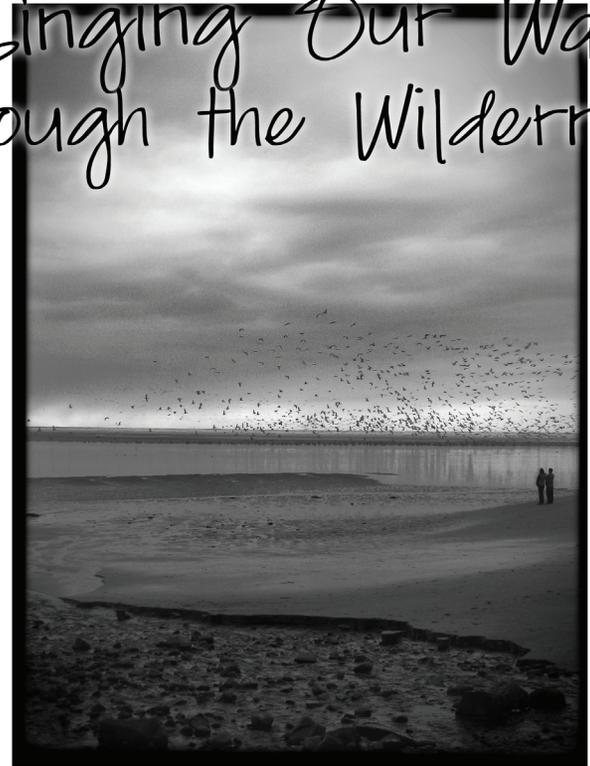


# Singing Our Way Through the Wilderness



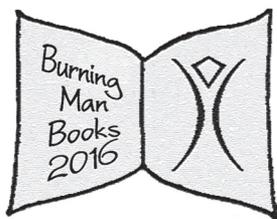
A Twelfth Anthology of Writings  
About Psychedelics



Edited by Raymond Souland, Jr.  
& Kassandra Souland

*Singing Our Way  
Through the Wilderness:  
A Twelfth Anthology  
of Writings About  
Psychedelics*

edited by Raymond Soulard, Jr.  
& Cassandra Soulard



Number Seventy-two

**Singing Our Way Through the Wilderness:  
A Twelfth Anthology of Writings About Psychedelics**

Burning Man Books is  
an imprint of  
Scriptor Press  
2442 NW Market Street - #363  
Seattle, Washington 98107  
[editor@scriptorpress.com](mailto:editor@scriptorpress.com)  
<http://www.scriptorpress.com>

*You are not alone.*

This volume was composed  
in the AGaramond font  
in InDesign CS5 on the  
MacBook Pro computer.

*“I know this may sound far-fetched,” I said to Elizabeth Vrba,  
“but if I were asked, ‘What is the big brain for?’,  
I would be tempted to say,  
‘For singing our way through the wilderness.’”*

—Bruce Chatwin, *Songlines*, 1987

*Dr. Timothy Leary*

## The Concord Prison Psychedelic Experiment

Excerpt from *Flashbacks, an Autobiography*, 1983

*March 1961  
Harvard University*



By spring we had given psychedelic drugs to over 200 subjects and had learned a lot about how to run sessions. Eighty-five percent of our subjects were reporting that the experience was the most educational of their lives. These testimonials were pleasing because most therapies, including psychoanalysis, traditionally reported around thirty-three percent positive change.

As scientists we were still dissatisfied. We were faced with the unavoidable problem in the field of psychiatry. How do you demonstrate that someone has improved? Self-appraisals are an important index but inconclusive; heroin addicts and born-again Christians claim to feel better but others might disagree. There didn't seem to be an objective way to keep score on life changes. Half of the people coached might have loosened up and half might have gotten their lives more tightly organized, and for any or all of them the changes might have been a genuine improvement. Half might have increased the intimacy and closeness of their marriages, and half might have left their spouses. Some might have benefited by making more money, some by making less. We needed clear statistical indices, like batting averages, for the game of life.

About this time a call came from two officials of the Massachusetts prison system, requesting that Harvard graduate-interns be assigned for research and training. They expected a quick turn-down. Just as prison guards were the bottom of the law-enforcement hierarchy, prison work was at that time the pits of psychology. Criminals simply didn't change.

Much to their surprise I invited the prison officials over for lunch at the Faculty Club. I welcomed the chance to get into a prison and initiate a volunteer rehabilitation program. I had two purposes in

mind. First, if we could change the behavior of violent criminals with our drugs, we'd demonstrate that our methods and theories worked where nothing else did. Second, prison rehabilitation would provide us with the behavioral scientist's dream, an iron-clad objective index of improvement—the recidivism rate.

The return-rate in Massachusetts prisons was running seventy percent. I felt we could decimate that percentage. What a boon to society—converting violent criminals to law-abiding citizens! If we could teach the most unregenerate how to wash their own brains, then it would be a cinch to coach non-criminals to change their lives for the better.

A deal was made over lunch. I agreed to send Harvard graduate-interns into the prisons; the officials agreed to get clearances from the wardens and correctional psychiatrists for us to give drugs to convicts.

A week later I drove out to the prison. I wore my Ivy League tweed uniform. I even wore leather shoes for this occasion. Warden Tom Grennan, a fellow Irishman, was impressed and pleased. A Harvard psychologist had never come around before.

Next I had to get the approval of the prison psychiatrist. This could have meant trouble. Shrinks didn't usually like programs of head expansion, and medics liked to preserve their monopoly on drugs.

I walked nervously down the hallway to the metal cage that opened into a prison cellblock. Rang a bell. A slot opened. A guard looked out, nodded, and opened up a second metal door. I walked through the prison with a sense of foreboding. And precapitulation. I'd been here before and I'd be here again.

#### *Concord State Prison*

I walked through the first tall cellblock, across the prison yard to the hospital. Bell, peephole, metal hinges creaking. Entered the hospital. Knocked on the door of the prison psychiatrist. It opened and facing me was good news. The prison psychiatrist was black and definitely avant-garde. Hurray! Philosopher Thomas Kuhn said that when you wish to introduce change-technology to a culture, you'll find your best allies among the outsiders, those whose alienation from the establishment makes them more open to change.

Aside from being a black psychiatrist, Dr. Jefferson Monroe

[Madison Presnell] stood out in the primitive period of 1961 as another kind of rarity—a sophisticated psychiatrist. Impeccable, graceful, hip. He had a twinkle in his eye and a wise, cool way of looking at you. He was definitely ready for something new.

A few days later Dr. Monroe paid a return call at the Faculty Club and then came to a staff meeting at the Center. We put him on the Harvard payroll as a consultant. The following Sunday he brought his wife over for cocktails.

“Your plan to teach prisoners to brainwash themselves is simply delicious. There's even a slight chance you can pull it off. Do you know what that might mean?”

