all "psychotic symptoms" was quite low: those who reported no use of cannabis averaged 0.60 symptoms, those who reported using cannabis "at least weekly" averaged 1.15 symptoms, and daily cannabis users reported an average of 1.95 symptoms.

In a May 2005 response letter published in *Addiction*, the authors dismiss this problem by pointing out that a survey in the Netherlands (where one might expect cannabis users to feel less disenfranchised) also found a relationship between schizophrenia and cannabis use. But with this argument they make it clear they did nothing to account for this confound in their work. It is both inappropriate to ignore this potential confound as well as to suggest that heavy cannabis users in the Netherlands are otherwise socially identical to the rest of Dutch society.

tions between measures ..."⁴ Simply put, it is problematic and difficult to separate correlation from causation using survey data.

Confounding Confounds

Although the studies on cannabis and psychosis attempt to delineate and account for confounds, real world epidemiological research into social and psychological phenomena is complicated. Issues such as family history or childhood traumas play a significant role in schizophrenia and are difficult to separate from other issues such as cannabis use. According to Macleod:

"Discounting confounding is probably the most serious interpretational

challenge in observational epidemiology...cannabis use could be a marker, rather than a cause, of a life trajectory more likely to involve adverse outcomes. There are no completely reliable means to identify confounded associations within observational data, and instances where apparently robust observational evidence has later been shown to be seriously misleading are common. The importance of this issue to the epidemiology of drug use might have been underestimated.”⁷⁴

Fergusson *et al.* agree: “The largest threat to the validity of causal conclusions in this area comes from the possibility of uncontrolled residual confounding.”⁷⁷ For many of the major surveys, apparent correlations were much higher before *known* confounds were factored in. Unidentified confounds could be equally important.^{4,5,9}

Problems During Intoxication

A separate issue is that cannabis use can occasionally cause powerful experiences that trigger bizarre feelings and behaviors. It is well documented that some people, at some doses, can and do react to the effects of cannabis with behavior that appears psychotic, paranoid, and delusional. These temporary effects during acute intoxication should not be confused with real psychotic disorders, as the effects generally resolve when the cannabis wears off.¹⁰

No Apparent Rise in Schizophrenia

One of my thoughts while reading on this topic has been that since, cannabis use rates have reportedly risen dramatically over the last 40 years,⁸ there should be a matching increase in psychosis rates. This turned out to be harder to research than I had imagined. The diagnostic criteria for schizophrenia and “psychosis” have changed quite a bit over the last 40 years, making it difficult to compare rates over time. Also, reliable epidemiology for these psychological problems is scant.

The most that can be said with certainty is that mental health facilities have not reported clear increases in psychotic disorders. There are a number of estimates of the prevalence of these disorders, most of which range from 0.7-2.0%, though others estimate as high as 5%. The generally accepted standard appears to be around 1%.^{11,12}

There is evidence that the rate of schizophrenia and psychotic disorders has “either been stable or slightly decreased” over the

past 40 years.⁴ Degenhardt *et al.* (2003) tested the hypothesis that cannabis use caused an increase in cases of schizophrenia that would not have otherwise occurred. They examined the rates of schizophrenia and related outcomes in Australia among populations born between 1940 and 1979 and found no increase in psychotic disorder rates. They concluded that a direct causal connection was unlikely:

“The hypothesis that cannabis causes schizophrenia was not supported by the data on trends in the incidence of this psychosis in Australia. There was no evidence that there has been an increase in incidence over the past 30 years of the magnitude predicted by the hypothesis...”¹¹

“Despite widespread concern, we have found no strong evidence that use of cannabis in itself has important consequences for psychological or social health.”

— Macleod *et al.*, 2004

Self Medication Hypothesis

A frequently mentioned explanation for the association between cannabis use and schizophrenia is that people with this type of mental illness self-medicate with cannabis to reduce symptoms or make themselves feel better. Recent studies have attempted to establish a direction of causation and control for the Self Medication Hypothesis (SMH) by carefully comparing the timing and order of cannabis use with the timing of reported symptoms. Both Fergusson *et al.* (2005) and Henquet *et al.* (2004) address this and report that the SMH did not explain their findings.

There is now substantial evidence that the SMH cannot explain all (or even most) of the correlation between the use of cannabis and schizophrenia and psychotic symptoms. But there is also undoubtedly some part of the association that is properly described as self medication, but this has not yet been quantified.

An alternative framing of self medication is “affect regulation”, which is a more general way to describe the reasons someone might want to use a substance to alter how they feel. Instead of focusing solely on the idea of medicating something, the term “affect regulation” also includes social, philosophical, or recreational reasons for use.

Multiple surveys have looked at the reasons people diagnosed with psychotic disorders give for their use of cannabis. In her review of these surveys, Spencer (2004) found a strong correlation between certain reasons for use and how much was used: “[the use of cannabis and other substances] to cope with unpleasant affect and to relieve psychotic symptoms and medication side-effects led to stronger dependence.”¹³ It may be problematic to assume that the dose-response findings in the surveys (where heavier cannabis use is associated with more psychotic symptoms) indicate cannabis causes symptoms to worsen. There is evidence that at least some users increase their cannabis intake in response to worsening symptoms and to curtail the unpleasant side effects of medications.

Prodromal Use

Related to the Self Medication Hypothesis is the issue of cannabis use during the “prodromal” period. Prodromal refers to symptoms that occur before the full onset of a disease. There is evidence that most psychotic disorders are preceded by an extended prodromal period that often includes a variety of other symptoms.^{14,15} It is possible that, during this period, some individuals turn to commonly available psychoactives to improve their emotional states. Since the developmental course of psychotic disorders is not clearly understood, the hypothesis that pre-symptomatic individuals prone to psychosis may have a proclivity for seeking cannabis cannot be easily separated from the hypothesis that cannabis use prior to the onset of psychosis causes the later symptoms to occur.

Some studies claim that they can detect those experiencing prodromal effects by their survey answers, but the question of whether survey answers can identify early prodromal individuals has not been adequately explored: many early symptoms may not appear to be psychotic. This makes it very difficult to identify whether cannabis is a cause or an effect of psychotic symptoms.

Shared Causes

Another possible explanation for the correlation between cannabis use and psychosis is that the same risk factors that lead to psychotic disorders also lead to heavy cannabis (or other similar psychoactive) use. An oversimplification of this “shared cause” (also called “common vulnerabilities”) model is that the genetic

background and childhood histories that make people prone to schizophrenia also increase the likelihood of cannabis use. This is similar to, but distinct from, the issue of confounding factors.

There is evidence that the cannabinoid system in the human brain may be involved with schizophrenia and that schizophrenic patients have imbalances in their endogenous cannabinoids.¹⁶ It is possible that an underlying condition could both lead to schizophrenia and make it more likely for an individual to use cannabis more heavily because it affects them differently than the average population.

Ferdinand *et al.* (2005) found that, in a longitudinal study of more than 1,500 respondents, psychotic symptoms and cannabis use appeared to cause each other. "It is remarkable that, in the present study, links between psychotic features and cannabis seemed to run in both directions, from cannabis use towards psychotic symptoms, and vice versa. This might indicate that a common type of vulnerability factor is responsible for the association found."¹⁷

Age of Onset

Since schizophrenia has a higher average age of onset (21-32 years old)¹⁸ than the average age of initiation for cannabis, by default, cannabis would normally be used before the onset of schizophrenic symptoms. According to national surveys in the United States, peak cannabis use occurs between the ages of 18 and 25.⁸ This overlaps the period during which schizophrenia is likely to first occur, providing an additional complication.

Degenhardt *et al.* (2003) propose that if cannabis is a precipitating component cause, as the age of initiation of cannabis goes down, so should the age of onset for schizophrenia. Unfortunately the available data does not clarify the matter: "The limited evidence on the average age of onset of schizophrenia makes it difficult to draw any conclusions about this indicator. [There is] some evidence that the age of onset of schizophrenia has decreased ... but clinical samples of first-episode psychosis have not consistently found that cannabis use is associated with an earlier onset of psychosis."¹¹ Other studies have documented a relationship between lower age of first psychotic episode and cannabis use, supporting the precipitating hypothesis, but further research is necessary.¹⁹

Does Cannabis Cause Psychosis?

There are several distinct types of "causes": necessary, sufficient, and component. A necessary cause is one that must be present before the result can occur. A sufficient cause is one that is, by itself, enough to cause the result. A component cause is one that is part of a "constellation" of causes that work together to bring about a result.

All of the recent research into this issue has found that cannabis is neither necessary nor sufficient to cause schizophrenia by itself.⁵ Rather, it is most likely a component factor when combined with a variety of other potential issues such as genetic predisposition or difficult childhood. Cannabis use, along with its attendant lifestyle and subculture, probably worsens symptoms in some of those vulnerable to psychotic disorders. The same is commonly said of the psychedelics such as LSD or psilocybin. As we don't know what causes schizophrenia, determining how important a factor cannabis use is cannot be determined.

Cannabis use could be a precipitating component in several ways. Heavy cannabis use may worsen certain coping mechanisms and weaken familial or social support through social disapproval. Fear of legal problems could cause anxiety and paranoid feelings; actual legal problems could damage self-esteem, damage hopes for life goals, or cause serious life problems. Cannabis intoxication can lower inhibitions and self control, worsen some symptoms to the point of dysfunction, or be part of a lifestyle that involves irregular sleep or other instability. It is easy to imagine that the effects of frequent or high dose cannabis intoxication could exacerbate these underlying instabilities and lead to increased paranoia and delusions.

Hundreds of papers have been published in the last few years looking at the very popular issue of whether cannabis causes psychosis. This issue has received the international attention of media, governments, researchers, and the general public, all looking for answers. Yet we are still sorting through cluttered fields of data. The main anchor point in the noise is that there is a near consensus that cannabis use and psychotic disorders are correlated, but the nature of the relationship is still far from clear. ●

You can read more about this issue at: Erowid.org/extracts/n8/cannabis.shtml

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THE EROWID REVIEW

Towards a Psychedelic Canon

by Scott O. Moore

On April 26th we unveiled a new project at Erowid called *The Erowid Review*. It is a multi-contributor blog that will, on a regular basis, publish original book reviews on the topics of interest to Erowid visitors.

