

Towards a Sacramental Understanding of Dextromethorphan

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Dextromethorphan (DXM) is an ingredient of some cough suppressants which, when consumed in large amounts, can have dissociative and psychedelic effects. Some people within the DXM-user community use DXM to facilitate what they perceive to be spiritual experiences. This paper argues that DXM can therefore be understood within the DXM-user community as a sacrament, and its use located within the neo-shamanic tradition.

Dextromethorphan (DXM), an ingredient of some cough suppressants, has so far been discussed within academic literature from a medical point of view, whether focusing on its abuse (Wolfe & Caravati 1995; Banerji & Anderson 2001) or its potential as a therapeutic agent (McConaghy et al 1998; Abraham et al 2003). However, a subculture exists around the use of DXM that requires a wider and more nuanced understanding. The DXM community has its own online networks and e-zine, and in 2006 emerged from its primarily ‘underground’ cultural location, if not to the mainstream then at least to the book-buying public with the publication of Dan Carpenter’s *A Psychonaut’s Guide to the Invisible Landscape* (2006/2004).¹

Carpenter’s text highlights a significant theme within the DXM community, namely the search for spiritual experience. When consumed in large amounts, DXM can have dissociative and psychedelic effects, and some people within the DXM-user community use it to facilitate what they perceive to be spiritual experiences. For some users DXM takes on a sacramental nature. Such sacramental usage locates part of the DXM community within a spectrum of traditions often described as “neo-shamanic”. This paper opens up a new space in which DXM can be contemplated within a cultural and spiritual context rather than exclusively medical.

Source material for this paper comprises Carpenter’s *A Psychonaut’s Guide to the Invisible Landscape*, William E White’s online *The Dextromethorphan FAQ*², 16 editions of *The DXM Zine*,³ published online between 1997 and 2003, and various DXM reports lodged with the Erowid⁴ database between 2000 and 2003.⁵ A widespread and detailed survey of DXM users and their

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experiences would provide more insightful conclusions, but in its absence the available material provides a suitable entry point for considering the spiritual use of DXM. This paper does not explore any of the neuro-theological investigations that have flowered around the explanation of spiritual experiences and/or non-ordinary consciousness over recent years (D'Aquili 1999; Strassman 2001; Hamer 2004), nor the 'authenticity' of a sacrament and the legal ramifications of this.⁶ Rather it shows how DXM has taken on a sacramental nature within the DXM community, and that such an understanding locates it within a wider tradition of neo-shamanism.

A key limitation for this paper is a lack of demographic information about the DXM community. Such data are hard to gather due to the community being relatively small, geographically diverse and somewhat secretively communicating through the Internet (a medium that lends itself to anonymity). Similarly, because of the fragmented and often anonymous nature of the DXM community, this paper takes documentary evidence at face value, for all its limitations, such as inadequately articulated ritual surrounding the use of DXM. However, despite these limitations, this paper fulfils a significant function. It shows how DXM is considered by some users as an "entheogenic" substance (Forte 1997; Smith 2000; Roberts 2001), and used within a spiritual and sacramental context.

1. Neo-shamanism

Neo-shamanism refers to the rediscovery of indigenous shamanic practices of engaging spiritual realities and their relocation in what can loosely be identified as the West. Neo-shamanic theory typically refers to the work of Mircea Eliade (1964) and is exemplified by the writings of Carlos Castaneda who, in the 1960s and 1970s, inspired a generation of spiritual seekers with the lessons of his shaman teacher Don Juan. Another key text popularising neo-shamanism is Michael Harner's *The Way of the Shaman* (1980), which sought to transplant traditional shamanic journeying techniques (in particular drumming) into a western context.⁷