“A great boon to society,” I suggested.

Dr. Monroe crossed his legs gracefully and laughed. “My dear, you don't really understand what you're getting into, do you? Sooner or later you're going to discover that law enforcement people and prison administrators have no desire to cut crime. They want more crime and more money to fight it. I'll cover you from the medical and psychiatric end, but sooner or later, if your methods work they'll start coming down on you. Reporters, bureaucrats, officials. ‘Harvard Gives Drugs to Prisoners!’ And you're going to have to do the impossible. Cure prisoners with your left hand while you try to hold off the entire bureaucracy with your right.”

“So what? If it works.”

“Being human, sooner or later you'll make a teeny little mistake. One of your subjects will revert. ‘Harvard Drug Parolee Robs Bank.’”

“As long as we do everything out front, no secrets,” I said, “we can make a few honest mistakes.”

“Maybe,” said Monroe. “Look, here's the deal. I'll back you all-out, until you goof. When they start coming down on you, exactly at that point I'll have to protect my own pretty black ass. 'Cause, I'm not you. I'm not the new Freud. So I'll win with you, but I can't afford to lose with you.”

On that basis we agreed on a plan: Monroe would line up volunteers in the prison population for the drug project and I'd line up Harvard graduate students willing to put their nervous systems on the line taking drugs with maximum security prisoners.

A few days later I was visited by a graduate student named Ralph Metzner. Metzner had a reputation for being one of the most

rigorously experimental students in the department. He wanted to work on the prison project.

My first reaction was that Metzner was too academic, too dainty-British, too ivory tower to walk into a prison and take drugs with hoodlums. But Metzner said he wanted to learn how. So I guided a training session for Metzner, his girlfriend, Dr. Monroe and his wife, and graduate student Gunther Weil and his wife. This was the fifty-second time I had taken psilocybin.

My study was the site of this experiment. Since this was an exploratory training session, I told the participants to relax, have a good time, and learn what they could. After a few hours of silent serenity, Jefferson took over spontaneously as guide. His joking and warm earthiness created a benign atmosphere. Ralph turned out to be a natural inner explorer.

A few days later Ralph, Gunther, and I, feeling a sense of camaraderie as a result of the session, drove out to the Concord prison to meet the six candidates Jefferson had selected from the pool of volunteers. Two murderers. Two armed robbers. One embezzler. One black heroin pusher.

In a dreary hospital room—gray walls, black asphalt floor, barred windows—we told the six suspicious men about an experience that could change their lives. We brought books for them to read, reports by other subjects, articles that described the ecstasies as well as the possible terrors. We spent most of the time describing our own experiences and answering questions. We made it clear to the prisoners that this was nothing we were doing to them. There was no doctor-patient game going here. We would take the drugs along with them. We were doing nothing to them that we weren't happily doing to ourselves.

We also made a transactional research contract with the prisoners. We said something like this: "We want to find out how and how much you change during this experience. For this reason we want you to take a battery of psychological tests before you eat the mushroom pills. After three or four sessions we'll give you the tests again. After you've taken the post-tests, we'll go over the results with you. Nothing in this project is going to be a secret." To the bored prisoners this sounded like a good deal, so the following week each was administered a complicated battery of psychological tests.

The prison project extended our research into a number of

new areas. We were dealing with a very different population from the professionals and high-status subjects in the early research. Second, we were switching from questionnaires and subjective reports to objective measurements of personality change. And third, we had to move from naturalistic settings to the most controlled and least inspirational environment imaginable—the hospital of a maximum security prison.

Six prisoners and three Harvard psychologists met for the first drug session. During the morning I was to turn on with three convicts. The three other prisoners and the two graduate students would act as observers. Then in the afternoon Gunther and Ralph and the three observing prisoners would take the drug, and the first group would act as guides. We brought a record player, tape recorder, and several books of classical art with us. Otherwise the room was bleak: four beds, a large table, and a few chairs. The bowl of pills was placed in the center of the table. To establish trust I was the first to ingest. Then the bowl was passed among the three prisoners, who each took twenty milligrams. After a half hour the effect started coming on: the loosening of thought, the humming pressure in my head, the sharp, brilliant, and then brutal intensification of the senses.

I felt terrible.

What a place to be—locked in a penitentiary, out of light, out of mind. I turned my brain towards the man next to me, a Polish bank robber from Worcester. I could see him much too clearly, every pore in his face, every blemish, the hairs in his nose, the horrid green-yellow enamel of his decaying teeth, the glistening of his frightened eyes, every hair on his head looking big as a tree-branch. What am I doing here?

"How ya doing, John?" I asked with a weak grin.

"I feel fine," he answered, but I didn't believe him.

"How you doing, Doc?"

I was about to reply in a reassuring professional tone, but I couldn't. It's hard to lie when you're in the power of the mushrooms. "I feel lousy."

John drew back his purple-pink lips. "What's the matter, Doc?"

Inside his eyes I could see a yellow spider-web of retinal fibers, optical veins shiny and pulsing. "I'm afraid of you," I said.

John's eyes enlarged, and then he began to laugh. I could see in his mouth, swollen red tissues, gums, tongue, throat. I was ready to be swallowed.

“Well, that’s funny, Doc, ’cause I’m afraid of you.”

We were both smiling at this point, leaning forward.

“Why are you afraid of me?”

“Because you’re a criminal. Why are you afraid of me?”

“I’m afraid of you ’cause you’re a fucking mad scientist.”

Then our eyes locked and we both laughed.

*Voilà.* There it was. We had made a connection. The sun came out in the room. For a while.

One of the prisoners, the heroin pusher, moaned and tossed on his cot.

“Are you all right, Willy?” I asked, apprehensive about a potential threat to our newfound sense of security. Everyone in the room watched, anxiously wondering if the prison setting was just irretrievably wrong, if this was to be one of those dreaded “bad trips.”

Willy lifted his head and gave a big grin. “Man, am I all right? I’m in heaven looking down on this funny little planet and I’m a million years old and there’s a million things to enjoy—and it’s all happening in prison. And you ask me, man, am I all right?”

When Willy laughed, we were all high and happy.

Jefferson checked in every now and then, walked around the room like a dainty, graceful cat not saying much but taking it all in.

At six o’clock, as the afternoon session was winding down, there was a bang on the door, and the guards came in. “Time is up, men. Back to the ward.” Ralph, Gunther, and I went with the six prisoners back to the lockup part of the hospital, where we smoked and laughed and compared notes on what we’d seen and where we’d been.

Then it was time for us to go. We shook hands and promised to return the next day for a follow-up. Ralph, Gunther, and I walked out of the hospital, across the dark prison yard, rang the bell, and waited until the iron doors opened into the guardroom. We went through two metal doors, down metal stairs, past the clanking steaming radiators, and outside the prison.