Books about every aspect of psychoactive plants, chemicals, technologies and related topics will be discussed—cultural, spiritual, legal, medical, pharmacological and more. While books about psychoactives are our primary focus, we will also cover books about related trends in philosophy, science, medicine, religion and art. And we are not limiting the scope to recently published works; our intention is to also publish new reviews of older works to help characterize those works for contemporary readers.

Though the rise of the web has created an explosion of information available at the fingertips, the book remains a powerful form for conveying ideas—and great psychoactive-oriented books are published regularly.

Our goal is to publish new reviews two or three times a week, as well as to occasionally publish links to reviews or commentary published elsewhere. We hope to build a body of reviews from within the community, and occasionally highlight reviews by other media outlets for contrast.

There are a variety of ways that Erowid visitors and members can become involved:

- 1) First, we are on the lookout for regular reviewers—people willing to identify, read, and review a relevant book or publication once every 1-2 months. When a book is submitted for review by an author or publisher, regular reviewers will have the opportunity to receive a copy of the book that is theirs to keep after they have written a review.
- 2) We would also like to encourage the submission of individual reviews by anyone who has recently read a book they think Erowid visitors would be interested

in—whether a newer or older title. We are more interested in non-fiction titles, though on-topic fiction will certainly be considered.

- 3) We are seeking editors who are interested in reading incoming reviews and preparing them for publication.
- 4) We are encouraging authors and publishers of relevant books to contact us about having their books reviewed.

Those interested in participating should email review@erowid.org for more information.

A secondary goal of the project is to begin work towards the development of a psychedelic canon: an annotated list of the top-recommended, defining books in the field. We hope to catalyze the creation of this canon by collecting high-quality reviews and ratings from those who have strong opinions about this field of study.

While it's fairly easy to find an online review or two for individual books, *The Erowid Review* will be the first place to aggregate and publish reviews primarily about psychoactive-related books. We believe this will become an invaluable resource and primary stop for those wishing to learn about the many varied works published in this field on an ongoing basis and throughout history.

We welcome your feedback about our efforts.

The Heart of the Word: A Journey to the Last Secret Place

Author: Ian Baker
Publisher: Penguin Press
Year: 2004
Reviewer: Corrie

In his recent book, *The Heart of the World: A Journey to the Last Secret Place*, Buddhist seeker and explorer Ian Baker delivers 500+ pages of well-researched background and detailed travelogues recounting his quest for Shangri-La. We follow Baker and his companions on three separate journeys into Pemako, a perilous and isolated region

of Tibet. Baker's major geographical discovery in the depths of Pemako's Tsangpo Gorge, the deepest gorge on Earth, made headlines worldwide. Baker is fascinated by the prophesied Tibetan *beyul*, mystical lands hidden deep in the Himalayas where enlightenment is easily attained, animals and plants have miraculous powers, and people can live hundreds of years. The *beyul* are said to be actual places, "albeit not strictly geographical"—their accessibility (or lack thereof) corresponds to levels of initiation in Tantric Buddhism....

There were rumors of the plants among local people, but Baker found only *Psilocybe cubensis* (which he shares with an isolated Tibetan meditator, who asks him for more after sampling them). Baker reflects on Terence McKenna's theory that early Tibetan art was influenced by a combination of psilocybin mushrooms and Syrian rue, noting that both have been found in Pemako. Does it really take a Bodhisattva to find the magical plants, as one ancient text claims? Or does it just take a Bodhisattva to find paradise once he's ingested it?

Drugs and the Brain

Author: Solomon Snyder
Publisher: Scientific American Library Paperbacks
Year: 1986
Reviewer: La Malice

Did you know that heroin was once legally sold as a cough syrup, that lithium (the same thing that's in my watch battery) is a magical drug for bipolar disorders though no one can explain how it works? That cocaine, after being advocated by Freud, was as popular then in the pharmacies as Valium is today? That the first anti-depressants were initially designed against tuberculosis, or that morphine-based compounds are used in most anti-diarrhea pills? I surely didn't, and apart from writing a solid and scientifically grounded book, Solomon Snyder succeeded in making *Drugs and the Brain* very digestible and reader-friendly by adding

a helpful visual and historical background to his explanations....

At a time when human life and death are dictated normatively by cerebral activity, when the boundaries of “normalcy” become blurred thanks to an increasing medicalization of our social life, and when brain “fingerprinting” is plunging us deep into personal identity and privacy issues, it is increasingly important to understand what is going on in our brains. And this book is a good starting point, using the psychiatric field and its traditional pathologies to give an insight into how neurotransmission works and how physical brain systems and physical or psychological functions relate to each other. I would definitely recommend it to the neophyte reader, as a good overview of brain chemistry, or as an entry point for both psychopharmacology and neuropsychiatry.

Towards an Archaeology of the Soul: A Paratheatrical Workbook

Author: Antero Alli and Friends
Publisher: Vertical Pool
Year: 2003
Reviewer: Scotto

Antero Alli's *Towards an Archaeology of the Soul* is not an easy book to read, and this is perhaps best explained by its subtitle: *A Paratheatrical Workbook*. Every page of it is asking you to get up and do, which can be quite a challenge to take sitting down. Inspired by the ground-breaking laboratory theatre approach of Jerzy Grotowski, Alli set out to create a non-dogmatic, theatrical approach to sacred ritual. For over two decades, Alli's research led him to develop a series of tools and techniques for unlocking, confronting and embodying archetypal forces at play within the self. The first incarnation of this book, *All Rites Reversed?!*, was a slim metaprogrammers' handbook; this new version is expanded greatly to encompass much more of the aesthetic, artistic currents that drive the work. Theatre is the broad context, a place where the willing suspension of disbelief allows the actor – in this case, the ritual participant – to travel across time, space and aether, returning regularly to what Alli calls No-Form (the actor off stage/the absence of self) to begin again anew.

The exercises within the book span forms of initiation, “shadow work”, and distillations toward performance-worthy forms. One exercise leads you through death and rebirth; another leads you into hell and back again;

several immerse you in emotional extremes, or polarizations. “With enough discipline, talent and emotional honesty,” Alli writes, “one can begin extracting from internal source material universal symbols, myths and characters towards artwork and performances that elicit visceral and spiritual resonances in the audience. This is the experiment, the process and the goal.”

More Than Human: Embracing the Promise of Biological Enhancements

Author: Ramez Naam
Publisher: Broadway
Year: 2005
Reviewer: Figment

In his sparkly new book, Ramez Naam argues that genetic engineering, biological implants, reproductive technologies, and mind-machine interfaces are poised to thoroughly transform the human bodymind. Usually, the prospect of such posthuman tinkering is greeted by lots of moaning and hand-wringing—fears that are in turn matched with disingenuous assurances that enhancement techniques can be restricted to medical uses. Naam, a software developer for Microsoft, is refreshingly candid: not only will medical advances inevitably encourage (some of) us to sculpt and improve our bodies and minds to an extent never before imagined, but this is a Good Thing. To support his claims, Naam has tracked down tons of provocative scientific research, which he deftly unpacks for the lay reader. These

tantalizing studies argue for the incredible plasticity of lifespans, memory, sensory acuity, and even future fashion (phosphorescent skin, anyone?). Reading them, your mind-forged sense of limitations begins to dissolve. However, when Naam downplays the rather dismal results of gene therapy to date, one is reminded that, while the author has certainly done his homework, he sports rose-colored glasses.

But that's what makes *More than Human* fun: Naam is a posthuman enthusiast, a hedonic libertarian who believes that individuals freely deciding to pump up the capacities of themselves and their pre-scanned children will lead to a healthier, richer, juicier world. Though Naam overplays the case for rapid scientific advancement, I have little doubt that his general picture is true: enhancement technologies will not only attract the lusty and curious, but will become part of the Darwinian logic of economic competition. Moralistic regulation will simply expand the drug war to include these technologies, and will also allow Asia—where Judeo-Christian qualms are few—to gain posthuman advantage.

The unspoken irony of Naam's libertarian view is that the very nature of “the individual” he trusts to guide this future is undermined by the technologies themselves. This becomes particularly clear in the speculative close of the book, when Naam gleefully imagines a world where we swap thoughts and feelings as easily as we swap MP3s. At this point, the humans have definitely left the building. ●

SEEKING REVIEWS

- 1 **Orgies of the Hemp Eaters:**
Cuisine, Slang, Literature & Ritual of Cannabis Culture
Edited by Hakim Bey & Abel Zug (Autonomedia)
- 2 **What the Dormouse Said:**
How the 60s Counterculture Shaped the Personal Computer Industry
by John Markoff (Viking Adult)
- 3 **The Hidden World:**
Survival of Pagan Shamanic Themes
by Marilyn Barrett (Haworth Press)
- 4 **Under The Influence:**
The Disinformation Guide to Drugs
Edited by Preston Peet (The Disinformation Company)



Photo by Teknutz, © 2005 Erowid.org

A CLEANSING THERAPY

An Experience with *Salvia divinorum*

by Mother Nature's Son

I was first introduced to *Salvia divinorum* in July of 2001. I was living in New York City at the time, and had experienced psilocybin mushrooms for the first time two months earlier. I found that experience incredibly rewarding and divine, and thus my interest in the world of psychotropic plants was sparked.

One evening after work, on a crowded subway car, I glanced over the shoulder of a man reading an article in *The New York Times* entitled "New Cautions Over a Plant With a Buzz". In the hustle and bustle of the subway car, I was able to read the first few lines of the article and knew that I would need to buy the newspaper and read the entire article after my run in Central Park.

I read the article, and was subsequently astonished at the *Salvia* trip reports I researched online. Two weeks later I had

my first experiences with both *S. divinorum* extract, and smoked *Salvia* leaves. Those experiences solidified my views of perception and the nature of our experience and reality. Although I did not partake of *Salvia* again, that summer was filled with much personal and spiritual growth...and then the events of September 11, 2001 changed the course of my life, and my views of the world.

