

COMMENTARY TO “MIND, MATTER, AND MUSHROOM”

KATE MADDALENA

INSTITUTE OF COMMUNICATION, CULTURE, INFORMATION & TECHNOLOGY, UNIVERSITY
OF TORONTO (MISSISSAUGA)

METADATA

doi.org/10.4245/sponge.v12i1.24242

CONTACT

kate.maddalena@utoronto.ca

Be sure to read this paper to the end, because that’s where the good stuff is. By laying out some of the stakes of the “question of psychedelics” in mainstream, primarily white North American, medical and para-medical knowledge-making, Eaton is able to critique the market-driven nature of the current psilocybin popular culture renaissance. This time around, the Mazatecs/Zapotecs medicine is being appropriated not by a counter-culture fringe (which Eaton calls “religious-idealist”) as it was in the 1960s, but by a more normy-friendly psychiatric and psychotherapeutic culture that includes, according to Eaton’s analysis, “secular materialists” and a hybridized group that blends idealism and materialism. This last group includes wellness practitioners and self-proclaimed gurus on the crunchy-to-alt-right pipeline (Belew, 2022) like Moms on Mushrooms, as well as others in larger, more nebulous umbrellas like Reddit psychonauts and readers of Michael Pollan. The epistemological question that divides these groups, says Eaton, is whether the trip itself or some chemical property leads to therapeutic outcomes.

But Eaton (2025) offers us another important epistemological provocation: “[can]

scientific knowledge be produced away from institutions, and if so, why has this knowledge been ignored?” (p. 10) It is impossible to answer this question from where Eaton has positioned himself and his readers—namely, inside the institution’s epistemological (and ontological) commitments. Instead of foregrounding Timothy Leary and Andrew Weil as challengers to the totalizing hegemony of Western science, we might do better to begin with and center Maria Sabina and a Mazatecs/Zapotecs ontology/epistemology, where mushrooms are method rather than object of study. This kind of consideration would be an opportunity to foreground non-Western ways of being. Wen-yuan Lin and John Law (2014) call this kind of effort to escape the Western academic hegemony of language about medicine a “correlative STS.” It would also point to the kind of reparative economic action that Eaton calls for, via Neşe Devenot (2022)’s critique of the Western normalization and medicalization of indigenous medicine: “an equitable psilocybin landscape would confer benefits appropriately to the broad sources of understanding of psilocybin we have, rather than just those in line with Western scientific knowledge” (Eaton, 2025, p. 10).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Belew, K. (2022). The Crunchy-to-Alt-Right Pipeline. *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/12/fringe-left-alt-right-share-beliefs-white-power-movement/672454/>.
- Devenot, N., Conner, T., & Doyle, R. (2022). Dark Side of the Shroom: Erasing Indigenous and Counterculture Wisdoms with Psychedelic Capitalism, and the Open Source Alternative. *Anthropology of Consciousness*, 33(2), 476–505.
- Lin, W., & Law, J. (2014). A Correlative STS: Lessons from a Chinese medical practice on JSTOR. *Social Studies of Science*, 44(6), Article 6.