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UNLOCKING NEW  
POTENTIAL

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THE SYNCHRONISM OF  
THE RISE OF AI AND  
THE REVALUATION OF  
PSYCHEDELICS MAY  
NOT BE A COINCIDENCE.  
STEPPING BEYOND  
FORMER BOUNDARIES  
OF THINKING SEEMS  
TO BE KEY TO THE FUTURE  
OF HUMANITY.

WORDS COLLECTED *by* SILKE BENDER

A MULTI-DISCIPLINARY  
BRAINSTORMING  
BY NICOLE BÜTTNER,  
SERGIO PÉREZ ROSAL  
AND ANNE PHILIPPI  
IN BERLIN.

*Before meeting for a photo call at the Futurium, our three discussion partners sat down in Soho House Berlin for a literally mind-blowing conversation: Why do AI and psychedelics attract each other? Do we need the latter to better understand the former? Can AI give us a spiritual experience?*

*The host of this talk is Anne Philippi, journalist and start-up entrepreneur in psychedelic journeys. In 2019 she founded The New Health Club podcast and newsletter, a space where founders, investors, scientists and therapists from the new psychedelic ecosystem talk about the potential of these previously banned drugs and about new markets, compounds and medical perspectives. Today she is expanding her activities to become a literal 'trip advisor' and helping peo-*



NICOLE BÜTTNER



*ple to find the retreat that best fits their personal needs in the Netherlands, Europe's playground for exploring the power of psilocybin (also known as magic truffles). Completely legal, these 'trip retreats' have been springing up like, well, mushrooms all over the small country in the past few years and are attracting people from all over Europe, US, India and even Saudi Arabia.*

*Nicole Büttner is CEO and co-founder of Berlin-based Merantix Momentum. She is regarded as one of Europe's most influential women in the field of artificial intelligence; the World Economic Forum in Davos named her the 'Digital Leader of Europe' in 2022, and she has twice been Capital magazine's pick as one of the 'Top 40 under 40'. She supports and advises start-ups, SMEs and corporations in the application of new AI-technologies. Convinced that Europe should become part of the forefront of AI, Büttner writes, gives talks and regularly lectures on artificial intelligence at institutions including the University of St. Gallen and the Swiss Finance Institute. She is also a startup coach at the Founders Institute and describes herself as a 'tech optimist'.*

*Sergio Pérez Rosal is a medical doctor and specialist in anaesthesia, intensive care, emergency medicine and cannabis-based medicine. He is CEO and co-founder of the OVID Clinics Berlin, the first psychedelic medicine clinic in Germany to use ketamine in treating mental disorders. Pérez Rosal is a member of the executive board of the MIND Foundation. Under the lead of Prof. Gerhard Gründer, MIND has joined forces with the Charité hospital in Berlin and the Central Institute of Mental Health (ZI) in Mannheim to conduct a clinical trial with 144 patients suffering from treatment-resistant depression. In this placebo-controlled study, patients will receive one or two doses of psilocybin under therapeutic supervision. The clinical trial was approved by the German Federal Institute for Drugs and Medical Devices and the responsible Ethics Committee. The start of the study and patient recruitment was in March 2021. Pérez Rosal is currently also training in cognitive-behavioural psychotherapy and pursuing a Master's in Neuroscience and Psychology at King's College London.*

*A link between AI and psychedelics is more than just a weird pipe dream. Philippi first encountered psychedelics in the US while working as a tech and lifestyle correspondent in California. Many Silicon Valley tech leaders have long experimented with micro-dosing of hallucinogenic substances. It all started with Apple founder Steve Jobs in the early 70s. He never tired of emphasising how LSD helped him to dream up his first computers alongside a mobile wireless internet bringing the whole world together. Sam Altman, CEO of OpenAI, is also chair of Journey Colab, a new start-up aiming to tap into the promise shown by psychedelic drugs in clinical trials and making them widely available for those struggling with mental health and drug-use disorders. ‘The man bringing artificial intelligence to the masses through the viral chatbot ChatGPT wants to revolutionize mental health care and addiction treatment with psychedelic drugs’, wrote The Washington Post. Other star entrepreneurs like Elon Musk and Sergey Brin are also part of the movement that proponents hope will expand minds, enhance lives, boost careers and produce business breakthroughs. In June this year, Elon Musk tweeted in response to a Wall Street Journal report on psychedelics that he believed ketamine is more effective at dealing with depression than more widely prescribed SSRI antidepressants that are, in his words, ‘zombifying’ people.*

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A lot of people are actually scared of both topics; they are afraid that their jobs will one day be replaced by AI. And they fear psychedelics because they are stigmatised as dangerous drugs. I would like to keep our conversation as fearless and unbiased as possible, and I’d like to start with a quote from Yuval Harari, the Israeli big-tech philosopher, who said that social media was the first contact between AI and humanity—and humanity lost. Now, many years later, are our brains actually designed for AI? Or do our brains need psychedelics to understand AI?

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*Human brains created AI, so of course AI and the human brain are complementary and compatible. If we can delegate some of our most intensive tasks to an AI, we could liberate a lot of time to do whatever actually brings us joy, and therefore bring more wealth and mental health to the world.*

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We actually know so little about the human brain that maybe we can’t answer the question yet. But AI could help us to understand the human brain even better. So maybe we can even reverse that. We could use the technology to understand patterns that we cannot yet properly sense or explain. That’s my hope.



SERGIO PÉREZ ROSAL



*80 years ago, in 1943, Swiss chemist Albert Hofmann tested a substance on himself that he had synthesised from ergot alkaloids, a fungus that infects grain. The intoxication hit him as he cycled home from the laboratory. Sitting on his bicycle, he reported, the landscape passed him by as if distorted in a mirror. A neighbour he met was transformed into a malevolent, insidious witch. Hoffmann documented the surprising effects. Psychotherapists and psychiatrists soon started to work with this powerful new substance, classified as 'medicine' at that time, in treating, alcoholism, with promising results. At the same time, the US army and the CIA were testing its potential as a truth serum in interrogations and psychological warfare during the Cold War, administering LSD to unwitting test subjects. LSD spread widely through the US through numerous studies, including one in which writer Ken Kesey served as a medical guinea-pig. He turned his experience into the best-selling novel One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest in 1962. LSD and other psychedelics were adopted by the counterculture hippie movement due to their perceived ability to expand consciousness, and became synonymous with it. Three letters stood for the social upheaval and pop culture in the 1960s: LSD, or lysergic acid diethylamide. Although LSD is considered non-addictive in pharmacological terms, its popularity and recreational abuse were soon viewed as a threat to American values and the war operations in Vietnam. In 1971, President Richard Nixon declared a 'war on drugs' and all studies and medical uses were stopped. Now, 80 years after their invention, psychedelics seem to be undergoing rehabilitation in the spirit of Albert Hofmann.*

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At the moment, there are research companies who are testing classic psychedelics like MDMA, LSD, ketamine and psilocybin for certain mental health disorders including treatment-resistant depressions, PTSD, drug-abuse, end-of-life care and anxiety. But there are already companies working with AI, producing millions of next-generation substances that are actually designed to dock on to our receptors even more effectively. Can we soon forget about the old substances like LSD? Could AI become a genuinely productive medical developer?



ANNE PHILIPPI