Due to the economic downturn following the September 11th attacks, I found myself among the hundreds of thousands of people unemployed in New York City in the autumn of 2001. Reluctantly, I was forced to leave New York City in January of 2002. I moved in with in-laws living in a warm, semi-tropical climate.

Still unemployed, but in a new environment, I filled my days with my new favorite pastime, gardening. I found

gardening incredibly creative and fulfilling. Since I was now living in an ideal environment for growing *Salvia divinorum*, I ordered two cuttings of *Salvia* (one Hoffman-Wasson, and one Blosser strain). I raised the two plants with great attention and care, and they quickly grew to many times their original size.

After several months of unsuccessful job hunting in my new home, I found myself longing for my old life in pre September 11th New York. I was still unemployed after eight months, and had no job prospects. My career seemed over. I wondered where my life was going, and what my future held. I had lost my enthusiasm and much of my hope for the future, especially given the tottering world situation. I was mildly depressed.

I had been waiting for the right time to partake of my *Salvia* plants, but up until now, the time did not feel right. I did not want to

utilize the Salvia because I was simply bored and restless. I respected my plants and myself too much for that.

Then, one night I had a dream about the Salvia plants. In the dream, I saw that someone had made cuttings from my plants, and planted them into a new container. In my dream, I knew it was my mother who had made the cuttings, although I did not see her do it. In the morning, when I woke up, I thought that perhaps this was a sign that it was time to partake of my Salvia, and then I realized that it was exactly nine months to the day of September 11th, 2001. The passage of nine months felt very symbolic to me. The time was right. I was ready to partake of the Salvia I had been cultivating.

I decided to attempt a mild dose of Salvia in solitude. That evening was a warm, rainy night. I thanked the two Salvia plants for their presence in my life and asked for their permission to use their leaves. I also said a little prayer for a positive, rewarding experience. I then began plucking six medium to large sized leaves off of the two plants, and as if on cue, a gentle rain started falling when I harvested the last leaf.

I decided that I wanted to partake of the Salvia outdoors in the warm, rainy night, so I set up a reclining chair near the two Salvia plants and settled into the chair with the leaves on my chest. I was lying in such a manner that the rain was gently lapping at my feet and lower legs, while the rest of my body was under a roofed canopy and was kept from getting wet.

“The feeling was strangely euphoric, and I had not remembered its intensity until this moment...”

Putting the six leaves directly in my mouth would have been difficult because of their size, so instead I lay the six leaves on top of one another, and tore them into bite size pieces, which I put in my mouth and began to chew, little by little. I did not find the bitterness unpleasant, and I noticed that the fresh leaves produced much less extraneous saliva than the Salvia extract did. As I lay there chewing, I was trying to have positive, grateful thoughts, and again thanked the plants for allowing me to partake of them.

I felt no effects for the first several minutes. Then the rain started to fall more

intensely, and I wondered if I should move indoors. I decided to stay where I was. I was eagerly anticipating the effects of the Salvia, but I apprehensively wondered if I should have used a sitter since it had been such a long time since my last Salvia experience, and fresh, personally grown leaves are supposed to be stronger than other leaves. It was then that I began to feel the subtle and instantly familiar waves of movement passing through and around me. I began to get excited and a little nervous. I could feel my heart pounding in my chest, and felt a slight pressure there. I relaxed and told myself not to worry.

I began seeing subtle and fleeting closed eye visuals moving in slow waves from my right field of vision to my left. The closed eye visuals were faint greenish glows that corresponded with the waves of movement that I felt moving through me, but when I opened my eyes the visuals were gone. My vision of the yard with my eyes open was completely normal. I closed my eyes to get back into the rhythm of the Salvia.

I then felt a second wave of movement flowing through me. This one was more intense. It felt as if I was being gently massaged through the fabric of the reclining chair I was lying on. My arms and legs began to feel like jelly. I don't know if it had stopped raining, but if it was, I was no longer feeling the raindrops on my legs. My mind quieted and the feeling of movement became stronger.

The sheer physicality of the *Salvia divinorum* experience always astounds me. I could have sworn someone or some force was supporting me by my elbows and legs and slowly moving my extremities in gentle, soothing circles. I then recalled the sensory memory of when I smoked Salvia for the first time, and felt like I was being pulled out of my body through the top of my head, the way that one removes one's arm out of a tight fitting sweater. The feeling was strangely euphoric, and I had not remembered its intensity until this moment and prepared for that sensation once again.

The closed eye visuals grew stronger, but instead of a greenish glow, I was focusing on a black void that was forming before me. The void felt utterly calm, empty and vast. I wanted to move into it. I felt as if something would be shown to me there. I began to feel as if my body were dissolving into my surroundings. Unfortunately, at that moment a light in a neighbor's yard

was turned on, and the light that it cast on my eyelids lessened my perceptions of the void and the sensations that I was feeling. I covered my eyes with my hands, and that seemed to add to the depth of the void, but holding my arms in that position was not relaxing. I wished I had goggles to completely cover my eyes. I then found noises from my neighbor's yard distracting, and decided I should move indoors.

“I felt a positive energy with me throughout the next day, which I still have. I had not felt so assured in some time.”

I slowly stood up from my reclined position. My body felt very awkward and heavy as I moved indoors to my bed. I put a pillow over my eyes for complete darkness, and in the void that I was perceiving, a smoky greenish glow seemed to be taking shape. I noticed that if I looked into the void, as if I were peering at something at a very great distance, the shapes would be more activated, and perception of depth and three-dimensionality would grow. I tried to concentrate and look into infinity, but the effects of the Salvia were dissipating.

I had a peculiar sensibility as the Salvia was wearing off. Curiously, I had this same experience the last time I had used Salvia divinorum. I felt a negative, angry, hidden part of myself attempting to attach itself to my ego and thoughts. In my mind's eye, I saw it as a scowly-faced version of myself. I became aware that this part of me lurks in my subconscious like a parasite, and that I must be vigilant in fighting off its negative influence if I want to remain a happy, fulfilled person.

When I fell asleep that night, I had exceedingly pleasant dreams of my family, and of taking a joyful walk in the streets of New York City. I felt a positive energy with me throughout the next day, which I still have. I had not felt so assured in some time.

I am grateful to the Salvia for cleansing me of my scowly-faced self, and for showing me that vigilance is required to fight off negative thoughts and emotions that can color my experience and life in detrimental ways. Salvia set me back on a positive path. ●

Erowid.org/exp/exp.php?ID=15393

EROWID

10 YEARS OF HISTORY

by Fire Erowid

2005 marks Erowid's ten-year anniversary. The site has come a long way in the past decade, from its roots in the early 1990s, when the web was in its infancy, to the present, when the internet reaches into nearly every school, library, business, and home.

Context of Creation

In 1993, Earth and I moved to the Midwest. We had switched the year before from local bulletin boards and nation-wide networks such as CompuServe and Genie to a direct internet connection through a technology company Earth worked for. The net was already showing itself to be an eclectic, data-rich playground, though it was navigable largely through hierophantic ASCII interfaces that only a computer geek could love.

We both had an existing interest in psychoactives. We had just graduated from a small, very liberal college where the use of psychedelics and MDMA was relatively common, but we kept to the sidelines, watching and listening as others experimented. The combination of anti-drug scare stories and a lack of solid, accessible information made it difficult to come to any sort of rational conclusion about these substances.

I used a month-long independent study period to research and write about the plants associated with European witchcraft, but even this relatively well-documented topic

was a challenge to research in our small college library.

By late-1994, when we moved to the San Francisco Bay Area, the web was starting to take hold. User-friendly graphical browsers replaced text-only interfaces, greatly expanding the possibilities for online data sharing. Hyperreal's Drug Archives, a centralized selection of FAQs and Usenet posts, became the most popular source of information about psychoactives on the new web.

Origins of a Name

It was in March of 1995 that Earth and I first chose the name "Erowid". We had been searching for a name for several months—actively brainstorming and playing with words. We were looking for an umbrella name under which we could do various projects, an idea that came in part from the way my parents ran their own businesses when I was a child.

We didn't know what the name would be used for, but we had a strong sense of what we wanted it to feel like. The creation of the name was part of the process of deciding what was next for us, and while we had no plans for a website about psychoactive plants and chemicals at the time, we *had* already begun gathering information in the form of scattered emails, URLs, books and journal references. Earth studied historical linguistics in college,

so we started by digging around in foreign-language dictionaries and Calvert Watkins' *Dictionary of Indo-European Roots*.

Then one day, during a brainstorming session in the car, a name just clicked—I remember writing the word several times, testing how it felt. "Erowid", based on its Proto-Indo-European roots, means approximately "Earth Wisdom" or the "Knowledge of Existence".¹ We registered the Erowid.com domain name a month later in April 1995.

A Community Resource

Although I'd made a website for the company I worked for in 1994, it was only a side project. In early 1995, I made a serious attempt to learn HTML. At the time, I didn't know what kind of job my humanities degree (history, literature, and women's studies) would bring, so I hoped to look for contract web design work. Meanwhile, the information Earth had been gathering about psychoactives was piling up in unorganized electronic stacks. This became an obvious dataset for me to explore with web design and data organization in mind.

And thus Erowid was born. By October, we had developed a small, publicly available website, though we did not publicize it or submit it to search engines. At this point we had no intention of making a large, public site. But the "practice pages" had useful

Erowid first becomes publicly available. 0 page hits a day.

Oct 1995

Erowid receives 1,000 page hits a day.

Jan 1997

Fire begins working full time on site. 35,000 page hits a day.

Oct 1999

The Experience Vaults are launched. 120,000 page hits a day.

Jun 2000

Apr 1995

The Erowid.com domain name is first registered.

Mar 1996

Erowid is first submitted to search engines. 120 page hits a day.

Jan 1998

Erowid moves to Hyperreal server. 4,000 page hits per day.

