



Conversations With My Anus

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“Through organ dialect, the body’s organs ‘speak a language which is usually more expressive and discloses the individual’s opinions more clearly than words are able to do.’ ”

– **Alfred Adler**, in *The Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler*. H. L. Ansbacher & R. R. Ansbacher (Eds.). New York, NY: Harper Torchbooks, p.223.

Dissociation

To move from the superficiality to the seriousness of this title requires some background. First consider the notion of dissociation, or the splitting of parts of one’s personality into separate personalities of their own. While this is normally seen as a sign of illness it isn’t; it’s common but subtle. Psychedelic drugs can amplify it.

Imagine parts of your body having their own personalities. These personalities can split from what you consider yourself, and they can speak. The question is, when this happens, are we hearing something new or are we just “making it up”?

We all experience our nervous system “speaking” to announce pain or trouble. We have a headache, bruise, or indigestion and we “get the message” without dialog. The head, tissue, or gut have authority in their domains and they speak somatically. Like the frowning mother who needs only point to our messy room, we understand without further instruction.

Indeed, were we to feign ignorance the frowning mother, like the bruise, would make their point through demonstration. The bruise or gut need not engage in rhetoric or polemics. Yet under the influence of psychedelics, this can happen. To me, it has.



Ayahuasca

Ayahuasca is a natural, psychedelic “tea” that has the unusual property of creating a dissociated world while leaving your “I- ness” intact. Under its influence you can journey to other worlds while remaining cogent, verbal, and aware. The notes you take make sense when you return. They make a lot of sense, in fact, a lot more than your average dream.

At the same time, ayahuasca greatly irritates one’s alimentary canal. Your gut is not just irritated, it’s infuriated. It responds with projectile vomiting and explosive diarrhea. It’s not enjoyable, but one copes. How many times does one take ayahuasca for fun? Once.

In the Sci-Fi comedy Dark Star hapless astronauts argue with the artificial intelligence of a malfunctioning thermonuclear bomb preparing to detonate while still attached to the ship. Unable to release, the astronauts attempt to use existentialist philosophy to convince the bomb it does not exist, and so should not explode.

I found myself in the same position, somewhere in the jungles of Ecuador, when the bolus of my ayahuasca reached the terminus of my intestines. I could not detach, and I did not want to explode. My only choice was to talk to my anus and convince it, somehow, that it could deviate from its natural inclinations.

It was an odd situation because – ayahuasca being what it is – my anus talked back. But I tell you this: unlike a bomb with artificial intelligence, the anus is not endowed with much. Its world is simple and its task straightforward. Thinking is not its strong point. The crew of Dark Star perished because of their poor undergraduate education, but my arguments succeeded, and I lived to see another day. Let it not be said that philosophy isn’t worth shit.