We laughed in triumph. All of us, Harvardites and convicts, had passed a crucial test. We had put our faith in human nature and the drug experience on the line. A bit of pagan magic had occurred, and none of us would ever forget that brief day of grace. It was a heroic moment in our lives.

The morning after the session, driving back to the prison was

like returning to some comfortable place in my skull. Strong bonds of empathy had developed. We had been through the adventure together. We had gone beyond the roles of Harvard psychologist and convict, faced fear together, had trusted and laughed.

This time I felt at home in the prison. It always works this way after a good trip. Your old reality fades a bit, and you incorporate a new reality. This identification is not metaphorical. It is neurological. In scientific papers we called this process re-imprinting.

This first session changed our status in the prison. As word went out through the grapevine, prisoners approached us in the yard to ask if they could sign up for the project. Guards and parole officers stopped us to request that a favorite prisoner be admitted to the group.

We spent the next two weeks discussing the prisoners’ reactions. Then we ran a second session for the group. This time the prisoners were more sophisticated. There was no sitting around on chairs in nervous anticipation. As soon as the energy began to radiate through their bodies, they headed for the cots and closed their eyes. For the next two or three hours they lay engulfed in the visions, occasionally sitting up to smile or make some quiet comment.

After the third session the convicts repeated the personality tests to measure changes. We brought the test results into the hospital room and handed them to the inmates. No secrets. We explained what the tests measure and what the results meant.

They had changed on the objective indices so dear to the heart of the psychologist. They showed less depression, hostility, anti-social tendencies; more energy, responsibility, cooperation. Their personality scores had swung dramatically and significantly in the direction of improved mental health.

By handing over and explaining their test results we were training the prisoners in psychodiagnostics. The prisoners were becoming their own psychologists. They loved it. There were fierce discussions about personality characteristics as the cons played the psychiatric game.

We planned the next phase of the research. The convicts were to select new recruits for the group. They would learn how to administer the psychological tests. They would give the orientation lectures. They would take over the project.

The prison became a training center. New graduate students were assigned to experienced inmates for orientation and guidance. In

session after session the inmates guided the Harvards, and the Harvards guided the convicts.

The energy generated by the sessions was felt beyond the prison walls. The penitentiary session room became a showplace. Whenever visitors came to Cambridge inquiring about psychedelic drugs, we took them out to the prison. The convicts spoke about their mystical experiences to Gerald Heard, Alan Watts, and William Burroughs, Aldous Huxley, and the ex-king of Sarawak, as well as to coveys of visiting psychiatrists. Our strategy here was to do everything possible to enhance their pride and sense of accomplishment. Every power we could turn over to the convicts became a fiber in the body of self-esteem.

By fall 1962 we had over thirty-five convicts and fifteen Harvards in the group. The men started being paroled at the rate of two and three a month, so we started Project CONTACT. The ex-cons and the Harvards were paired up in buddy-system teams, with the Harvards visiting the ex-cons in their homes. There was a twenty-four-hour telephone to rush help in case of emergencies.

We sobered them up, praised them to the parole officers, cooled out angry bosses. In short we did what a family does for its confused members. We kept them out of jail.

Soon our circus had grown into a three-ring extravaganza. There was the in-prison group. There was the outside CONTACT project. And there was the equally important task of keeping the state administrators and officials happy. We sent out a steady flow of memoranda and progress reports to the myriad departments that had a jealous interest in the work of rehabilitating criminals. Following Jefferson's sage advice we never let a week go by without contacting the bureaucrats, making them a part of the action.

One morning in the second year of the project I came into Warden Grennan's office to report the most recent statistics. We had kept ninety percent of our convicts out of jail.

He listened politely but kept glancing behind me. When I finished, he clapped me on the back and led me to the corner. "Look at that, Timmy," he said proudly.

It was an architect's color drawing of a super-prison. "Look. Two football fields. This wing is for admitting and orientation. Two more cell blocks. Mess halls double in size. We'll have capacity for twice as many inmates, and we can double the staff all the way down

the line."

His face was glowing. This was his fantasy coming true. A huge prison and an organizational table twice as big to go with it! Bureaucrat Heaven.

"That's wonderful, Bill," I said. "But have you forgotten? You're not going to need a larger prison."

His face registered surprise.

"Why not?"

"Because we're cutting your return-rate from seventy percent to ten percent. If you let us continue our project, you won't need half the cells you have right now."

The warden laughed, in spite of himself. "I can't argue with you, Timmy. You have kept these men straight, although I'll be damned if I know how you did it."

We were trying to figure this out ourselves. It seemed that two major factors were bringing about changes in the convicts: first, the perception of new realities helped them recognize that they had alternatives beyond the cops and robbers game; then, the empathetic bonding of group members helped them sustain their choice of a new life.

Similar kinds of sudden behavior change had been observed in other species. Conrad Lorenz, the German ethologist, and Nico Tinbergen, the Dutch naturalist, were the first to describe imprinting, a form of permanent learning assimilated in one shot, as opposed to step-by-step, painstaking and often painful, punishment-reward conditioning, which traditional psychologists and educators believed to be the basis of change. Lorenz discovered the imprinting phenomenon one day when goose eggs hatched in an incubator in his laboratory. In the absence of the mother the goslings followed him around, apparently because he was the only warm moving object on the scene. The baby birds continued to focus on him, ignoring their mother when she was brought to them.

Hundreds of experiments by Lorenz and others have demonstrated that this immediate learning, which requires no reward or punishment, occurs only during a critical period, shortly after birth or metamorphoses. During this critical period the organism, rather than acquiring behavior from the environment, hooks up an innate behavior pattern to the environment. The nervous systems of mammals and fowl respond to the first available stimulus, usually the mother,

activating and binding instinctual behavior. Birds, for example, have been known to seek mothering from ping pong balls. Baby giraffes have imprinted the jeep of the hunter who shot the mother.

Psychologists were at first reluctant to apply the imprinting principle to human behavior, probably because of the challenge it posed to our notion of free will. However, the dramatic changes in behavior that followed our prison experiments seemed to be best explained by these concepts. The drugs appeared to suspend previous imprints of reality (in this case, the prison mentality) inducing a critical period during which new imprints could be made.

People tended to form powerful positive attachments to those present during a trip, sometimes following one another around like Lorenz's goslings. It was also true that I was becoming attached to those present during my sessions.

Even more important than the bonding was the re-imprinting of new belief systems and attitudes about others and society that occurred during the sessions. In a positive, supportive environment, new non-criminal realities were being imprinted. (And in some weird and ominous way, I may have been re-imprinting a prison mentality, a reality which I was forced to inhabit between 1970 and 1976.)

Everything that I have learned in the subsequent twenty years of drug research has strengthened my conviction that psychedelic re-imprinting ranks with DNA deciphering as one of the most significant discoveries of the century.