Nov 1999

Erowid incorporates HyperrealDrugArchives. 90,000 page hits a day.

Oct 2000

Visionary Art Vaults are launched. 150,000 page hits a day.

and interesting information that other people wanted to access. Someone on Usenet or an email list would ask a question that was answered on one of our pages, so we would send them the URL. As people started suggesting links and topics, the to-do lists began to pile up.

At this time, the site was primarily a resource for a community of sophisticated data geeks. It was a place to look for the latest about N,N-DMT or ketamine, or to find updates on the personal research of others. It filled a very obscure niche, with data almost exclusively related to psychedelics, MDMA, and unusual psychoactives.

Early Growth

In March 1996, we began submitting the site to search engines, and traffic grew, from about 100 daily page views in January 1996 to around 1,000 by the end of the year. As the site received more attention, the profile of our visitors changed. Many had no foundation of knowledge, no context within which to place the information they were finding on Erowid. We realized that these visitors needed more of the basics: summaries, FAQs, dosage and effects descriptions. We broadened our scope to include more general information and added sections about the more common (but arguably less “entheogenic”) substances like cocaine, heroin, amphetamine, and alcohol.

In early 1996, we also helped a little with the launch of the Lycaenum, a psychedelic community website founded by online friends. Early disagreements about how the project should proceed led to our disengaging and, although we’ve been friends with the Lycaenum staff over the years, we haven’t had editorial input since before it launched.

Coming of Age

At Burning Man 1996 we watched an incautious friend try GHB for the first time. Because of differing concentrations between two sources, she subsequently passed out, vomited, and convulsed for several hours. Soon afterwards, we started adding more warnings and cautions to the site.

We also met a fellow riding around on a bicycle, wearing a long homemade coat covered in patches. Many of the patches were pockets, each containing different types of cannabis, acid, mushrooms, ecstasy, or less common chemicals such as N,N-DMT. He traveled around the United States, buying, selling, and trading novel materials: part salesman, part information resource, and part psychedelic bard ready with McKenna quotes and campfire trip tales.

A defining realization we made during this period was that the prohibition of recreational drugs creates a huge market pressure for new psychoactives that are not strictly illegal and, by virtue of their novelty, more difficult to detect. At Burning Man and other events, we met people who would sell or give away chemicals we’d only ever read about. While the resources available on the web were growing, most information about these uncommon chemicals still traveled by word of mouth, even among medical personnel. The classic message-garbling of the “telephone game” was a serious problem, not only among people buying, selling, and ingesting psychoactives, but also among those charged with treating overdoses or addiction problems.

We realized we needed to build lines of communication with experts and community members, talk with writers and publishers, physicians, researchers, drug treatment professionals, teachers, parents, and teens. Each has their own perspective that informs the work we do, in terms of both the information we should present and how it should be presented. Meeting Alexander and Ann Shulgin at the Entheobotany conference in San Francisco in October of 1996 was an inspiration. Sasha’s lively genius and Ann’s cautious advocacy were infectious, increasing our interest in the subject matter and in the diverse community studying the topic.

Legal Issues & Data Quality

In 1996 and 1997, we took a serious look at what legal issues we might encounter running such a site. We wanted to make sure

that it wasn’t going to be shut down for some simple mistake that could easily be avoided. Happily, publishers, reporters, and libraries in the United States all enjoy a high degree of protection under the First Amendment. We determined that, given a moderately conservative editorial policy, we could publish information about psychoactives without breaking any laws.

Part of our process was to develop the editorial and review policies necessary to ensure a reasonable level of accuracy about topics obscured by complex social and legal issues. We settled on a process that required either Earth or me to read every article that was published on the site, rather than having an open forum system where visitors could post information at will. This limited the amount we could publish but helped maintain a higher degree of data integrity.

We began to think in terms of creating a resource with a consistently high level of quality, diversity, and availability, an active repository that could be relied on from year to year.

Money

Over the next couple of years we worked on Erowid in our spare time, filling in the basics while continuing to keep track of the cutting edge. To pay the bills, we took on a variety of contract jobs, including technical and editing work for the Council on Spiritual Practices (CSP). This included helping to publish the online chrestomathy of books on entheogens as well as Huston Smith’s *Cleansing the Doors of Perception*.

Meanwhile, Erowid continued to grow. Near the end of 1997, traffic reached 4,000 page hits per day and we were exceeding our bandwidth limitations. We had to find a new host, but costs were looking prohibitive.

Then a mutual friend introduced us to Brian Behlendorf, who ran the server that hosted the Hyperreal Drug Archives. Brian stepped up and generously offered to host Erowid on the Hyperreal server, allowing for the site to expand while actually lowering our

Erowid Extracts is first published. 200,000 page hits a day.

May 2001

The Hofmann Collection is launched. 315,000 page hits a day.

Oct 2002

Escottology is launched. 350,000 pages a day.

May 2003

Launch of *The Erowid Review*. 435,000 page hits a day.

Apr 2005

The EcstasyData project is launched.

Jul 2001

CBS News story on Erowid. 600,000 page hits a day for a few days.

Jan 2003

Begin upgrade of site to 3.0 design.

Feb 2004

Sperowider released. 41,000 visitors a day.

Jun 2005

costs. We moved Erowid to the Hyperreal server in January 1998.

At over 1,000 pages of information, we could no longer do the site justice while working other jobs. Our first donation came from Bob Wallace in April 1998 which prompted us to think seriously about working full-time on Erowid. In 1999, we began asking for donations to support the project; though we didn't receive enough to live on, it seemed possible that, with a little fundraising work, it could pay part of the rent.

Around this time, donations began to increase and we started to receive some larger contributions which helped with the sustainability of the site. We also began working with the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies on a variety of educational and informational projects. In October 1999, with the site now at 2,500 pages of data, I began working on Erowid full-time. Earth joined me in March 2000.

Hyperreal Archived

Several years earlier, Lamont Granquist, the primary editor for the Hyperreal Drug Archives, had stopped actively updating his collection. In mid 1999, he suggested the archives be incorporated into Erowid and together we decommissioned them in October 1999. With existing links to the Hyperreal Drug Archives redirected to Erowid, traffic doubled from 50,000 to more than 100,000 page hits per day.

Becoming a Library

It was around this time that we began to settle in to our role as librarians. The site was large, traffic was growing, and it was clear there was a great need for a well-managed collection of this information. We realized that we needed to avoid rhetoric and the political gravity well, and seek the fine middle ground of neutrality. Through the model of a library, we wanted to create a shared resource that could help bridge gaps between the various groups and individuals who needed psychoactive-related information.

Organization Building

During this period, volunteers began to take on increasingly important roles. Several key crew members with needed skills (including Scruff, Psilo, Bo and others) helped review and respond to the increasing flood of data.

In May 2001, after looking in to a number of options, we launched our print newsletter

Erowid Extracts, in order to give Erowid a physical presence and offer people a recurring reason to join and support the site.

Christopher Barnaby joined the volunteer crew in October 2001 to become the curator and director of the new Visionary Art Vaults. Starting from very humble beginnings, the Art Vaults soon became an important online venue for visionary artists to share their work.

Then, in July 2001, Sylvia Thyssen joined us, working part-time on everything from document editing and site updates to volunteer management. We were asked to step in to manage DanceSafe's Ecstasy testing program as they went through organizational difficulties. The program was reconstructed and became EcstasyData.org, a collaborative project between Erowid, MAPS, and DanceSafe.

In 2001, Erowid received its first two mentions in peer-reviewed journals, in two different articles discussing the growth of online information about disapproved psychoactives.² We were also invited to speak publicly for the first time, a somewhat uncomfortable experience since we perceived ourselves more as archivists and librarians, than "experts" on psychoactives. While we've gathered quite a bit of knowledge over the years, we consider ourselves first and foremost to be experts in the collection and publishing of data about psychoactives. We continue to try to balance these roles.

Reality Strikes

In January 2002, we hit an average of 250,000 page views per day. In May we were invited to speak at a small National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) conference. This was one of the first very clear acknowledgements that Erowid was a resource not only for psychoactive users, but also for people in the fields of health care, law, and public policy.

Then, in September 2002, our good friend and largest funder, Bob Wallace, died unexpectedly. While we were able to continue our work, this single event led to the loss of nearly half our yearly support. Many ongoing projects were substantially interrupted as we were forced to focus on fundraising and rethink our funding model. Over the next two years we worked hard to expand our membership base.

Settling In

Both Earth and I continued to work full-time on the project. What began as

a hobby had turned into a crowded home office: seven computers, a living-room full of books, a shipping room for managing membership gifts and newsletters, and a garage full of supplies. Several large projects were completed during this period, including the digitization of the Hofmann Collection of LSD & Psilocybin References, a joint project with MAPS and the Albert Hofmann Foundation. Sylvia became an integral part of the team. Recently we hired another part-time contractor to help process data. And although volunteers have always been a major part of Erowid, they are now more involved than ever in the editing and publishing process.

Current Projects

This spring, we began the work of becoming a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. We've considered this move many times before, but now the time is right. The first step is to form a corporation, choose a board of directors, and write bylaws. Then we apply for both federal and state 501(c)3 status. We're working with lawyers to move through this and, with some luck, we'll finish the process by the end of 2005.

We've just completed a significant site upgrade, updating the front page and all of the substance indexes. In April we also launched *The Erowid Review*, an online book review forum for the review of books related to psychoactives (see page 8). This is only one of several major additions to the site slated for this year.

Our biggest current task is looking ahead to the next phase of the Erowid project. Many of our initial goals have been met and the state of the web has changed radically since we began. We are now serving more information than we would have ever guessed possible: 450,000 page hits to more than 45,000 visitors each day. We estimate that more than 10 million unique people visited Erowid in the last year.

With the site having achieved a truly global reach, and with ten years of experience under our belts, we're excited to both reflect on our history and look ahead to the future of the project. ●

Notes

1. Erowid. "The Etymology of Erowid." *Erowid Extracts*. Dec 2001;2:3. Erowid.org/about/about_faq_etymology.shtml
2. Erowid Media & Journal Mentions. Erowid.org/general/mentions/mentions.shtml.