While Harner continues to focus on drumming and breathing techniques for neo-shamanic experiences, his earlier academic work focused on the use of hallucinogens within shamanic cultures to access spiritual dimensions (Harner ed 1973). While not essential to shamanism, the use of organic hallucinogens is an indicator of shamanic practice. Similarly, the use of organic or synthetic hallucinogens is emblematic of neo-shamanism. Hallucinogen as a term has since been superseded by entheogen. Carl Ruck et al (1979) first laid claim to the term entheogen, which describes a

substance with a meaning of containing (or releasing) god and becoming. The term has since gathered momentum (eg Forte 1997; Smith 2000) and has more recently been explicitly associated with meaning a sacramental substance (Roberts 2001). Aligning entheogens with sacraments brings more depth to the meaning of the entheogenic experience. For Paul Tillich, “any object or event is sacramental in which the transcendent is perceived to be present” (cited in Martos 1981:1). This is a broad understanding of a sacrament in which anything could fit, thus William Temple’s notion of a “sacramental universe” where God resides in all things (cited in Macquarrie 1997:1).

Citing the Anglican catechism, John Macquarrie argues that a sacrament is “an outward and physical sign of an inward and spiritual grace.” While not attempting to synthesise meanings, Macquarrie also notes that the Latin *sacramentum* is also the common translation of the Greek *mysterion* or “mystery” (Macquarrie 1997:4-5). Macquarrie is correct in suggesting that the idea of mystery may detract from the Christian understanding of sacrament, but within a shamanic/neo-shamanic context both meanings have value. An entheogen, acting as a medium between a person and the Divine, is indeed perceived to be “an outward and physical sign of an inward and spiritual grace.” An entheogen also has mysterious qualities, both in its production of ineffable experiences (see below) and, it has been argued, its role in ancient mystery cults (Wasson et al 1998; Heinrich 2002; Hoffman et al 2002; Ruck et al 2000). Examples of entheogens within indigenous or shamanistic traditions, which are the most commonly understood context, are ayahuasca, peyote, iboga, and amanita muscaria.⁸ In these contexts entheogens are used in ancient rituals to engage a dialogue with the Divine via non-ordinary states of consciousness.

Harner’s early work raises the question of trans-cultural experience, suggesting similar entheogenic shamanic experiences can be had in diverse contexts. From various ayahuasca-drinking tribes across Colombia and Bolivia, Harner notes five commonalities within the visionary experience: the soul’s separation from the body or “trip”;⁹ visions of snakes and jaguars; visions of demons and/or deities; visions of distant cities, landscapes and persons; and divinatory experiences such as resolving crimes or sickness (Harner 1973). In a companion paper, Claudio Naranjo finds a comparable commonality in Chilean urban ayahuasca-drinkers who do not share the same cultural references as the Amazonian tribes, inviting us to “regard some shamanistic conceptions more as the expression of universal experiences than in terms of acculturation to local traditions” (Naranjo 1973:190).

Elaborating on the nature of entheogenic experience William Richards argues entheogens, “can be profoundly revelatory of truths, both spiritual and psychodynamic – truths that could prove highly relevant to our well-being, personally and culturally” (Richards 2002:147). Richards goes on to list phenomena which characterise mystical experiences: unity; transcendence of time and space; objectivity and reality; sense of sacredness; deeply-felt positive mood; ineffability and paradoxicality (Richards 2002:1248). Richards also suggests the benefits of entheogenic use are measurable (Richards 2002:151) and refers to Walter Pahnke’s Good Friday Experiment and its 25-year follow-up (Doblin 1991), and his own researches with terminal cancer patients. Part of neo-shamanism revolves around these universal entheogenic experiences outside of their indigenous cultures, either from the original organic compounds or more contemporary guises such as LSD and synthetic DMT. Use of these substances may or may not be entheogenic, rather recreational, which suggests the context and intentionality of the user is central to an understanding of a substance’s use as an entheogen or sacrament.