Unfortunately the subsequent controversy about drugs overshadowed scientific implications of this experiment. Though we had dramatically cut the crime rate, teaching prisoners to clear their own brains of old programs and create new ones, the prison project was shut down after Alpert and I were driven from Harvard. Our ex-cons formed their own group, with the help of our colleague Professor Walter Houston Clark. They continued to operate the Self-Help program for fifteen years on their own.

Scientific tradition requires that important findings be replicated: disproved or verified. There were and still are hundreds of psychologists eager to perform experiments of this sort. The government remains steadfast in its curtailment of meaningful psychedelic research, though every other form of criminal rehabilitation has failed and thousands are recruited into the cycle of recidivism each year.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **The CIA, Mind Control, & LSD**

Excerpt from *The Search for the Manchurian Candidate*, 1979

Albert Hofmann's discovery of LSD in 1943 may have begun a new age in the exploration of the human mind, but it took six years for word to reach America. Even after Hofmann and his coworkers in Switzerland published their work in a 1947 article, no one in the United States seemed to notice. Then in 1949, a famous Viennese doctor named Otto Kauders traveled to the United States in search of research funds. He gave a conference at Boston Psychopathic Hospital,<sup>1</sup> a pioneering mental-health institution affiliated with Harvard Medical School, and he spoke about a new experimental drug called d-lysergic acid diethylamide. Milton Greenblatt, the hospital's research director, vividly recalls Kauders' description of how an infinitesimally small dose had rendered Dr. Hofmann temporarily "crazy."

"We were very interested in anything that could make someone schizophrenic," says Greenblatt. If the drug really did induce psychosis for a short time, the Boston doctors reasoned, an antidote—which they hoped to find—might cure schizophrenia. It would take many years of research to show that LSD did not, in fact, produce a "model psychosis," but to the Boston doctors in 1949, the drug showed incredible promise. Max Rinkel, a neuropsychiatrist and refugee from Hitler's Germany, was so intrigued by Kauders' presentation that he quickly contacted Sandoz, the huge Swiss pharmaceutical firm where Albert Hofmann worked. Sandoz officials arranged to ship some LSD across the Atlantic.

The first American trip followed. The subject was Robert Hyde, a Vermont-born psychiatrist who was Boston Psychopathic's number-two man. A bold, innovative sort, Hyde took it for granted that there would be no testing program until he tried the drug. With Rinkel and the hospital's senior physician, H. Jackson DeShon looking on, Hyde drank a glass of water with 100 micrograms of LSD in it—less than half Hofmann's dose, but still a hefty jolt. DeShon describes Hyde's reaction as "nothing very startling." The perpetually active Hyde

insisted on making his normal hospital rounds while his colleagues tagged along. Rinkel later told a scientific conference that Hyde became “quite paranoid, saying that we had not given him anything. He also berated us and said the company had cheated us, given us plain water. That was not Dr. Hyde’s normal behavior; he is a very pleasant man.” Hyde’s first experience was hardly as dramatic as Albert Hofmann’s, but then the Boston psychiatrist had not, like Hofmann, set off on a voyage into the complete unknown.

For better or worse, LSD had come to America in 1949 and had embarked on a strange trip of its own. Academic researchers would study it in search of knowledge that would benefit all mankind. Intelligence agencies, particularly the CIA, would subsidize and shape the form of much of this work to learn how the drug could be used to break the will of enemy agents, unlock secrets in the minds of trained spies, and otherwise manipulate human behavior. These two strains—of helping people and of controlling them—would co-exist rather comfortably through the 1950s. Then, in the 1960s, LSD would escape from the closed world of scholar and spy, and it would play a major role in causing a cultural upheaval that would have an impact both on global politics and on intimate personal beliefs. The trip would wind up—to borrow some hyperbole from the musical *Hair*—with “the youth of America on LSD.”

The counterculture generation was not yet out of the nursery, however, when Bob Hyde went tripping: Hyde himself would not become a secret CIA consultant for several years. The CIA and the military intelligence agencies were just setting out on their quest for drugs and other exotic methods to take possession of people’s minds. The ancient desire to control enemies through magical spells and potions had come alive again, and several offices within the CIA competed to become the head controllers. Men from the Office of Security’s ARTICHOKE program were struggling—as had OSS before them—to find a truth drug or hypnotic method that would aid in interrogation. Concurrently, the Technical Services Staff (TSS) was investigating in much greater depth the whole area of applying chemical and biological warfare (CBW) to covert operations.

TSS was the lineal descendent of Stanley Lovell’s Research and Development unit in OSS, and its officials kept alive much of the excitement and urgency of the World War II days when Lovell had tried to bring out the Peck’s Bad Boy in American scientists. Specialists

from TSS furnished backup equipment for secret operations: false papers, bugs, taps, suicide pills, explosive seashells, transmitters hidden in false teeth, cameras in tobacco pouches, invisible inks, and the like. In later years, these gadget wizards from TSS would become known for supplying some of history’s more ludicrous landmarks, such as Howard Hunt’s ill-fitting red wig; but in the early days of the CIA, they gave promise of transforming the spy world.

Within TSS, there existed a Chemical Division with functions that few others—even in TSS—knew about. These had to do with using chemicals (and germs) against specific people. From 1951 to 1956, the years when the CIA’s interest in LSD peaked, Sidney Gottlieb, a native of the Bronx with a Ph.D. in chemistry from Cal Tech, headed this division. (And for most of the years until 1973, he would oversee TSS’s behavioral programs from one job or another.) Only 33 years old when he took over the Chemical Division, Gottlieb had managed to overcome a pronounced stammer and a clubfoot to rise through Agency ranks.

Described by several acquaintances as a “compensator,” Gottlieb prided himself on his ability, despite his obvious handicaps, to pursue his cherished hobby, folk dancing. On returning from secret missions overseas, he invariably brought back a new step that he would dance with surprising grace. He could call out instructions for the most complicated dances without a break in his voice, infecting others with enthusiasm. A man of unorthodox tastes, Gottlieb lived in a former slave cabin that he had remodeled himself—with his wife, the daughter of Presbyterian missionaries in India, and his four children. Each morning, he rose at 5:30 to milk the goats he kept on his 15 acres outside Washington. The Gottliebs drank only goat’s milk, and they made their own cheese. They also raised Christmas trees which they sold to the outside world.

Greatly respected by his former colleagues, Gottlieb is described as a humanist, a man of intellectual humility and strength, willing to carry out, as one ex-associate puts it, “the tough things that had to be done.” This associate fondly recalls, “When you watched him, you gained more and more respect because he was willing to work so hard to get an idea across. He left himself totally exposed. It was more important for us to get the idea than for him not to stutter.” One idea he got across was that the Agency should investigate the potential use of the obscure new drug, LSD, as a spy weapon.