The Process of Re-Visioning

As part of Erowid's ten-year anniversary, it's time to take a step back and look at Erowid's overall mission and direction. Many parts of our original vision have been partially or completely realized, so it's a good time to survey what we're doing and where we're heading.

Change Course or Stay on Track?

Is it time for a big change or should Erowid continue on its current course? That is perhaps the first question to be considered as part of the "re-visioning" process. The internet-enabled sea change in information access has fundamentally changed psychoactive-using subcultures in many ways. What implications, if any, does this have for Erowid's methods and goals?

In January 2005, we began holding a series of re-visioning meetings with Erowid supporters. While this process is far from finished, we've had two formal meetings and many casual conversations with members and friends around the world. As the year continues we'll be working to involve more of the community in this conversation.

Results So Far

So far, those involved with the re-visioning have said they think Erowid is generally on the right track. Many had ideas about how we could expand or grow, but none expressed the desire for a major reorientation. After brainstorming and discussion, a variety of ideas were generated, which everyone was asked to rank. The top topics are below:

Meeting 1: San Francisco, January 2005. Twelve participants, mostly major funders and long-time friends of the project. Main issues and suggestions:

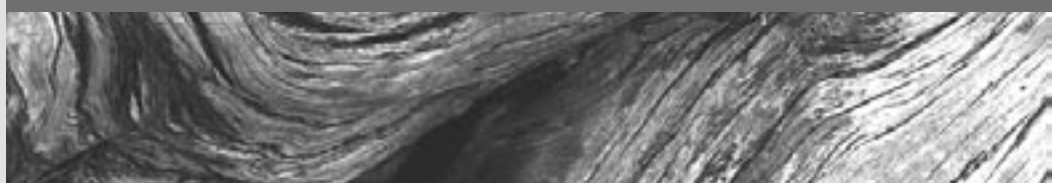
- 1) Hiring an assistant to decrease the amount of time spent on work outside our core areas of expertise.
- 2) Fundraising opportunities and ideas for how we could develop towards increased, sustainable revenue.
- 3) Outreach to professionals such as reporters and physicians.
- 4) Providing more transparency to the Erowid publishing process, perhaps with a blog or portal-style What's New interface.

The Broad Questions

- What is most needed in the world of psychoactive information over the next five to ten years?
- What new audiences (schools, libraries, media, health care) should we target with our information?
- What should change or be added to our current mission?
- What ethical issues are raised by our potential participation in scientific research?
- What organizations are doing complementary work that we can collaborate with or make sure not to overlap?

The Specific Questions

- What are the major gaps in publicly available data about psychoactives and how best can they be filled?
- Are there new technologies and information distribution methods that we should be utilizing?
- How can we effectively involve more volunteers?
- What new funding models and revenue streams should we consider? What new membership gifts would encourage people to join or renew?
- What tools or resources would be most useful to reporters or physicians?



Meeting 2: Seattle, February 2005. Seventeen participants, mostly technically-oriented funders and volunteers. The specific ideas included:

- 1) Publishing systems changes like user-manipulable meta-data, document management overhaul, the use of an off-the-shelf content management system, user ratings, etc.
- 2) Pro.erowid.org and professional outreach, including law enforcement, health professionals and reporters. Also, institutional subscriptions.
- 3) Hiring lower cost staff.
- 4) Creation of a volunteer management system and volunteer development teams. A group of Seattle supporters has formed to look into this.
- 5) Steering committees to focus expertise on technical and organizational tasks.

One point on which the participants of both meetings agreed was the idea of hiring an assistant. As a result we recently began working with a new part-time contractor.

Community Building

Of the top ideas discussed so far, one that has been identified as both high and low priority is "community building". Some supporters would like to see Erowid

implement more systems for involving visitor participation (such as web boards), while others think this would put the neutrality of Erowid-as-library at risk.

In many ways, Erowid has a very strong community: a diverse volunteer network, over a thousand members, millions of visitors. We have connections to many online and physical communities, as well as colleagues, experts, and friends who interact with the project in one way or another. Yet we continue to avoid normal "community" functions such as public web boards and email discussion lists.

Some interesting ideas have been discussed during the re-visioning process for other ways we might build, utilize, and help the communities that Erowid serves, including: increased community review of articles and information; better networking of the many experts we interact with; and more behind-the-scenes view into Erowid's ongoing projects.

We are very interested in improving systems that support the needs of the varied communities the site serves and that allow more community participation. As part of this, we will continue to invite feedback about Erowid's re-visioning over the next six months. If you'd like to participate in further discussions, visit:

Erowid.org/extracts/n8/revisioning.shtml

As information technologies develop, the line between content filtering and post-Orwellian censorship grows increasingly blurry.

SILENT CENSORSHIP ?

THE RISKS AND BENEFITS OF DIGITAL CONTENT FILTERING

There is nothing inherently wrong with content filtering. At its simplest and most elegant, it is the process of taking an unmanageable dataset and pulling out just what is needed or wanted. As a general concept, content filtering includes everything from systems that allow someone to find a recipe for chicken breasts without sorting through porn sites, to the Chinese government's banning of certain topics from search results.

The new reality of omnipresent access to the collective knowledge banks presents broad and novel challenges to the practice of content filtering because old models are no longer functional. Before the internet boom, libraries and schools used humans to filter books, periodicals, and resources that were then provided by the institution. Those doing the filtering were most often local community members who worked in the library or school and answered to those they served (or their parents). The staggering volume of information now available makes this type of hand filtering impossible.

“Any content-based regulation of the Internet, no matter how benign the purpose, could burn the global village to roast the pig.”

— U.S. District Judge S. Dalzell
in a 1996 CDA opinion

There is a fundamental shift underway towards accessing virtually all information and media through a computer or another electronic device. This shift has created both the opportunity and the need for pervasive machine filtering. Machine filtering has already had a huge impact on what people write and think, but, in the future, human intellectual endeavor will be shaped far more intensely by how these filters work.

To most people, the filtering inherent in current search technologies (such as Google or PubMed) is already hidden and inscrutable. Future filtering technologies have the possibility of being built even more deeply and undetectably into the fabric of the digital information space. In the past, censorship required physical acts of removal and ceremonial burning of books. In the future, censorship may be completely silent and invisible.

Filtering as Censorship...

Most people support the rights of individuals to choose what they and their young children view. If you don't want to watch sexually explicit content at home, you certainly shouldn't have to. If you don't think your eight year old son is ready for GHB-overdose stories, or you don't want to see certain advertisements, you should be able to make those choices. Using filtering software to identify and block the content you don't want can certainly be a reasonable choice.

But as information technologies develop, the line between content filtering and post-Orwellian censorship grows increasingly blurry. There are a multitude of methods that can be used and numerous points in the publication process where content can be filtered. How and at what stage content gets filtered conveys very different messages about choice versus control.

The same content can be filtered many ways: by an individual choosing not to buy a book; a bookstore choosing not to sell that book; a library being forbidden to carry the book; a library being forbidden to record the existence of the book in its database; an author or publisher being forbidden to produce a book; or an individual being forbidden to own the book. At the extreme end of that spectrum, a government could ban the distribution of all information on a given topic.

We draw the line between filtering and censorship based on two issues, consent and intent. Filtering becomes censorship when a) the choice of what is filtered is no longer controlled by those seeking the information, and b) data is blocked because the filtering entity doesn't want the information to be viewed.

U.S. Federal Legislation

The traditional concept of censorship involves a government (or religious organization acting as government) banning or using criminal law to restrict access to information. Over the last ten years, the U.S. government has tried to enact several pieces of legislation that would censor online information. Most of these have been designed to restrict the materials that children are allowed to view.

In 1996, the Communications Decency Act (CDA) was passed, criminalizing the transmission of “indecent” materials to minors. In 1997, it was ruled unconstitutional by a unanimous Supreme Court (9-0). The Court found that the Act's overly broad language violated the First Amendment guarantee of free speech.¹

In 1998, U.S. Congress passed the Child Online Protection Act (COPA), which would have made it the responsibility of web content providers to ensure that children did not have access to content “harmful to minors”. This would have forced content providers to require proof of age (such as a credit card or driver's license) from those accessing adult material. In June 2004, after a long series of court battles, the Supreme Court upheld a preliminary injunction against COPA, finding that COPA had a significant effect on free speech and was not the least restrictive means available of achieving the original goal.² The Court suggested that end-user filtering software is both less restrictive and possibly more (or at least equally) effective in protecting children from online indecency.

The Children's Internet Protection Act of 2000 (CIPA) required schools and libraries to implement a policy and "appropriate technology" to restrict children's access to graphical depictions of "obscene" internet content.³ Notably, this Act covers only images, not text. Libraries or schools that do not comply risk losing federal funding used to pay for computers and internet access. CIPA was found constitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court in June 2003 and remains in effect.⁴

Community Standards

Although the United States has one of the world's strongest judicial traditions protecting speech and publication, the courts have allowed the banning of works that violate "community standards" of decency and have no redeeming artistic or literary value.

On the internet, however, the concept of "community standards" dissolves, as every piece of media is available everywhere. City, state, and national boundaries become meaningless and the concept provides little practical guidance. As Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens wrote:

"In the context of the Internet, however, community standards become a sword, rather than a shield. If a prurient appeal is offensive in a puritan village, it may be a crime to post it on the World Wide Web."⁵

Three Filter Types

Problems with nation-wide censorship laws led the Supreme Court to suggest content filtering as a better solution for upholding local standards. The massive expansion of the internet into nearly every home and school room in the United States combined with the exponential growth of online data has created a demand for filtering. Three of the primary types of internet filtering software are content filters, traffic filters, and search engines.

Content Filters

Many web content filters—products such as Cybersitter, Cyber Patrol Net Nanny, and Safe Surf—are targeted at parents who want to limit their children's access to "inappropriate materials". These products generally work by categorizing websites into a series of potentially objectionable groupings—such as "sexually explicit", "drugs", or "violence"—and blocking access to any site that belongs to a banned category.