Some neo-shamanic movements with an entheogenic element straddle the line of indigenous and Western. Both the União do Vegetal and Santo Daime traditions of Brazil use ayahuasca as a sacrament, both within Brazil and, increasingly, overseas. Similarly, the Native American Church uses peyote. All three attract both indigenous participants and outsiders, and their traditions and rituals are well established. John Baker cites ayahuasca within União do Vegetal as an example of a psychedelic sacrament (Baker 2005). Baker charts the intersection of psychedelics and sacraments, drawing a distinction between the nouns “sacramental” and “sacrament,” the former assigned to a looser understanding of spiritual experience, the latter for rituals which have become more codified and fixed.¹⁰ Baker’s division of “sacramental” and “sacrament” echoes discussion of the origin of the word entheogen:

In a strict sense, only those vision-producing drugs that can be shown to have figured in shamanic or religious rites would be designated entheogens, but in a looser sense, the term could also be applied to other drugs, both natural and artificial, that induce alterations of consciousness similar to those documented for ritual ingestion of traditional entheogens. (Ruck et al 1979:146)

Neo-shamanic entheogen use often falls into this “looser sense” and would generally be described by Baker as a “sacramental”. Such use exists within contemporary manifestations of purportedly ancient traditions including

witchcraft and paganisms (Clifton 2004) as well as numerous self-proclaimed religious organisations (Lyttle 1988; Stuart 2002).

If DXM is to be understood as part of such a neo-shamanic tradition it should be possible to identify intentional employment of DXM in a sacramental context, albeit a sacramental in a loose sense. It should also be possible to identify at least some of the commonalities of the shamanic visionary experience as presented by Harner, as well the characterisations and sense of well-being outlined by Richards.

2. DXM as Sacrament

DXM is most widely found in over-the-counter cough medicine. Typical syrups used for their DXM ingredient include Robitussin Maximum Strength Cough, CVS Tussin Maximum Strength Cough (and other generic versions), Vicks 44 Cough Relief and Delsym. DXM can also be found in pill form (geltabs) such as Robitussin Cough Gels, Dexalone, and Sucrets. DXM's reputation is generally dubious. Carpenter writes:

DXM is often played off as a “kiddie” psychedelic because obviously bored and broke teens do use it, and then post on drug information Web sites, “dude, I was sooo ripped, like worse than drunk. ...” The most common and undignified method of getting DXM to the brain – drinking cough syrup – has certainly kept it relegated to the status of a poor man's drug in the minds of many cellar-shamans. (Carpenter 2006/2004:13)

This reputation is perpetuated on the occasions when DXM hits the mainstream media, for example in headlines such as, “Kids Overdosing on Cold Medicine to Get High”¹¹ and “Euphoric Teenagers Get High on Cough Pills.”¹² White suggests that a “DXM culture” has existed at least since the 1960s Beatnik era. DXM subcultural use in the 1970s was minimal given the contemporaneous emergence of LSD, peyote and similar alternative psychedelics (although White says DXM was probably used among US soldiers in Vietnam), but regained popularity in the 1980s via hardcore punk communities. In most of these cases, DXM use was communicated only via personal social networks rather than cultural producers. White, writing in the mid-1990s says, “the increasing reach of the Internet, especially among college students, is totally changing the face of DXM use.”¹³ This is confirmed by other studies showing the effect of the Internet and more widespread awareness of psychoactive substances (Halpern & Pope 2001; Boyer et al 2005).¹⁴

If DXM can be understood by the DXM community as an entheogen, as enabling an experience of the Divine, then it can also be understood as having a sacramental nature. To evaluate this understanding we must look at accounts of DXM experiences and the interpretations of its users. The DXM experience has been categorised by White into five generally distinct phases known as “plateaus”.¹⁵ The first and second “lower plateaus” are characterised by alertness and mild sensory distortion, and then more noticeable dissociative effects. It is the “upper plateau” experiences that are pertinent to this paper. Mobility is reduced on the third and fourth plateaus and most experiences are had lying down with closed eyes, often accompanied by visions. Feelings of rebirth and recovery of hidden memory are common. A calm akin to meditation can descend – “one person reported this as ‘it felt like the top of my skull was opened into a clear blue sky’”.¹⁶ Ego loss/annihilation/liberation is frequent. The fourth plateau consists of out-of-body experiences and contact with external, superior beings. A fifth, elusive plateau known as Plateau Sigma has also been reported, characterised by contact with superior beings, alien forms and gods, but now with eyes open and in “waking” reality.¹⁷ White says, “the upper plateaus are considerably less ‘recreational’ than the lower plateaus, and are more introspective, spiritual, and shamanic. Most people who use DXM for psychonautical exploration or spiritual work do so at the upper plateaus.”¹⁸ The seriousness of such work that takes place in “Tussin Space” or “Tussin Consciousness”¹⁹ (Tussin referring to Robitussin, the primary source of DXM), as perceived by the DXM community, is indicated by the anonymous “Dex”:

Perhaps the most interesting things that I can recall from my DXM experience is it’s spiritual aspects. While many use DMX on a “party attitude” I believe personally that this is a great waste of a perfectly good “ethenogenic chemical”. Perhaps this is why so many dislike the sigma plateau, they are simply not ready for it.²⁰

Certainly spiritual and non-ordinary realities are of interest to White: Section 8 of his FAQ, running to over 4,000 words, is dedicated to “Altered States and Paranormal Experiences”. This section of the FAQ contains subsections including the dissociative spiral, out-of-body experiences, near-death and rebirth experiences, contact with alien and spiritual beings, clairvoyance, ESP, and other psi phenomena, memory loops and prescient sensations, and cosmic coincidence control (the source of synchronicity) and the alien conspiracy (in which alien intervention continues to have a guiding effect on humanity).

One could conclude that such a list is simply a reflection of White's personal interests, however the trend is continued in another significant source for cultural information pertaining to DXM, *The DXM Zine*, of which there were 16 online editions between 1997 and 2003. (It also must be remarked that White's work is central to the whole DXM subculture.) It is significant to note, given DXM's reputation of being a high school dropout substance, that every issue ran at least one article focusing on the use of DXM and subjects which intersect with a broad understanding of spirituality and non-ordinary states of consciousness including paranormal and psychic experiences, coincidence control (manipulating synchronicity), near death and out-of-body experiences, astral projection, lucid dreaming, extra sensory perception, communicating with the dead, kundalini and chakra energy, and the 2012 eschaton.²¹

On their own, these interests, while helping to dispel the myth of a disengaged dropout community, do not demonstrate a full and explicit connection between DXM and spiritual/religious experiences. However, Issue 8 of *The DXM Zine*,²² in one of its regular reader surveys asks, "Has DXM ever influenced your religious beliefs?" The fact that the question was asked in the first place is as interesting as its results – it shows that the *Zine*'s editor was keen to explore and articulate the spiritual aspects of DXM use within the community's most significant medium of communication. The editorial survey had 25 respondents (the *Zine* claimed to have "over 270 subscribers" at this point) and was reported in Issue 9²³: "68% of those who participated claim their religious beliefs have been influenced or changed by DXM." The editor concludes, "This obviously implies that DXM does have very strong ties to the spiritual world ... even more so than LSD or salvia divinorum."²⁴ And in all aspects, it would only make sense to base a religion on DXM usage for the enlightenment and self-progression of the individual self."²⁵ Further still, Issue 8 ran an article entitled, "DXM: A New Religion," which proposed an organisation called "The Church of Tussin," with the following objective:

To promote the exploration of one self and of the universe with the powerful shamanic device, DXM. This is not a blasphemous satire on religion, but a secret ritual of practice that enables oneself to perceive reality in a different way, and to contact higher spiritual beings for the promotion of self exploration and development.²⁶

The article goes on to describe various tenets of ethical behavior and spiritual guidance: what you cause to others will someday be brought back upon you, whether good or bad; you must show respect for both the drug and

the experience; each experience will reveal an answer; avoid contact with malevolent entities; do not ignore the visions; spiritual channelling can be used; inter-dimensional travelling can be a valuable tool for universal exploration. Part Two of the article²⁷ lays out the Church's rituals, practices and tithing.²⁸ Again, similarly to the editorial survey about DXM and religious belief, the *Zine's* running of these two articles locates spiritual considerations at the heart of the community's agenda, rather than the fringe.