At the top ranks of the Clandestine Services (officially called the Directorate of Operations but popularly known as the “dirty tricks department”), Sid Gottlieb had a champion who appreciated his qualities, Richard Helms. For two decades, Gottlieb would move into progressively higher positions in the wake of Helms’ climb to the highest position in the Agency. Helms, the tall, smooth “preppie,” apparently liked the way the Jewish chemist, who had started out at Manhattan’s City College, could thread his way through complicated technical problems and make them understandable to nonscientists. Gottlieb was loyal and he followed orders. Although many people lay in the chain of command between the two men, Helms preferred to avoid bureaucratic niceties by dealing directly with Gottlieb.

On April 3, 1953, Helms proposed to Director Allen Dulles that the CIA set up a program under Gottlieb for “covert use of biological and chemical materials.” Helms made clear that the Agency could use these methods in “present and future clandestine operations” and then added, “Aside from the offensive potential, the development of a comprehensive capability in this field . . . gives us a thorough knowledge of the enemy’s theoretical potential, thus enabling us to defend ourselves against a foe who might not be as restrained in the use of these techniques as we are.”

Once again, as it would throughout the history of the behavioral programs, defense justified offense. Ray Cline, often a bureaucratic rival of Helms, notes the spirit in which the future Director pushed this program: “Helms fancied himself a pretty tough cookie. It was fashionable among that group to fancy they were rather impersonal about dangers, risks, and human life. Helms would think it sentimental and foolish to be against something like this.”

On April 13, 1953—the same day that the Pentagon announced that any U.S. prisoner refusing repatriation in Korea would be listed as a deserter and shot if caught—Allen Dulles approved the program, essentially as put forth by Helms. Dulles took note of the “ultra-sensitive work” involved and agreed that the project would be called MKULTRA.<sup>2</sup> He approved an initial budget of \$300,000, exempted the program from normal CIA financial controls, and allowed TSS to start up research projects “without the signing of the usual contracts or other written agreements.” Dulles ordered the Agency’s bookkeepers to pay the costs blindly on the signatures of Sid Gottlieb and Willis Gibbons, a former U.S. Rubber executive who headed TSS.

As is so often the case in government, the activity that Allen Dulles approved with MKULTRA was already under way, even before he gave it a bureaucratic structure. Under the code name MKDELTA, the Clandestine Services had set up procedures the year before to govern the use of CBW products. (MKDELTA now became the operational side of MKULTRA.) Also in 1952, TSS had made an agreement with the Special Operations Division (SOD) of the Army’s biological research center at Fort Detrick, Maryland, whereby SOD would produce germ weapons for the CIA’s use (with the program called MKNAOMI).

Sid Gottlieb later testified that the purpose of these programs was “to investigate whether and how it was possible to modify an individual’s behavior by covert means. The context in which this investigation was started was that of the height of the Cold War with the Korean War just winding down; with the CIA organizing its resources to liberate Eastern Europe by paramilitary means; and with the threat of Soviet aggression very real and tangible, as exemplified by the recent Berlin airlift” (which occurred in 1948).

In the early days of MKULTRA, the roughly six TSS professionals who worked on the program spent a good deal of their time considering the possibilities of LSD.<sup>3</sup> “The most fascinating thing about it,” says one of them, “was that such minute quantities had such a terrific effect.” Albert Hofmann had gone off into another world after swallowing less than 1/100,000 of an ounce. Scientists had known about the mind-altering qualities of drugs like mescaline since the late nineteenth century, but LSD was several thousand times more potent. Hashish had been around for millennia, but LSD was roughly a million times stronger (by weight). A two-suitcase could hold enough LSD to turn on every man, woman, and child in the United States.

“We thought about the possibility of putting some in a city water supply and having the citizens wander around in a more or less happy state, not terribly interested in defending themselves,” recalls the TSS man. But incapacitating such large numbers of people fell to the Army Chemical Corps, which also tested LSD and even stronger hallucinogens. The CIA was concentrating on individuals. TSS officials understood that LSD distorted a person’s sense of reality, and they felt compelled to learn whether it could alter someone’s basic loyalties.

Could the CIA make spies out of tripping Russians—or vice versa? In the early 1950s, when the Agency developed an almost desperate need to know more about LSD, almost no outside information existed on the subject. Sandoz had done some clinical studies, as had a few other places, including Boston Psychopathic, but the work generally had not moved much beyond the horse-and-buggy stage. The MKULTRA team had literally hundreds of questions about LSD's physiological, psychological, chemical, and social effects. *Did it have any antidotes? What happened if it were combined with other drugs? Did it affect everyone the same way? What was the effect of doubling the dose?* And so on.

TSS first sought answers from academic researchers who, on the whole, gladly cooperated and let the Agency pick their brains. But CIA officials realized that no one would undertake a quick and systematic study of the drug unless the Agency itself paid the bill. Almost no government or private money was then available for what had been dubbed “experimental psychiatry.” Sandoz wanted the drug tested, for its own commercial reasons, but beyond supplying it free to researchers, it would not assume the costs. The National Institutes of Mental Health had an interest in LSD's relationship to mental illness, but CIA officials wanted to know how the drug affected normal people, not sick ones. Only the military services, essentially for the same reasons as the CIA, were willing to sink much money into LSD, and the Agency men were not about to defer to them. They chose instead to take the lead—in effect to create a whole new field of research.

Suddenly there was a huge new market for grants in academia, as Sid Gottlieb and his aides began to fund LSD projects at prestigious institutions. The Agency's LSD pathfinders can be identified: Bob Hyde's group at Boston Psychopathic; Harold Abramson at Mt. Sinai Hospital and Columbia University in New York; Carl Pfeiffer at the University of Illinois Medical School; Harris Isbell of the NIMH-sponsored Addiction Research Center in Lexington, Kentucky; Louis Jolyon West at the University of Oklahoma; and Harold Hodge's group at the University of Rochester.

The Agency disguised its involvement by passing the money through two conduits: the Josiah Macy, Jr. Foundation, a rich establishment institution which served as a cutout (intermediary) only for a year or two, and the Geschickter Fund for Medical Research, a Washington, D.C. family foundation, whose head, Dr. Charles

Geschickter, provided the Agency with a variety of services for more than a decade. Reflexively, TSS officials felt they had to keep the CIA connection secret. They could only “assume,” according to a 1955 study, that Soviet scientists understood the drug's “strategic importance” and were capable of making it themselves. They did not want to spur the Russians into starting their own LSD program or into devising countermeasures.

The CIA's secrecy was also clearly aimed at the folks back home. As a 1963 Inspector General's report stated, “Research in the manipulation of human behavior is considered by many authorities in medicine and related fields to be professionally unethical”; therefore, openness would put “in jeopardy” the reputations of the outside researchers. Moreover, the CIA Inspector General declared that disclosure of certain MKULTRA activities could result in “serious adverse reaction” among the American public.