Some programs allow "stealth filtering". They craft a response page for blocked sites which looks like an ordinary unrelated error message, or they simply redirect the request to an unblocked site. This feature is designed to allow parents to block sites while their (young and/or presumably stupid) children remain clueless. It is marketed to parents as a means of controlling what their children see without letting them know that control has been exerted.

Traffic Filters

Traffic filters are designed for employers who wish to keep employees from "wasting time" or "lowering productivity" while at work. Products in this group include WebSense and Vericept, which are usually installed on firewall or gateway machines. These filters include bandwidth management and adult content categories such as "financial sites", "online shopping", and "news and media". Rather than simply blocking all access to non-business sites, employers can set time limits for access to non-work-related sites: employees might be allowed a "quota" of 90 minutes per day of personal surfing, for example. Similarly, employers can set bandwidth thresholds and filters that reduce access to certain types of web activity (media download sites, instant messaging, etc.) when company bandwidth resources are heavily used.

The framing of the issue by the filter providers is that the "non-business" use of the internet is damaging business. WebSense makes the claim that "Internet misuse at work is costing American corporations more than \$85 billion annually in lost productivity."⁶ Yet some of these products provide companies the ability to block their employees' access to websites about labor organizations, a content-based filtering choice much closer to censorship.

As "reading" increasingly comes to mean "reading online", filtering based on content becomes the equivalent of searching people's bags as they come into the workplace and removing books, magazines, or flyers that are not to the liking of management.

Search Engines

Search engines are generally designed to filter according to the end user's needs. But because of their role as central hubs on the internet, they deserve some attention as possible sources of filtering and censorship.

Each of the major search engines uses a different set of rules for how sites are

included. Yahoo and other similar indexes were originally hand coded. Editorial decisions about what and who to link to were based on quality of content and on who could afford to pay their multi-thousand-dollar listing prices.

Google stands out as a company that did not begin with human-coded listings. It created an algorithm based on counting and weighting the network of links between sites. But, as Google became popular, problems with their "PageRank" algorithm highlighted some of the less obvious effects that specific indexing techniques can have on what people read. Weblog software that included automated linking between any sites using the same (or similar) software caused PageRank to overweight weblog articles. The cross linking increased each site's PageRank, recursively, and came to be known as "Google Bombing". Individual stories or pages that receive thousands of links in a short period of time could force a target page to the top of the search results for a given word or phrase.

...several search engine companies, including Google, have agreed to provide services to China that have content-based filtering built in.

Some companies exploited this weakness and forced their pages towards the top of Google's results. Google punished those companies by removing all of their sites from Google search results. This illustrates an important aspect of search engine filtering: to the normal user Google appears to provide a transparent list of everything that has been published on the web, but behind the scenes, the corporate and editorial decisions of these companies directly shape search results.

Several search index companies, including Google, have also agreed to provide services to China that have content-based filtering built in. Search results will not include sites that are disapproved of by the Chinese government.⁷ The traditions of free speech in Europe and North America will make it difficult for governments to force search engines to exclude material, but if top search providers chose to exclude sites with information or links about a narrow topic, that information could effectively disappear from public view.

How Much of Erowid Is Blocked?

We have known for years that many web filters block Erowid, generally categorizing it as a “drug, alcohol, or tobacco related” site. Among the top content filters, Erowid is blocked at varying levels.

CyberPatrol’s “drugs” category selectively and somewhat randomly blocks pages and sections of Erowid. The entire Chemicals and Psychoactives directories and all pages beneath them are blocked, while the Herbs and “Smart Drug” directories are available. Only portions of the Plants directory are blocked: access is not allowed to any page about cannabis, mushrooms or *Salvia divinorum*, and a few pages about poppies or morning glory seeds. All dosage pages and a few pharmaceuticals are blocked. The Freedom, Spirit, and Culture sections remain fully accessible.

Cybersitter simply blocks any page under the erowid.org domain name. As far as we can tell, the major server-based traffic filters are “Erowid aware” and will usually block access to Erowid when content-based filters are turned on. However, many companies choose not to use content-based filtering in the workplace.

Problems with Filters

A couple of years ago, friends of Erowid mentioned that the Erowid.org domain was being blocked at several German universities that used the free filtering software SquidGuard. We looked at SquidGuard’s list of blocked sites and noticed a pattern. Not only was Erowid blocked, but a suspicious number of sites that we linked to were also blocked.

It seemed as if just about anything linked to from Erowid was included in their blocked “drugs” category. A little investigation showed how much confidence the SquidGuard maintainers have in their categorization process. A message at the top of the list of sites they block states: “This list is entirely a product of a dumb robot.” SquidGuard appears to create its drug-related sites list simply by compiling links from 45 sources, one of which is Erowid. SquidGuard’s lists are often used without customization by universities in Europe, the United States, and around the world.

Erowid contains thousands of external links, including links to government and school websites, encyclopedias, major media outlets, sites about meditation, and even Mountain Dew. Many of these sites were

blocked by SquidGuard. To test their system, we added a set of very small links at the bottom of an Erowid page, linking to several mainstream German websites, European drug control organizations, U.S. anti-drug campaigns, and a couple of entirely unrelated sites. After about a month, we checked back on SquidGuard’s drug-category and, sure enough, the arbitrary links we added were now blocked as “drug content”. Amusingly, SquidGuard also blocks a variety of books on Amazon that we link to.

It is far harder to look for these kinds of patterns in the commercial filtering software because they keep their blacklists and categories secret.

Filter Quality and the Mirrored Bubble

Choosing how to select and categorize sites for blocking is a huge undertaking. There is no established method for doing it well. At the sloppier end, blocked categories and lists are haphazardly put together, creating somewhat random and non-sensical lists of blocked sites.

At the more sophisticated end, millions of sites are associated with one or more categories to allow for more selective blocking of specific types of data. The upsides are obvious: the more specific and comprehensive the categorization, the more accurately you can block what you intend to block and not block what you want to see. The potential problems of comprehensive filtering, however, are even worse than with hamfisted “systems” like SquidGuard.

Although no truly sophisticated filters yet exist, they will have the downside of exacerbating the Mirrored Bubble Syndrome. Individuals will have the ability to precisely and preemptively eliminate exposure to media and publications, whether for themselves, their children or employees, or everyone in a school or library.

This has the potential to make the world appear more homogenous than it really is. Instead of the web providing exposure to more and more voices and viewpoints, sophisticated filtering could leave large parts of the population exposed only to media in line with their pre-existing biases and tendencies. In one example, WebSense already includes categories to block dissent, singling out “sites that promote change or reform in public policy, public opinion, social practice, economic activities and relationships”.

Information About Psychoactives

Unsurprisingly, commercial filtering products tend to heavily favor prohibitionist and anti-drug government sites. Although the alleged premise under which sites are blocked for “drug content” is to protect children from sites “promoting illegal drug use”, the practical effect is to block factual information or anything that contradicts zealous, “single-message”, politically-driven prohibitionist sources.

This editorial bent comes as no surprise; even peer reviewed medical journals uncritically publish articles describing Erowid as “partisan” and “pro-drug” while describing anti-drug government sources as “neutral”.

The history of CDA, COPA, and CIPA in the United States make it clear that unconstitutional censorship legislation can pass at the highest levels. Although its censorship section was removed before passage, the first version of the Methamphetamine Anti-Proliferation Act of 2000 included provisions that would have made it illegal (punishable by up to ten years in prison) to publish or provide information relating to the “manufacture of a controlled substance”. It also would have criminalized linking to sites that sold “drug paraphernalia”.

A Sisyphean Task

Massive countervailing forces do exist. As John Gilmore famously quipped, “The internet sees censorship as damage and routes around it.” While the more conservative elements of society don’t like to admit it, creative, artistic, curious, and highly intelligent people drive a lot of technological development. If existing systems become stifled by censorship, new systems will inevitably pop up to replace them. ●

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Preliminary HPPD Survey

In 2004, in order to gather information about the poorly understood problem known as Hallucinogen Persisting Perceptual Disorder (HPPD; also sometimes inappropriately called "flashbacks"), we conducted a small preliminary survey about our visitors' use of psychoactives and any experience of lasting visual disturbances.

Although HPPD is most often associated with LSD, it is not known how common it is, nor what other substances might trigger these "lasting visual disturbances or effects".

We received 1,858 responses to our online survey. More than 1,400 respondents said they had experienced some type of lasting visual effect and more than 800 had visual effects lasting more than a month.

263 (15%) reported that they'd had the visual symptoms before they ever took any drug and 416 (22%) said they weren't sure whether they had the effects before they took any drug. Nearly all of those who reported some symptoms said they had never seriously considered treatment or definitely would not seek treatment (94%), suggesting the effects were reasonably mild.

Because the percent reporting visual disturbances was high, it seems likely that respondents with visual issues were more likely to complete the survey.

We're working with a researcher to produce a second related survey, using the results from this one to inform the next design. The researcher is seeking human-subjects (IRB) approval from their university so that the results can be published more formally. We hope to conduct the improved survey in the next few months.

Psytopia (psytopia.org)

August 17-23, 2005

Fire and Earth will be speakers at Psytopia, billed as a "psychedelic festival for the mind" and fundraiser for the Albert Hofmann Foundation, Chapel of Sacred Mirrors, Drug Policy Alliance, High Times, MAPS and NORML.

Psytopia is being held near Negril, Jamaica in the Hedonism III and Breezer Bay Resorts. The conference/festival includes 14 bands, 21 speakers, 21 DJs, laser shows, snorkeling, sailing, SCUBA diving, circus school, and other tropical activities.

How Members Can Help

Fundraising

Through a very encouraging fundraising drive (from November 2004 through January 2005), we met our membership goal of reaching 1,000 members by the end of 2004. Our goals for 2005 are to increase the number of monthly pledges, reach 1,250 members, and find one new project grant.

As part of the re-visioning process, we have also been taking another look at our fundraising strategies. There are two major types of fundraising that we need help with.