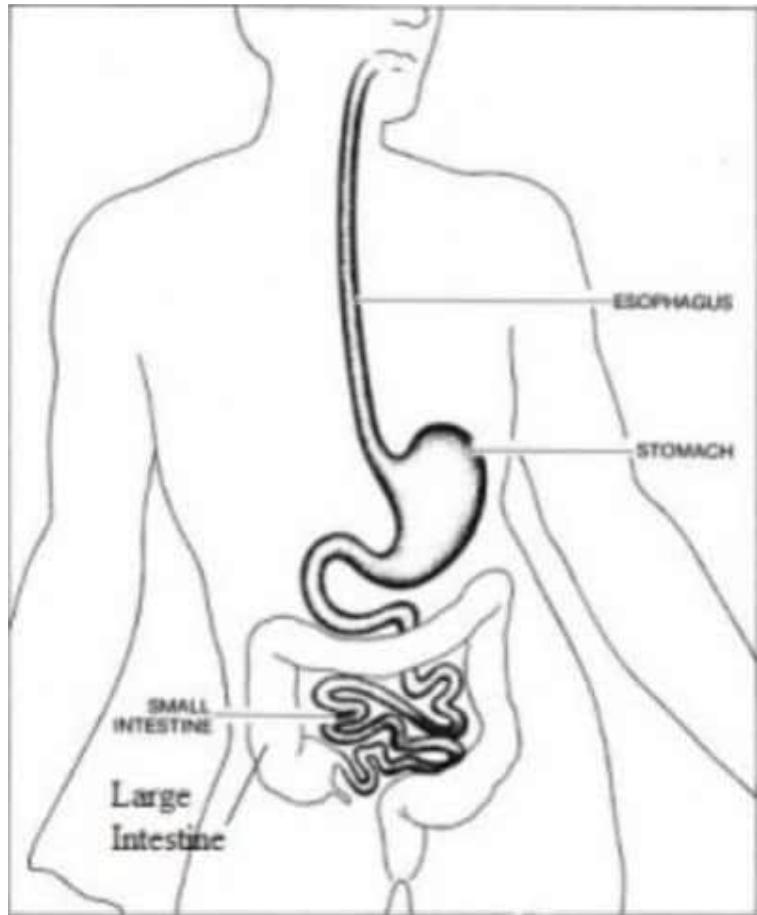
After The Flood

This was the end of it, but far from the beginning. At the beginning, after the wretched nausea of swallowing this concoction, my stomach had quite a bit to say about this adventure. Once the beta-carbolines and tryptamines perfused my system, these gastric complaints were communicated to my mind in plain English.

Your stomach, as you should know, is far from stupid. Your enteric nervous system, a wholly separate nervous network, is one tenth the size of your brain. I have a renewed respect from the intelligence of my gut as a result of these conversations. And whereas I often don't get an answer outside of a dissociated state, I now always announce my intentions, and my stomach knows I'm listening.

These conversations took place over a decade ago. Since then I've developed benign hemorrhoids and acid reflux. It recently dawned on me that these two conditions, located at the entry and exit of my alimentary canal, are controlled by same characters I once engaged in conversation.

I am wondering if the dissociation that began in the jungle has developed into a situation where the characters I brought to consciousness cannot reconnect to the subconscious world from which they arose. Or maybe now that I've demonstrated I am somewhat conscious of their affairs, I'm expected to take an active role, whereas I used to be exempt.



Home to Roost

There is something of merit here. I'm not sure if damage was done by the trauma of the ayahuasca, or by my conjuring into existence entities from inside myself that would have been better left undisturbed. Shamans say that disempowerment is a sign of loss of soul connection, and ayahuasca is about as shamanic a thing as

one can get.

Yet, the idea is not so different from the idea of “organ dialect,” put forward 100 years ago by Alfred Adler. Today Adler is called “the father of humanistic psychology,” but most of his work has been forgotten.

Adler’s idea was that the body harbors an understanding of systems of which the mind is only faintly aware. From this follows the idea that trauma can root in the body, and that dysfunctions of the body can migrate to become conflicts of the mind.

His idea of “organ jargon” was not meant literally, but he was serious in saying that our “fiction” of reality becomes our blueprint for development and behavior. This is pretty close to saying that one’s dialogs with others, oneself, and one’s organs become your operating manual.

The implication is that changing the text – the fiction – creates an actual change. I would argue that if this is the case, the “fiction” was not entirely fictitious to begin with. After all, we never perceive reality, only our fanciful version of it.

My conditions have improved since I’ve made a personal investment, “rolled up my sleeves and got to work,” you might say. It cannot be denied that directing conscious energy – simply attending to the flow of energy – through a troubled organ creates a higher level of engagement and attunement than remaining powerless and disengaged. But what is the prognosis? How far can we take this?

I do not know the answers, but I think I know some characters who might.

“The unconscious is nothing other than that which we have been unable to formulate in clear concepts. It is not a matter of concepts hiding away in some unconscious or subconscious recesses of our minds, but of parts of our consciousness, the significance of which we have not fully understood.”

– **Alfred Adler**

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