At Boston Psychopathic, there were various levels of concealment. Only Bob Hyde and his boss, the hospital superintendent, knew officially that the CIA was funding the hospital's LSD program from 1952 on, to the tune of about \$40,000 a year. Yet, according to another member of the Hyde group, Dr. DeShon, all senior staff understood where the money really came from.

“We agreed not to discuss it,” says DeShon. “I don't see any objection to this. We never gave it to anyone without his consent and without explaining it in detail.” Hospital officials told the volunteer subjects something about the nature of the experiments but nothing about their origins or purpose. None of the subjects had any idea that the CIA was paying for the probing of their minds and would use the results for its own purposes; most of the staff was similarly ignorant.

Like Hyde, almost all the researchers tried LSD on themselves. Indeed, many believed they gained real insight into what it felt like to be mentally ill, useful knowledge for health professionals who spent their lives treating people supposedly sick in the head. Hyde set up a multidisciplinary program—virtually unheard of at the time—that brought together psychiatrists, psychologists, and physiologists. As subjects, they used each other, hospital patients, and volunteers—mostly students—from the Boston area. They worked through a long sequence of experiments that served to isolate variable after variable.

Palming themselves off as foundation officials, the men from MKULTRA frequently visited to observe and suggest areas of future

research. One Agency man, who himself tripped several times under Hyde's general supervision, remembers that he and his colleagues would pass on a nugget that another contractor like Harold Abramson had gleaned and ask Hyde to perform a follow-up test that might answer a question of interest to the Agency. Despite these tangents, the main body of research proceeded in a planned and orderly fashion. The researchers learned that while some subjects seemed to become schizophrenic, many others did not. Surprisingly, true schizophrenics showed little reaction at all to LSD, unless given massive doses.

The Hyde group found out that the quality of a person's reaction was determined mainly by the person's basic personality structure (set), and the environment (setting) in which he or she took the drug. The subject's expectation of what would happen also played a major part. More than anything else, LSD tended to intensify the subject's existing characteristics—often to extremes. A little suspicion could grow into major paranoia, particularly in the company of people perceived as threatening.

Unbeknownst to his fellow researchers, the energetic Dr. Hyde also advised the CIA on using LSD in covert operations. A CIA officer who worked with him recalls: "The idea would be to give him the details of what had happened [with a case], and he would speculate. As a sharp M.D. in the old-school sense, he would look at things in ways that a lot of recent bright lights couldn't get . . . . He had a good sense of make-do."

The Agency paid Hyde for his time as a consultant, and TSS officials eventually set aside a special MKULTRA subproject as Hyde's private funding mechanism. Hyde received funds from yet another MKULTRA subproject that TSS men created for him in 1954, so he could serve as a cutout for Agency purchases of rare chemicals. His first buy was to be \$32,000 worth of corynanthine, a possible antidote to LSD, that would not be traced to the CIA.

Bob Hyde died in 1976 at the age of 66, widely hailed as a pacesetter in mental health. His medical and intelligence colleagues speak highly of him both personally and professionally. Like most of his generation, he apparently considered helping the CIA a patriotic duty. An Agency officer states that Hyde never raised doubts about his covert work. "He wouldn't moralize. He had a lot of trust in the people he was dealing with [from the CIA]. He had pretty well reached the conclusion that if they decided to do something [operationally], they

had tried whatever else there was and were willing to risk it."

Most of the CIA's academic researchers published articles on their work in professional journals, but those long, scholarly reports often gave an incomplete picture of the research. In effect, the scientists would write openly about how LSD affects a patient's pulse rate, but they would tell only the CIA how the drug could be used to ruin that patient's marriage or memory. Those researchers who were aware of the Agency's sponsorship seldom published anything remotely connected to the instrumental and rather unpleasant questions the MKULTRA men posed for investigation.

That was true of Hyde and of Harold Abramson, the New York allergist who became one of the first Johnny Appleseeds of LSD by giving it to a number of his distinguished colleagues. Abramson documented all sorts of experiments on topics like the effects of LSD on Siamese fighting fish and snails,<sup>4</sup> but he never wrote a word about one of his early LSD assignments from the Agency.

In a 1953 document, Sid Gottlieb listed subjects he expected Abramson to investigate with the \$85,000 the Agency was furnishing him. Gottlieb wanted "operationally pertinent materials along the following lines: a. Disturbance of Memory; b. Discrediting by Aberrant Behavior; c. Alteration of Sex Patterns; d. Eliciting of Information; e. Suggestibility; f. Creation of Dependence."

Dr. Harris Isbell, whose work the CIA funded through Navy cover with the approval of the Director of the National Institutes of Health, published his principal findings, but he did not mention how he obtained his subjects. As Director of the Addiction Research Center at the huge Federal drug hospital in Lexington, Kentucky, he had access to a literally captive population. Inmates heard on the grapevine that if they volunteered for Isbell's program, they would be rewarded either in the drug of their choice or in time off from their sentences. Most of the addicts chose drugs—usually heroin or morphine of a purity seldom seen on the street. The subjects signed an approval form, but they were not told the names of the experimental drugs or the probable effects. This mattered little, since the "volunteers" probably would have granted their informed consent to virtually anything to get hard drugs.

Given Isbell's almost unlimited supply of subjects, TSS officials used the Lexington facility as a place to make quick tests of promising but untried drugs, and to perform specialized experiments they could not easily duplicate elsewhere. For instance, Isbell did one study for

which it would have been impossible to attract student volunteers. He kept seven men on LSD for 77 straight days.<sup>5</sup> Such an experiment is as chilling as it is astonishing—both to lovers and haters of LSD.

Nearly 20 years after Dr. Isbell's early work, counterculture journalist Hunter S. Thompson delighted and frightened his readers with accounts of drug binges lasting a few days, during which Thompson felt his brain boiling away in the sun, his nerves wrapping around enormous barbed wire forts, and his remaining faculties reduced to their reptilian antecedents. Even Thompson would shudder at the thought of 77 days straight on LSD, and it is doubtful he would joke about the idea.

To Dr. Isbell, it was just another experiment. "I have had seven patients who have now been taking the drug for more than 42 days," he wrote in the middle of the test, which he called "the most amazing demonstration of drug tolerance I have ever seen." Isbell tried to "break through this tolerance" by giving triple and quadruple doses of LSD to the inmates.

Filled with intense curiosity, Isbell tried out a wide variety of unproven drugs on his subjects. Just as soon as a new batch of scopolamine, rivea seeds, or bufotenine arrived from the CIA or NIMH, he would start testing. His relish for the task occasionally shone through the dull scientific reports. "I will write you a letter as soon as I can get the stuff into a man or two," he informed his Agency contact.