1) Grant Writing. We need to find an experienced grant writer who can help us write and edit grants applications. We also need help in identifying specific, named grants that might apply to some aspect of the work we do.

2) Individual Donors. We need help connecting with individual funders who might consider sponsoring a specific project or help with a matching grant to increase donations.

Finding grants and sponsors is something that takes personal networking, asking around, and doing research. If you would like to help, please email donations@erowid.org.

Logo Design

We have tried and failed several times over the last few years to design and implement a logo for Erowid. We are now seeking skilled artists and designers who would like to help in this process. Good skills include: line drawing ability, an understanding of logo-scaling issues, skill with vector drawing programs, etc.

At this point we have a number of solid ideas and are looking for people who want to play with both design and implementation. If you're interested in helping us with this project or have ideas of people who might want to help, please email sage@erowid.org.

Image Drive



Acacia maidenii, photo by Wandjina Gardens, © 2005 Erowid.org



Nymphaea moucheletii in acaerulea, photo by Wandjina Gardens, © 2005 Erowid.org



Clonidine tablets, photo by Biopharma © 2005 Erowid.org

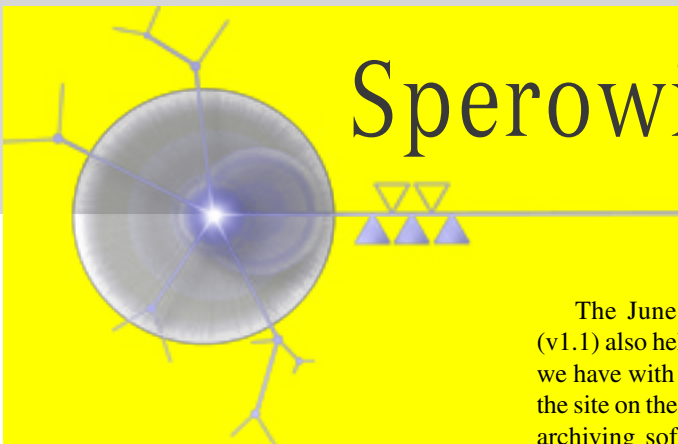
With the launch of the new site design in April 2005, we included a place on every substance index for a representative photo. This created a more pressing need for at least one good quality photo of each substance.

From April 15 to May 15 we held a photo drive, asking visitors and members to submit images of psychoactive plants, chemicals, herbs and pharmaceuticals to fill in the gaps in our collection. We received more than 500 image submissions during this time. Results of the image drive and related contest will be available later this summer.

The most difficult photos to find are images of live plants in various stages of development: this includes pictures of flowers, leaves, stems, and whole plants. We continue to seek high-quality, high-resolution photos, so if you own photos (or a camera and access to plants we list on Erowid), please consider submitting them for our use!

Erowid.org/extracts/n8/images.shtml

Sperowider Release



Over the past few years, perhaps the most common request we've heard has been for a CD version of Erowid for viewing offline or as a backup copy for those worried that the site might disappear from the web.

For some time now, we've been working on a solution that we've named "Sperowider", a combination of the words Spider and Erowid. Sperowider is open source software, developed by Erowid crew and volunteers, that creates a flattened version of Erowid's public pages for download or distribution on CD. Although there were many available archiver robots (called "spiders") when we started the project in 2003, not one that we tried could successfully spider and save a full working copy of Erowid.

The June 2005 release of Sperowider (v1.1) also helps solve some of the problems we have with people who attempt to archive the site on their own. Many people try, using archiving software, to download copies of every file on Erowid. During peak traffic days, several spiders may be crawling the site at the same time. Some of these spiders download more than 100,000 pages in a single day (more pages than exist on the site), getting lost in endless loops, downloading the same pages over and over.

In order to reduce their negative impact on normal traffic, we have restricted the use of some archiver 'bots. While we want to allow people to download the site, a single badly managed spider can slow down page load times for thousands of other visitors.

Finally, this release makes it possible to set up more online mirrors of Erowid based on bi-monthly spidering by Sperowider. The main Erowid server requires a complicated

setup and takes a lot of maintenance and management to keep running reliably. Requiring every mirror's server to have this same complicated setup can be prohibitive. There are also many security and privacy issues inherent with setting up additional servers. Sperowider allows us to set up simple, secure mirrors using the program's output.

Since last fall, we have had one mirror, located in Germany (de1.erowid.org), that can be used by visitors in Europe for faster load times or if the main site is ever down. We are now seeking servers around the world to host additional mirrors. ●

For more information about the Sperowider project, see:

Sperowider.org

Erowid.org/extracts/n8/e_on_cd.shtml

Erowid.org/extracts/n8/e_download.shtml

Organizational Updates

MAPS (maps.org)

Eight patients have been administered MDMA or placebo in Dr. Mithoefer's MAPS-sponsored MDMA/posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) study. In February, eligibility was expanded to include combat-related PTSD. This garnered international press attention, as did the December 12, 2004 FDA approval of a MAPS-sponsored research project at Harvard Medical School investigating MDMA in the treatment of cancer-related anxiety.

Council on Spiritual Practices (csp.org)

In February 2005, operational control of CSP was turned over to two new Co-Directors, Kelly Ransom and Anthony Henin. After eleven years as President, founder Bob Jesse will move to the position of Chairman.

DanceSafe (dancesafe.org)

DanceSafe recently worked the Ultra Festival, a 50,000 person rave in Miami, with great success, and continues to increase the number of smaller events it is working. New chapters have been established in Phoenix, AZ and Salt Lake City, UT, and several additional chapters are underway. A big challenge the group faces, alongside Erowid and MAPS, is raising the funds to keep the EcstasyData testing project going.

CHEAR (raiseyourvoice.com)

The Coalition for Higher Education Reform is a coalition of religious, criminal justice, drug treatment, education, civil rights, and health organizations seeking to repeal the Drug Provision of the Higher Education Act of 1998. CHEAR was founded in April 1999 under the aegis of DRC-Net, about six months after the Drug Provision became law.

In recent months, CHEAR worked closely with the staff of Representative Barney Frank (D-MA) on the development of H.R. 1184, the Removing Impediments to Students' Education (RISE) Act. The RISE Act, introduced with 55 House co-sponsors on March 10, is designed to repeal the amendment to the Higher Education Act that denies federal financial aid to students convicted on drug charges.

SSDP (ssdp.org)

SSDP members were instrumental in the establishment of Brown University's new Drug Resource Center. On Monday April 18, Brown became the second school in the country to open such a center. SSDP continues efforts to reinstate aid for students convicted on drug charges. It is targeting five states to find Republican co-sponsors of the RISE Act in the House, and the RISE Act's companion bill in the Senate.

I WONDER HOW THIS IS POSSIBLE

AN EXPERIENCE WITH DXM

BY COLLIN

It is 4 am. I am sitting bolt upright in bed, legs dangling off the side, only too aware of the increasing intensity. I look down, concentrating feebly on the spinning porcelain bowl of vomit, my vomit, and wonder when the next one will come. And then it hits me, flush on. My skin is burning. I am on fire.

"You are only imagining this. This is a figment of your imagination," I tell myself. But is it really? Perhaps I really am burning up. Does it even matter? I stare straight ahead and suddenly wonder whether my eyes are open. The burning passes, and I flop down on the bed clutching at my face. I think I hear a voice, possibly my own laughter, but it passes after maybe a few seconds.

Suddenly I am moving. I need to hear Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, in all its glory, in its entirety, immediately. It is a matter of life and death.

Motion does not come easily, however. I find gravity extremely confusing, and I can do little more than stumble drunkenly in what I believe to be the right direction. I am holding a black and white CD case. The tray slides out, and I am grasping the disc with my right hand. It will not fit.

This is catastrophic. I realize I am burning again, so I throw off my sweatpants and step onto my balcony. It is pouring rain, and with absolutely no hesitation I sit down on a drenched plastic green chair. I realize the problem: I need to take off my socks.

I cannot feel the moisture against my skin even though I am soaking wet. In the grip of insanity, I tear at the insipid cotton suffocating my feet, but I realize that I am shivering, so I go inside, and I hear the choral section of the Ninth jumping to my ears, and I wonder how this is possible.

Erowid receives a huge number of submissions of DXM-related experience reports. The average quality of these reports is quite low. So low, in fact, that the crew responsible for triaging and reviewing incoming submissions was getting bogged down with the high volume of difficult-to-read experiences.

For the past year, to help keep reviewers happy, we've actually hidden all incoming DXM reports from triagers and reviewers who do not explicitly ask to see them. Default lists simply don't show them.

It is therefore both surprising and pleasant to run across a nicely written DXM report every now and then. This report was submitted by a member for consideration for *Erowid Extracts* and helps restore some faith that articulate DXM users do exist.

I am lying on the sofa, looking at my watch. The numbers are spinning in a circle, and I feel I could decipher them if only I could perceive them. But then I wonder why we always try to decipher, always try to make sense out of everything, and then I wonder what it means to contemplate deciphering. And soon I am caught up in the vicious cycle of meta-thought, where thoughts never dissipate, they simply iterate, thinking about thinking about thinking, and everything is so obvious yet so distant all at once. Recursion, recursion, recursion.

And then the paranoid thoughts come. Any minute they are going to knock on my door, tell me my music is too loud and they know who I am and what I believe and they are taking me away. But I recognize these as illusory figments: they must be rejected.

So I lie down on my couch, covered loosely in a blanket of astounding redness, and I reach over for water. It spills; I search for repercussions, find none. Perhaps this is actually my right mind, and only now do I realize that my actions have no consequences. I will never leave this train of thought.

I am having considerable difficulty making any sense out of the music. It is soothing, yet distant and confusing. I am touching my arms and face, and the resulting sensation is one of touching together two completely incommensurate substances, perhaps rubber and existentialism, and it seems to be draining like sand through my fingertips, through my nails.