3. Firsthand Reports

Clearly, not all of the reports mapping DXM experiences refer to a spiritual dimension; indeed most do not. However, those that do cover a broad spectrum ranging from the sceptical who were evidently surprised at their spiritual experiences, through the neutral, to those who actively set out on a spiritual journey, employing DXM as their sacrament. Of the first, sceptical category, the anonymous "DrknMnky" writes,

I could see the whole network of consciousness, and God was a huge blue stand of energy that connected everything together. It was cool. It was definitely a religious experience, and I'm not even that religious. One thing was clear to me, however, there is a supreme power. I have no idea what happened - blue green mesh mold network – connected – GOD wow.²⁹

The anonymous "Matt" writes,

I am not particularly religious but I felt God speaking to me telling me that everything was alright. I was the pupil in this mental conversation as God showed me the beauty in everything and how that was for me and everybody to experience. I wept at this beauty that now surrounded me. I wished everybody could remove themselves from the meaningless stress that they endure and join me in seeing what life was really like.³⁰

Other accounts of spiritual experiences remain positive, but it cannot be said with any certainty whether these users set out to have a spiritual experience with DXM, an intentionality that lends itself to a sacramental interpretation, or whether they were simply happy accidents. In this category, the anonymous "The Shadow" writes,

I used my strength and knowledge and looked to God for guidance. I felt as though I had a connection with God, one that I had never before had. Imagine the numbers 1 through 10, 1 being no DXM at all, and 10 being a fatal overdose of DXM ... All numbers greater than 1 bring you that much closer to death, and in that, bring you that

much closer to God. The upper plateaus are most definitely meant for spirituality. I was being cradled by God as he protected me from myself. I was comforted, more than I ever had been before. If I could cry that night, I would have.³¹

In this category, again, the anonymous “Okey” writes,

I saw God ... I went into this room. I was ‘told’ that it was his ‘room’. I walked around a corner in the entrance ... And He was standing there. I was scared to death. He appeared 50ish. with short dark hair (parted on his left.) He was not handsome in any way. But He looked distinguished and very confident, and gracious. He knew that I was scared to death. He then held out his hand and shook my hand. He said ‘Hi ... have a seat’. We sat down and had some small talk. And then I was lead away. He looked slightly Jewish. More like a cross between my Father and a older Me. One thing I was made aware of ... He had nothing to warn me about ... nothing to scold me about ... and He was glad to se me. He seemed proud of me ... and He seemed very supportive.³²

These accounts, and numerous others like them, provide a window into some of the spiritual experiences had by DXM users, but may fall short of an actual spiritual dimension to their DXM use. Other accounts make the connection more explicit. One article in *The DXM Zine* discusses combining DXM use with meditation practice, which is called “dexitation”.³³ The anonymous “Væðølis” makes his/her sacramental understanding of DXM very clear:

Prior to taking my sacrament, I do pray, asking for the blessing of the Creator and for the company of my “guides”. It is the healing energy that I seek to remove blockages in my chakra system and give me strength in my daily life. To me, this is the equivalent to a Christian person praying for an archangel to watch over them.³⁴

Carpenter, being the most articulate source we have about DXM experiences, clearly marks out his intention: “My approach has been absolutely spiritual” (Carpenter 2006/2004:108). It is Carpenter’s experiences that provide the least contestable evidence of DXM being used as an entheogen and sacrament. The phenomena that characterise entheogenic mystical experiences suggested by Richards can all be glimpsed in Carpenter’s text:

