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## PSYCHEDELIC INFORMATION THEORY: A SYSTEMATIC EXPLORATION OF INFORMATION DURING ALTERED CONSCIOUSNESS (Panel)

### Abstract

Inspired by the conference theme, *Leaps and Stumbles*, our panel takes a quantum leap beyond conventional notions of information. We provide a systematic consideration of information phenomena during altered states of consciousness generated by ingestion of “magic mushrooms.” Our exploration is anchored in the book, *Psychedelic Information Theory: Shamanism in the Age of Reason* (Kent, 2010) and is situated within the information behaviour literature. The session will be systematic for its explicit and balanced treatment of “psychedelic information” on four levels, namely: personal, microsocial, macrosocial, and the “meta” perspective of Information Science (Bates, 1999).

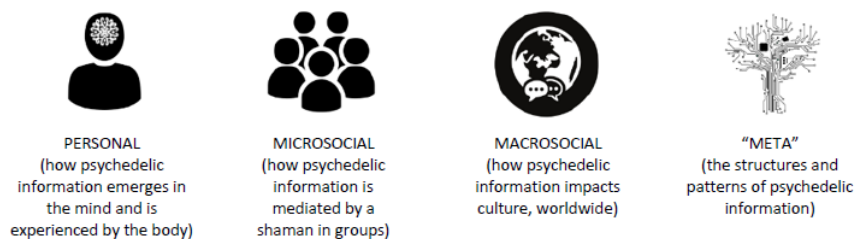


Figure 1. At this panel, psychedelic information will be cast at personal, microsocial, macrosocial and “meta” levels, aiming for a systematic and comprehensive presentation and discussion.

### 1. Agenda

The panel begins with an introduction by Jenna Hartel to establish the layered framework, shown above, and to survey familiar points of reference in the information behaviour literature. Hartel’s talk includes a snippet of [her short, original video on the topic](#) (Hartel, 2023), and recognizes the importance of an indigenous perspective, too. Then, psychedelic information theory (PIT) is elaborated by its creator, James L. Kent, an invited guest to our conference and field. Next, two information scientists engage the topic at hand from the perspectives of their research. Tim

Gorichanaz will discuss the characteristics of personally meaningful information experiences (identity, centripetal force, curiosity, and presence) and how they manifest in psychedelic experience (Gorichanaz, 2020). Keith Munro will illustrate psychedelic information as it pertains to creative DJs and their audiences, who are often under the influence of psychedelics (Munro, Ruthven, & Innocenti, 2023). Closing remarks by Jenna Hartel revisit the organizing framework and summarize salient points. The session ends with a question, comment, and discussion period of about 35 minutes among all in attendance.

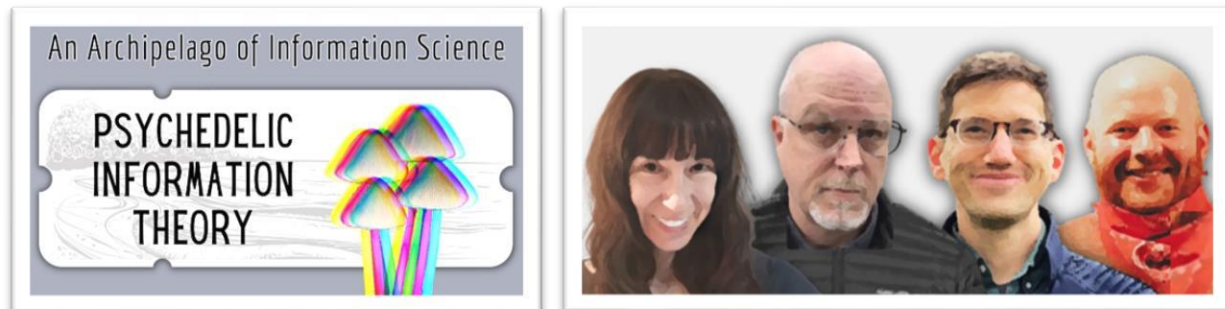


Figure 2. (Left) A short, educational video (Hartel, 2023), will be shown at the introduction to the panel. (Right) Our panel includes James L. Kent, Tim Gorichanaz, and Keith Munro.

## 2. Guiding Research Questions, Original Contributions, and Research Methods

We are guided by broad and novel questions: *What information phenomena are associated with the use of magic mushrooms? Put differently, what is “the red thread of information” (Bates, 1999) in the psychedelic experience?* Our session makes three original contributions: 1) Broaching a new topic and population that are otherwise taboo and neglected in Information Science; 2) Introducing an intriguing, interdisciplinary book and theory of psychedelic information theory (Kent, 2010); and 3) Providing a layered template (Figure 1) for comprehensive consideration of information phenomena in other domains. Methodologically speaking, the panel is based upon conceptual analysis, literature review, and empirical information behaviour research.