No corresponding feeling shone through for the inmates, however. In his few recorded personal comments, he complained that his subjects tended to be afraid of the doctors and were not as open in describing their experiences as the experimenters would have wished. Although Isbell made an effort to "break through the barriers" with the subjects, who were nearly all black drug addicts, Isbell finally decided "in all probability, this type of behavior is to be expected with patients of this type." The subjects have long since scattered, and no one apparently has measured the after-effects of the more extreme experiments on them.

One subject who could be found spent only a brief time with Dr. Isbell. Eddie Flowers was 19 years old and had been in Lexington for about a year when he signed up for Isbell's program. He lied about his age to get in, claiming he was 21. All he cared about was getting some drugs. He moved into the experimental wing of the hospital where the

food was better and he could listen to music. He loved his heroin but knew nothing about drugs like LSD. One day he took something in a graham cracker. No one ever told him the name, but his description sounds like it made him trip—badly, to be sure. "It was the worst shit I ever had," he says. He hallucinated and suffered for 16 or 17 hours. "I was frightened. I wouldn't take it again."

Still, Flowers earned enough "points" in the experiment to qualify for his "payoff" in heroin. All he had to do was knock on a little window down the hall. This was the drug bank. The man in charge kept a list of the amount of the hard drug each inmate had in his account. Flowers just had to say how much he wanted to withdraw and note the method of payment. "If you wanted it in the vein, you got it there," recalls Flowers who now works in a Washington, D.C. drug rehabilitation center.

Dr. Isbell told a Senate subcommittee in 1975 that he inherited the drug payoff system when he came to Lexington and that "it was the custom in those days . . . . The ethical codes were not so highly developed, and there was a great need to know in order to protect the public in assessing the potential use of narcotics . . . . I personally think we did a very excellent job."

For every Isbell, Hyde, or Abramson who did TSS contract work, there were dozens of others who simply served as casual CIA informants, some witting and some not. Each TSS project officer had a skull session with dozens of recognized experts several times a year. "That was the only way a tiny staff like Sid Gottlieb's could possibly keep on top of the burgeoning behavioral sciences," says an ex-CIA official. "There would be no way you could do it by library research or the Ph.D. dissertation approach." The TSS men always asked their contacts for the names of others they could talk to, and the contacts would pass them on to other interesting scientists.

In LSD research, TSS officers benefited from the energetic intelligence gathering of their contractors, particularly Harold Abramson. Abramson talked regularly to virtually everyone interested in the drug, including the few early researchers not funded by the Agency or the military, and he reported his findings to TSS. In addition, he served as reporting secretary of two conference series sponsored by the Agency's sometime conduit, the Macy Foundation.

These series each lasted over five-year periods in the 1950s; one dealt with "Problems of Consciousness" and the other with

“Neuropharmacology.” Held once a year in the genteel surroundings of the Princeton Inn, the Macy Foundation conferences brought together TSS’s (and the military’s) leading contractors, as part of a group of roughly 25 with the multidisciplinary background that TSS officials so loved. The participants came from all over the social sciences, and included such luminaries as Margaret Mead and Jean Piaget. The topics discussed usually mirrored TSS’s interests at the time, and the conferences served as a spawning ground for ideas that allowed researchers to engage in some healthy cross-fertilization.

Beyond the academic world, TSS looked to the pharmaceutical companies as another source on drugs—and for a continuing supply of new products to test. TSS’s Ray Treichler handled the liaison function, and this secretive little man built up close relationships with many of the industry’s key executives. He had a particular knack for convincing them he would not reveal their trade secrets. Sometimes claiming to be from the Army Chemical Corps and sometimes admitting his CIA connection, Treichler would ask for samples of drugs that were either highly poisonous or, in the words of the one-time director of research of a large company, “caused hypertension, increased blood pressure, or led to other odd physiological activity.”

Dealing with American drug companies posed no particular problems for TSS. Most cooperated in any way they could. But relations with Sandoz were more complicated. The giant Swiss firm had a monopoly on the Western world’s production of LSD until 1953. Agency officials feared that Sandoz would somehow allow large quantities to reach the Russians. Since information on LSD’s chemical structure and effects was publicly available from 1947 on, the Russians could have produced it any time they felt it worthwhile. Thus, the Agency’s phobia about Sandoz seems rather irrational, but it unquestionably did exist.

On two occasions early in the Cold War, the entire CIA hierarchy went into a dither over reports that Sandoz might allow large amounts of LSD to reach Communist countries. In 1951 reports came in through military channels that the Russians had obtained some 50 million doses from Sandoz. Horrendous visions of what the Russians might do with such a stockpile circulated in the CIA, where officials did not find out the intelligence was false for several years. There was an even greater uproar in 1953 when more reports came in, again through military intelligence, that Sandoz wanted to sell the

astounding quantity of 10 kilos (22 pounds) of LSD—enough for about 100 million doses—on the open market.

A top-level coordinating committee which included CIA and Pentagon representatives unanimously recommended that the Agency put up \$240,000 to buy it all. Allen Dulles gave his approval, and off went two CIA representatives to Switzerland, presumably with a black bag full of cash. They met with the president of Sandoz and other top executives. The Sandoz men stated that the company had never made anything approaching 10 kilos of LSD and that, in fact, since the discovery of the drug 10 years before, its total production had been only 40 grams (about 1 1/2 ounces)<sup>6</sup>. The manufacturing process moved quite slowly at that time because Sandoz used real ergot, which could not be grown in large quantities. Nevertheless, Sandoz executives, being good Swiss businessmen, offered to supply the U.S. Government with 100 grams weekly for an indefinite period, if the Americans would pay a fair price. Twice the Sandoz president thanked the CIA men for being willing to take the nonexistent 10 kilos off the market. While he said the company now regretted it had ever discovered LSD in the first place, he promised that Sandoz would not let the drug fall into communist hands.

The Sandoz president mentioned that various Americans had in the past made “covert and sideways” approaches to Sandoz to find out about LSD, and he agreed to keep the U.S. government informed of all future production and shipping of the drug. He also agreed to pass on any intelligence about Eastern European interest in LSD. The Sandoz executives asked only that their arrangement with the CIA be kept “in the very strictest confidence.”

All around the world, the CIA tried to stay on top of the LSD supply. Back home in Indianapolis, Eli Lilly & Company was even then working on a process to synthesize LSD. Agency officials felt uncomfortable having to rely on a foreign company for their supply, and in 1953 they asked Lilly executives to make them up a batch, which the company subsequently donated to the government.

Then, in 1954, Lilly scored a major breakthrough when its researchers worked out a complicated 12- to 15-step process to manufacture first lysergic acid (the basic building block) and then LSD itself from chemicals available on the open market. Given a relatively sophisticated lab, a competent chemist could now make LSD without a supply of the hard-to-grow ergot fungus.

Lilly officers confidentially informed the government of their triumph. They also held an unprecedented press conference to trumpet their synthesis of lysergic acid, but they did not publish for another five years their success with the closely related LSD.