- Of unity: “there are fabrics of groups of people ... The Known in the Hive is fabrics of awareness. Families chatting, knitted into a quilt. It was a very clear thing that I sailed over” (ibid:65).
- Of transcendence of time and space: “The world kept coming over me as a new world – one I had just entered – a reality I had just arrived in. Each time this happened I had to create a new scenario about who and where I was. I said: ‘I am Dan Carpenter! I am an earth man!’ Then the world was new again” (ibid:28-9).
- Of objectivity and reality: “I saw endless bits of floating, living particles, buglike with neon eye/feelers on the end of stalks. There were multicoloured tubes, orbs, and plantlike plastic/plasma formations, the voices of cartoons and the evening news ringing through memory chambers, and messengers like sophisticated leeches running along “wires” and streams of “cables” made of light and strangely self-aware, looking back at “me.” All the crazy comings-and-goings were self-regulated by the parts themselves, like a host of hardened ER doctors in action after a bus crash. The psychedelic had held a door open into one “me,” allowing another “me” to see in ... and “I” was a squirming electric flesh-chemical ant colony” (ibid:44).
- Of a sense of sacredness: “Beliefs in the solid-state yet spiritual realms one can witness in the closed-eye DXM trance have become Knowns for me” (ibid:107).
- Of a deeply-felt positive mood: “I found myself drifting over a scene of unmistakable Buddhist monks. I could smell incense. There was a high seat of honor and I understood it was for me. The monks were saying, “He has made it! This is Dan’s Day! Place him on the seat!” ... Suddenly something went wrong – like the chair broke. ... Then one young man approached smiling and I understood the broken chair had been a cosmic joke ... The young man said: “This is the first enlightenment!” We both began to laugh hardily” (ibid:52).
- Of ineffability and paradoxicality: “I have witnessed the seat of dreaming” (ibid:14).

4. The Benefits of Entheogenic Use

Richards also suggested there are identifiable benefits of entheogenic use, so if DXM fits within an entheogenic and neo-shamanic tradition there should be at least some perceived benefits of entheogenic DXM use within the community. The anonymous “5 Boxes”, who had been suffering from depression, writes of his/her meeting with Christ through DXM:

As I closed my eyes the red light pulsed through my brain until through the light I saw the image of Christ himself standing before me holding a heart. He handed me this heart and as I touched it I felt a chill run from head to toe, and a feeling of finality, almost as if my life were finally over. But after this I felt such a rush of happiness it felt like I'd blew an eight ball in 30 seconds.

Jesus stood there still, staring at me, I thought he was waiting for me to say something, so I thanked him. At this time he faded away from me, and I knew it was an answer to my depression.³⁵

“Anonymous” writes,

The nirvana-like bliss I experienced on the 3rd plateau was so fabulous that not a day has gone by that I haven't longed for it and felt a tremendous sorrow at being separated from it. I have since understood this in terms of my particular spiritual path – but until I did, I experienced profound depression and suicidal impulses. Whether this is an aspect of the drug or of ‘opening doors’ to grander spiritual vistas of being, is up to the reader to decide. Whatever the case, my DXM experiences have transformed me and my life from the ground-up – this, despite the fact that before trying it, I'd had substantial experience with magic/mysticism as well as other psychedelics.³⁶

The anonymous “Xtrovert” writes, “Jesus is dead, but love is still alive. All music comes from the magic place. I have been there and have communed with it. Death is nothing to fear. The soul is everlasting and the universe is complex”.³⁷ For Carpenter, human engagement with the Hive Mind (the ultimate reality containing/comprising human awareness) leaves him feeling, in the end, optimistic: “Here were individuals ... “fingertips” touching through corridors of light ... “eyes” acknowledging each other, reassuring – ‘We're making it!’” (Carpenter 2006/2004:61) There are, then, some perceived benefits of entheogenic DXM use within the community.

5. Conclusion

Neo-shamanism is concerned with accessing spiritual and non-ordinary states of consciousness via shamanic practices within what can loosely be described as the West. Shamanism and neo-shamanism are typified by use of entheogens. In facilitating an experience with the Divine, entheogens are considered by people who use them as having a sacramental nature. Harner and Naranjo argued that entheogens produce certain trans-cultural shamanic experiences, regardless of the users' cultural references. Harner and Naranjo provide a distinct link between traditional shamanism and neo-shamanic use of sacramental entheogens. Richards listed further universal characteristics of entheogenic experience. Baker, within a psychedelic context, argued for a distinction between the nouns "sacramental" and "sacrament" based on the degree to which the context is codified and fixed. Neo-shamanic practices tend to use entheogens (or sacramentals) in less codified and fixed ways.

