

Me

- also obsessed  
to Answer

Why Question

introduction

**W**hen I began this book, I wanted to solve a mystery. I wanted to know why certain substances are revered in tribal societies throughout the world but repressed as well as ridiculed in contemporary Western cultures. In the West, these substances are called "psychedelics," a class of drugs that radically alter consciousness and perception. Unlike heroin or cocaine, most psychedelics are neither physically harmful or habit-forming. Yet they are considered so frightening and dangerous that possession of them is punished by long prison sentences. Although they were once thought to "expand consciousness," which sounds at least theoretically desirable, no sane adult can be allowed legal access to them.

The word psychedelic—"mind-manifesting"—was coined in the 1950s during our culture's brief enthusiasm for chemical self-discovery. The term itself is a bit vague, as the entire set of these substances tends to escape precise classification. In this book, I have, for the most part, limited my discussion to traditional and well-known visionary catalysts