## 3. Background on Psychedelic Drugs and the Magic Mushroom Trip

Psychedelic drugs are a subclass of hallucinogenic drugs whose primary effect is to trigger nonordinary mental states known as psychedelic experiences or "trips." Psychedelics include LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide), DMT (dimethyltryptamine) and magic mushrooms (psilocybin, pronounced: *sai·luh·sai·bn*); the latter is our focus, here. Upon ingestion, psilocybin induces visual and auditory hallucinations, emotional changes, and altered perception of time and space (Schultes, 1976).

For thousands of years, Indigenous cultures have used such plant-based medicines for healing, conflict resolution, and spirituality (Fotiou, 2020, Celidwen, et. al, 2023). A groundbreaking study of the therapeutic potential of magic mushrooms, reported that most participants rated their trips as among the most meaningful events of their lives (Griffiths et. al, 2008). Psychologist William James, reflecting on his own adventures with mind-altering substances, pointed out that such mystical experiences have a "noetic" quality—that is, that seem to be a form of knowledge (Cole-Turner, 2021).

We believe this topic is timely and touches many people. In the United States about 10% of the population has taken magic mushrooms, recreationally (Yockey & King, 2021). Among intoxicants, they rank lowest on a scale of addiction and harm to users or society (Nutt, King, & Phillips, 2010). In some American states, magic mushrooms are in the process of being legalized for medically supervised therapeutic purposes.

*To be perfectly clear, our panel is not advocating magic mushrooms for information-seeking or otherwise, but invites everyone to consider their extraordinary informational properties and their relevance to a more spacious Information Science.*

#### **4. Psychedelic Experience in the Information Science Literature**

To our knowledge, psychedelic experience has not been discussed in the Information Science or information behaviour literatures<sup>i</sup>, perhaps due to a preference for mainstream domains or topics. However, a magic mushroom trip and its information phenomena resonate with multiple concepts already in play. In many cases, such drugs generate a profound experience and instance of the “higher things in life” (Kari & Hartel, 2007) or a “personally meaningful activity” (Gorichanaz, 2019). Psilocybin’s impact upon the brain and body, with resulting hallucinations, are unusual “embodied” and “sensory” forms of information (Lloyd, 2007; Cox, 2018). Given the long history of psychedelics in Indigenous cultures, we might see the topic at hand as an aspect of Indigenous Knowledge, (Duarte, Vigil-Hayes, Littletree & Belarde-Lewis, 2020), though this matter has not been broached, which is one intention of this panel. Through the lens of the Serious Leisure Perspective, recreational drug use is an instance of “casual leisure” and specifically, “sensory stimulation” (Hartel, 2010). When the psychedelic experience entails perceived contact with otherworldly (non-human) beings, it relates to “paranormal information behaviour” (Kari, 2001, 2009), and may generate “spiritual information” (Kari, 2009; Chabot, 2019).

## 5. Psychedelic Information Theory (PIT) by James L. Kent (Invited Guest)

The book *Psychedelic Information Theory: Shamanism in the Age of Reason* (available online at <https://psychedelic-information-theory.com/>) by James L. Kent has thus far not been noticed by scholars of Information Science and information behaviour. Yet, the lead author of this panel proposal, Jenna Hartel, considers this book and its psychedelic information theory (PIT) to be one of the most compelling descriptions of information phenomena within a niche context. She surveyed the book in an invited presentation at the 2023 European Conference on Information Literacy, arousing much curiosity. The 2023 CAIS theme of “Leaps and Stumbles,” with its invitation to go beyond our discipline’s comfort zone, seems a perfect opportunity to bring wider attention to PIT and Kent’s intriguing ideas. Following Hartel’s introduction to the session, James L. Kent will provide highlights from the book, which align with the personal, microsocial, macrosocial, and “meta” framework (Figure 1), and he will help to translate his ideas to Information Science. Kent’s participation is an opportunity for interdisciplinarity at CAIS, and the panelists bring a diversity of perspectives to the topic.

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<sup>i</sup> Searching under the TITLE, ABSTRACT, and KEYWORD fields for “psychedelic” or “magic mushroom” in *Library and Information Science Abstracts* generated no relevant publications in the LIS literature. However, there were many reviews by librarians of books such as “Coming Full Circle: Healing Trauma Using Psychedelics” in *Publisher's Weekly* and “Shroom: A Cultural History of the Magic Mushroom” in *Library Journal*. Of note, Jenna Hartel discussed Psychedelic Information Theory (Kent, 2010) as an invited speaker at the European Conference for Information Literacy (Krakow, Poland) in October, 2023 and made an educational video (Hartel, 2023). Hartel's student, Samantha Rowlandson-O'Hara, reported psychedelic information use as a form of information behaviour in a master's thesis on amateur musical composers (Rowlandson-O'Hara, 2020). Outside of the Information Science literature, there are multiple publications that bridge information and psychedelics (e.g. Kruger, et al., 2023; Shanon, 2010) but these do not draw upon any concepts from Information Science. In short, our panel aims to nourish and organize this thin and fragmented conversation.