Some people consume large amounts of DXM in order to attain non-ordinary states of consciousness and, as we have seen, do report what they perceive to be spiritual experiences. DXM can therefore be considered to function as a sacrament and entheogen, if its intended use is the generation of spiritual experience. While the title of this paper employs the word "sacramental" as an adjective, DXM is clearly aligned with Baker's understanding of psychedelic sacramentals: DXM is used as a sacramental, but this use is not particularly codified or fixed. Similarly, DXM also fulfils Ruck et al's looser understanding of entheogen, inducing, as it does, "consciousness similar to those documented for ritual ingestion of traditional entheogens."

Harner's five commonalities within the shamanistic visionary experience were: the soul's separation from the body or "trip"; visions of snakes and jaguars; visions of demons and/or deities; visions of distant cities, landscapes and persons; and divinatory experiences such as resolving crimes or sickness. The DXM narratives provided in this paper fulfil all these commonalities except visions of snakes and jaguars. The DXM narratives also fulfil all Richards' characteristics of mystical experiences, namely: unity; transcendence of time and space; objectivity and reality; sense of sacredness; deeply-felt positive mood; ineffability and paradoxicality; and identifiable benefits.

In conclusion, we can identify intentional employment of DXM in a spiritual context. We can identify significant commonalities with the shamanic visionary experience as presented by Harner, as well as the entheogenic characterisations and sense of well-being outlined by Richards. DXM use

can therefore be considered as a continuation of the neo-shamanic tradition, which requires looking beyond previous medical contexts towards a sacramental understanding of dextromethorphan.

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Notes

¹ Carpenter originally self-published and distributed free of charge his text in 2004 under the title *The DXM Explorer*, which suggests a more humble methodology than the published title. The cover of *The DXM Explorer* shows a picture of Carpenter orienteering: he is wearing a camouflage shirt, has a compass around his neck, a map in a plastic envelope, and pen and paper; he is looking, intrigued, up at a cosmological vortex, noting his observations. I commented on an early draft of Carpenter's book and encouraged him to seek a publisher. In all, I communicated with Carpenter over a period of two years via an Internet discussion board and email.

² William E White, "The Dextromethorphan FAQ: Answers to Frequently Asked Questions About Dextromethorphan, Version 4.0" www.dextroverse.org/faq/dxmfaq40.txt. All Internet urls cited in this paper were accessed in April 2006.

³ www.dextroverse.org/zine.

⁴ www.erowid.org. Erowid, "documenting the complex relationship between humans and psychoactives," is commonly understood amongst drug users to be the premier resource on the Internet for information of this kind. As well as acting as a repository of published information, Erowid contains a large database of "trip reports" which are first-hand accounts of psychoactive experiences that provide a wealth of (albeit anecdotal and unsubstantiated) information. Originally a subcultural phenomenon, awareness of Erowid has achieved breakthrough into mainstream media: see Erik Davis, "Don't Get High Without It", www.laweekly.com/general/features/dont-get-high-without-it/1739.

⁵ Out of all the DXM subcultural literature, only Carpenter's has gone through a traditional editorial process. In this paper, I quote with the original spelling and grammar, with all its inaccuracies: I therefore do not use, in the multiple, "sic". I have chosen this material because it represents the most accessible and coherent literature about DXM as a cultural and spiritual phenomenon, material that was compiled with the intention of being used as a resource. There are large amounts of other material, ranging from the chaotic to the articulate, to be found in various Internet discussion forums and chat logs, but such material is difficult to collate.

⁶ Peyote, generally illegal, is a legal sacrament of the Native American Church in the United States – see Smith & Snake eds (1996). A protracted legal battle, *Gonzales vs O Centro Espirita Beneficiente União do Vegetal*, www.supremecourt.us/opinions/05pdf/04-1084.pdf recently resulted in the sacramental use of ayahuasca being legalised in New Mexico.

⁷ For a critique of these key neo-shamanic beginnings see Noel (1999) and Wallis (2003).

⁸ See Shanon (2002), for a whirlwind account of the role entheogens may have played in many major religions, not just shamanistic traditions. See also Wasson et al (1988) and Merkur (2000).