I have never been more tired in my life. I can no longer tell whether it is getting more intense, less intense, whether I am even high. I am not sure I care at this point. Everything is losing its meaning, and I melt into my bed, ferried off into an open field of shamanic revelation. ●

Erowid.org/experiences/exp.php?ID=42957

THE DISTILLATION

The Distillation includes updates, statistics, and information that we hope will offer insight into the ongoing site additions, traffic, and projects currently underway at Erowid.

Image Vaults



Published images	5,494	Viewed each day	84,400
Published in last 6 mo.	88	Submitted each day	4
Awaiting processing	3,864	Substances covered	184

In April and May 2005 we held an image submission drive to try to collect images of plants we currently have no photos of. This drive yielded more than 500 new images. See page 19 for more information about this and future image drives.

Experience Reports

Published reports	8,473
Published in last 6 mo.	792
Fully triaged reports	7,114
Partially triaged reports	2,451
Un-triaged reports	12,208
Viewed each day	54,000
Submitted each day	26
Substances covered	313
Active triagers	31

Erowid Visitors

Daily Visitors	46,040
Est. Unique Visitors in Past Year	8 million

A recent survey of Erowid visitors received 8,523 responses in a 48-hour period. Visitors reported that their primary occupation and age were:

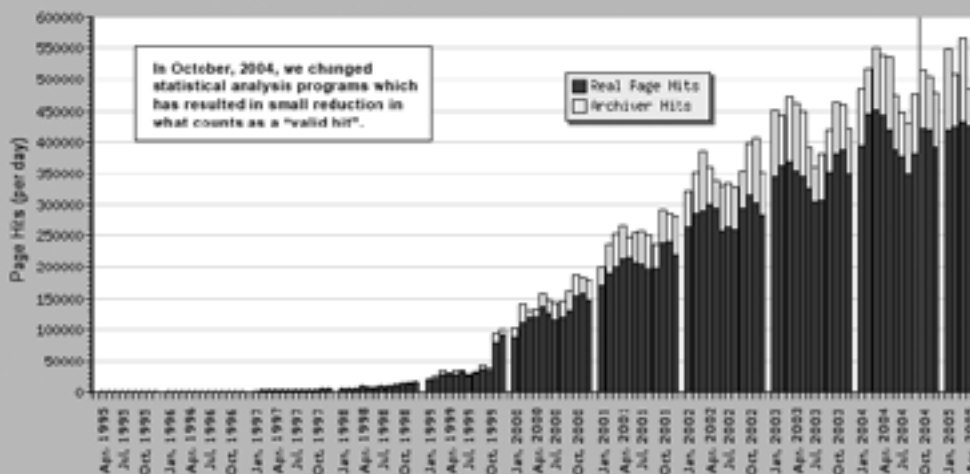
27.37%	Undergraduate Std.	1.72%	Service Industry
26.32%	High School Std.	1.65%	Government
5.42%	Graduate Std.	1.50%	Education
5.25%	Computer Industry	1.29%	Science
4.97%	Professional (various)	.86%	Military
4.82%	Artist	.55%	Publishing
3.58%	Health Care	.42%	Retired
2.73%	Unemployed	.42%	Homemaker
2.39%	Tech (non-computer)	.26%	Pastor
2.11%	Labor Job	.13%	Politics

45.34%	18-22	3.87%	40-49	0.31%	under 10
22.35%	15-17	2.31%	50-59	0.20%	over 70
15.49%	23-29	1.67%	10-14	0.53%	no answer
7.47%	30-39	0.47%	60-69		

Reference Library

We continue to build our library of books, which are useful for reference, review, and answering questions. We receive the occasional contribution of used books from members retiring parts of their libraries, and new or used books from supporters who visit our Wish List on Amazon.com. We can find a use for any book on related topics. If you would like to contribute to Erowid's physical library, please contact library@erowid.org.

Site Traffic (1995-2005)



Erowid 3.0

In April 2005 we finished a major phase of the Erowid site redesign including a new splash page as well as updates to the psychoactive page formats and data. While the new look has received some good reviews, a number of people have contacted us about their chagrin at the loss of the older "Alchemist" splash page. Rest assured, visitors will soon be able to customize their own splash page preferences, including the option of reverting to the Alchemist, if so desired. If you haven't visited the site in a while, go check out the changes!

Public Engagements

In December 2004, for the fourth year in a row, Erowid staffed the psychoactive mushrooms table at the San Francisco Mycological Society's annual Fungus Fair. In May, Erowid staffed a table at the Whole Earth Festival in Davis, CA as well as the Mind States conference in San Francisco. In June we will be speaking at a conference in London titled "Drugs: The Shape of Things to Come", and in August, we will be speaking at the Psytopia festival in Jamaica.

Visionary Art Vaults



Cactus City, by Highraff

Published pieces	1,412	Submitted per month	120
Number of artists	415	Published in last 6 mo.	180
Viewed per day	8,500	Curated by Christopher Barnaby	

EcstasyData.org

2005	Daily Visitors	2,221	Daily Page Hits	16,064
	Tablets Tested	60	Daily File Hits	284,141
BY YEAR	Tablets Tested		Testing Results (1999-2005)	
	2004	151	Total Tablets Tested	1,427
	2003	148	MDMA Only	(38%) 548
	2002	301	MDMA + Something	(16%) 226
	2001	332	No MDMA	(46%) 653
	2000	333	- Nothing	94

The EcstasyData project costs a minimum of \$15,000 a year in lab testing fees alone. The project is nearing the end of its existing funding, at which point testing will be suspended until additional support is found.

Membership

Current members	1,044
Expired members	1,563
Members in U.S.	
Members in other countries	818 (76%)
Countries with members	253 (24%)
Top 11 membership countries	
USA (818); UK (68); Canada (41); Australia (35); Netherlands (13); Germany (13); Norway (9); France (7); Ireland (6); Finland (6); Mexico (5)	

Content

Content pages	29,660
Number of substance vaults	269
Most popular substance vaults:	
Cannabis; LSD; Mushrooms; MDMA; Cocaine; Methamphetamine; Salvia divinorum; DXM; Morning Glory; Opiates; Ketamine; DMT; Nitrous	
Most accessed documents:	
Drug Testing Basics; Cannabis Effects; Mushroom Effects; MDMA Effects; About Copyrights; LSD Effects	

As of August 2004, the external web page that sends the most visitors to Erowid is the results page for a Google search on the term "Erowid".

Erowid Traffic Statistics

2005	Daily Visitors	40,873	Daily File Hits	2,822,731
	Daily Transfer	20.4 GB	Daily Page Hits	408,085
BY MONTH		Avg Daily File Hits	Avg Daily Page Hits	Avg Daily Visitors
	Apr 2005	2,574,233	435,927	40,641
	Mar 2005	2,342,765	431,713	39,525
	Feb 2005	2,234,405	424,579	39,506
	Jan 2005	2,076,735	418,993	36,248
	Dec 2004	1,867,691	388,398	33,353
BY YEAR	2005	2,307,034	427,803	38,980
	2004	1,799,694	405,528	31,241
	2003	1,421,815	349,530	25,997
	2002	1,206,855	283,541	23,042

VERBATIM

“There is nothing like returning to a place that remains unchanged to find the ways in which you yourself have altered.”

— Nelson Mandela (b. 1918)

“Without contraries there is no progression.”

— William Blake (1757–1827)

“It’s only when we truly know and understand that we have a limited time on earth—and that we have no way of knowing when our time is up, we will then begin to live each day to the fullest, as if it was the only one we had.”

— Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (1926–2004)

“When everyone agrees, someone is not thinking.”

— George S. Patton (1885–1945)

“This time, like all times, is a very good one, if we but know what to do with it.”

— Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882)

“The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity.”

— William B. Yeats (1865–1939)

“There comes a time when every man feels the urge to spit on his hands, hoist the black flag, and start slitting throats.”

— H. L. Mencken (1880–1956)

“The future enters into us, in order to transform itself in us, long before it happens.”

— Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926)

“Walk tall, kick ass, learn to speak Arabic, love music, and never forget that you come from a long line of truth seekers, lovers, and warriors.”

— Hunter S. Thompson (1937–2005)

“One of the greatest gifts of being human is being able to turn off rationality in favor of adventure.”

— Veek (b. 1977)

“The key to growth is the introduction of higher dimensions of consciousness into our awareness.”

— Lao Tzu (c. 600 B.C.E.)

“Wisdom is knowing what to do next, skill is knowing how to do it, and virtue is doing it.”

— David Starr Jordan (1851)

**Allvar och gamman
trives gärna
samman.**

[Seriousness and pleasure
should thrive together.]

— Swedish Proverb

“We don’t know a millionth of one percent about anything.”

— Thomas Edison (1847–1931)

“Silence is the universal refuge, the sequel to all due discourses and all foolish acts, a balm to our every chagrin, as welcome after satiety as after disappointment.”

— Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862)

“It’s a poor sort of memory that only works backward.”

— Lewis Carroll (1832–1898)

“There are always flowers for those who want to see them.”

— Henri Matisse (1869–1954)

“After silence that which comes nearest to expressing the inexpressible is music.”

— Aldous Huxley (1894–1963)

“The greatest of all mistakes is to do nothing because you can only do a little. Do what you can.”

— Liz Smith (b. 1923–2001)

“Enthusiastic people are the ones who actually get things done in this world. Enthusiasm is what turns any idea into reality. And enthusiasm is linked closely with happiness.”

— Roy Sheppard

“A man will turn over half a library to make one book.”

— Samuel Johnson (1709–1784)

“Voices previously drowned out ... can have special meaning in the struggle to eradicate inequality.”

— Allan Hutchinson (b. 1951)

“No great inner event befalls those who summon it not.”

— Maurice Maeterlinck (1862–1949)

“There are very few human beings who receive the truth, complete and staggering, by instant illumination. Most acquire it fragment by fragment, on a small scale, by successive developments, cellularly, like a laborious mosaic.”

— Anaïs Nin (1903–1977)

“If you have a garden and a library, you have everything you need.”

— Marcus T. Cicero (106–43 B.C.E.)

“Knowledge is a process of piling up facts; wisdom lies in their simplification.”

— Martin H. Fischer (1879–1962)