⁹ There is a tempting resonance between the "trip" and sacraments. Macquarrie claims that the sacrament links the two worlds (physical and spiritual) in which we live (1997:5), which resembles a shamanic journey. Martos' *Doors to the Sacred* (1981) bases its title on Eliade's (1964) work. Martos argues the sacramental experience, in opening the door to the sacred, "is like entering into another dimension of space and time, and discovering a whole new world of meaning" (1981:7). This description could fit any entheogenic or neo-shamanic narrative.

¹⁰ The distinction of "sacramental" and "sacrament," or degrees of "looseness," may in the end be more accurate ways of categorising entheogens than whether or not something is "indigenous". For example, it seems quite reasonable to describe synthetic entheogens such as LSD (or, as I will argue, DXM) as "indigenous" to the West.

¹¹ *ABC News*, "Kids Overdosing on Cold Medicine to Get High", 16 December 2002, www.abcnnews.com/GMA/Health/story?id=125521.

¹² *Copenhagen Post*, "Euphoric Teenagers Get High on Cough Pills", 7 February 2003, www.cphpost.dk/get/65575.html.

¹³ White, *The Dextromethorphan FAQ*, section 12.1.

¹⁴ My introduction to DXM also happened via the Internet.

¹⁵ White, *The Dextromethorphan FAQ*, section 5.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, section 5.7.2.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, section 5.9.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, section 5.6.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, section 5.12.

²⁰ Dex, "A Closer Look at the Plateaus of DXM", *The DXM Zine*, no. 14, 2002, <http://dextroverse.org/zine/zine14/#9>.

²¹ The 2012 eschaton refers to a supposed global spiritual paradigm shift that takes place at the end of the current cycle of the Mayan calendar. See Sitler (2006).

²² November 1998, <http://dextroverse.org/zine/zine8>.

²³ December 1998, <http://dextroverse.org/zine/zine9>.

²⁴ Salvia divinorum is a psychoactive sage plant ritually used by the Mazatec people of the Oaxaca mountains of southern Mexico. It is sold legally in most countries and is commonly used as an alternative to cannabis, although the effects are significantly different. See Shayan (2001).

²⁵ December 1998, <http://dextroverse.org/zine/zine9>.

²⁶ John L Terrence, "DXM ... A New Religion", *The DXM Zine*, no. 8, 1998, <http://dextroverse.org/zine/zine8/#11>.

²⁷ John L Terrence, "DXM ... A New Religion, Part Two", *The DXM Zine*, no. 9, 1998, <http://dextroverse.org/zine/zine9/#7>.

²⁸ Tithing here does not involve money, rather the giving of positive actions: basically, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

²⁹ DrnknMnky, "My First DXM Trip", *The DXM Zine*, no. 9, 1998, <http://dextroverse.org/zine/zine9/#22>.

³⁰ Matt, "A Religious Experience", 2002, www.erowid.org/experiences/exp.php?ID=6027.

³¹ The Shadow, "DXM, a Double-Edged Sword", 2000, www.erowid.org/experiences/exp.php?ID=72.

³² Okey, "I Saw God", 2000, www.erowid.org/experiences/exp.php?ID=1882.

³³ Graval & Charles Morris, "Altered States of Consciousness and DXM", 1999, *The DXM Zine*, no. 10, <http://dextroverse.org/zine/zine10/#11>. See Stolaroff (1999) for an insightful and comparable treatment of psychedelic use within Buddhist meditation.

³⁴ Væşølis, "Entheogenic DXM and Entity Contact", *The DXM Zine*, no. 16, 2003, <http://dextroverse.org/zine/zine16>.

³⁵ 5 Boxes, "Head First into Blissful Insanity", 2003, www.erowid.org/experiences/exp.php?ID=21257.

³⁶ Anonymous, "The 4th Plateau", 2000, www.erowid.org/experiences/exp.php?ID=1880.

³⁷ Xtrovert, "Anthropomorphication", 2002, *The DXM Zine*, no. 13, <http://dextroverse.org/zine/zine13/#9>.