TSS officials soon sent a memo to Allen Dulles, explaining that the Lilly discovery was important because the government henceforth could buy LSD in “tonnage quantities,” which made it a potential chemical-warfare agent. The memo writer pointed out, however, that from the MKULTRA point of view, the discovery made no difference since TSS was working on ways to use the drug only in small-scale covert operations, and the Agency had no trouble getting the limited amounts it needed. But now the Army Chemical Corps and the Air Force could get their collective hands on enough LSD to turn on the world.

Sharing the drug with the Army here, setting up research programs there, keeping track of it everywhere, the CIA generally presided over the LSD scene during the 1950s. To be sure, the military services played a part and funded their own research programs<sup>7</sup>. So did the National Institutes of Health, to a lesser extent.

Yet both the military services and the NIH allowed themselves to be co-opted by the CIA—as funding conduits and intelligence sources. The Food and Drug Administration also supplied the Agency with confidential information on drug testing. Of the Western world’s two LSD manufacturers, one—Eli Lilly—gave its entire (small) supply to the CIA and the military. The other—Sandoz—informed Agency representatives every time it shipped the drug.

If somehow the CIA missed anything with all these sources, the Agency still had its own network of scholar-spies, the most active of whom was Harold Abramson, who kept it informed of all new developments in the LSD field. While the CIA may not have totally cornered the LSD market in the 1950s, it certainly had a good measure of control—the very power it sought over human behavior.

Sid Gottlieb and his colleagues at MKULTRA soaked up pools of information about LSD and other drugs from all outside sources, but they saved for themselves the research they really cared about: operational testing. Trained in both science and espionage, they believed they could bridge the huge gap between experimenting in the laboratory and using drugs to outsmart the enemy.

Therefore the leaders of MKULTRA initiated their own series

of drug experiments that paralleled and drew information from the external research. As practical men of action, unlimited by restrictive academic standards, they did not feel the need to keep their tests in strict scientific sequence. They wanted results now—not next year. If a drug showed promise, they felt no qualms about trying it out operationally before all of the test results came in.

As early as 1953, for instance, Sid Gottlieb went overseas with a supply of a hallucinogenic drug—almost certainly LSD. With unknown results, he arranged for it to be slipped to a speaker at a political rally, presumably to see if it would make a fool of him.

These were freewheeling days within the CIA—then a young agency whose bureaucratic arteries had not started to harden. The leaders of MKULTRA had high hopes for LSD. It appeared to be an awesome substance, whose advent, like the ancient discovery of fire, would bring out primitive responses of fear and worship in people. Only a speck of LSD could take a strong-willed man and turn his most basic perceptions into willowy shadows.

Time, space, right, wrong, order, and the notion of what was possible all took on new faces. LSD was a frightening weapon, and it took a swashbuckling boldness for the leaders of MKULTRA to prepare for operational testing the way they first did: by taking it themselves.

They tripped at the office. They tripped at safe-houses, and sometimes they traveled to Boston to trip under Bob Hyde’s penetrating gaze. Always they observed, questioned, and analyzed each other. LSD seemed to remove inhibitions, and they thought they could use it to find out what went on in the mind underneath all the outside acts and pretensions. If they could get at the inner self, they reasoned, they could better manipulate a person—or keep him from being manipulated.

The men from MKULTRA were trying LSD in the early 1950s—when Stalin lived and Joe McCarthy raged. It was a foreboding time, even for those not professionally responsible for doomsday poisons. Not surprisingly, Sid Gottlieb and colleagues who tried LSD did not think of the drug as something that might enhance creativity or cause transcendental experiences. Those notions would not come along for years.

By and large, there was thought to be only one prevailing and hardheaded version of reality, which was “normal,” and everything else was “crazy.” An LSD trip made people temporarily crazy, which

meant potentially vulnerable to the CIA men (and mentally ill, to the doctors). The CIA experimenters did not trip for the experience itself, or to get high, or to sample new realities. They were testing a weapon; for their purposes, they might as well have been in a ballistics lab.

Despite this prevailing attitude in the Agency, at least one MKULTRA pioneer recalls that his first trip expanded his conception of reality: “I was shaky at first, but then I just experienced it and had a high. I felt that everything was working right. I was like a locomotive going at top efficiency. Sure there was stress, but not in a debilitating way. It was like the stress of an engine pulling the longest train it’s ever pulled.”

This CIA veteran describes seeing all the colors of the rainbow growing out of cracks in the sidewalk. He had always disliked cracks as signs of imperfection, but suddenly the cracks became natural stress lines that measured the vibrations of the universe. He saw people with blemished faces, which he had previously found slightly repulsive. “I had a change of values about faces,” he says. “Hooked noses or crooked teeth would become beautiful for that person. Something had turned loose in me, and all I had done was shift my attitude. Reality hadn’t changed, but I had. That was all the difference in the world between seeing something ugly, and seeing truth and beauty.”

At the end of this day of his first trip, the CIA man and his colleagues had an alcohol party to help come down. “I had a lump in my throat,” he recalls wistfully. Although he had never done such a thing before, he wept in front of his coworkers. “I didn’t want to leave it. I felt I would be going back to a place where I wouldn’t be able to hold on to this kind of beauty. I felt very unhappy. The people who wrote the report on me said I had experienced depression, but they didn’t understand why I felt so bad. They thought I had had a bad trip.”

This CIA man says that others with his general personality tended to enjoy themselves on LSD, but that the stereotypical CIA operator (particularly the extreme counterintelligence type who mistrusts everyone and everything) usually had negative reactions. The drug simply exaggerated his paranoia. For these operators, the official notes, “dark evil things would begin to lurk around,” and they would decide the experimenters were plotting against them.

The TSS team understood it would be next to impossible to allay the fears of this ever-vigilant, suspicious sort, although they might use LSD to disorient or generally confuse such a person. However, they

toyed with the idea that LSD could be applied to better advantage on more trusting types. Could a clever foe “re-educate” such a person with a skillful application of LSD?

Speculating on this question, the CIA official states that while under the influence of the drug, “you tend to have a more global view of things. I found it awfully hard when stoned to maintain the notion: I am a U.S. citizen—my country right or wrong . . . . You tend to have these good higher feelings. You are more open to the brotherhood-of-man idea and more susceptible to the seamy sides of your own society . . . . I think this is exactly what happened during the 1960s, but it didn’t make people more communist. It just made them less inclined to identify with the U.S. They took a plague-on-both-your-houses position.”

As to whether his former colleagues in TSS had the same perception of the LSD experience, the man replies, “I think everybody understood that if you had a good trip, you had a kind of above-it-all look into reality. What we subsequently found was that when you came down, you remembered the experience, but you didn’t switch identities. You really didn’t have that kind of feeling. You weren’t as suspicious of people. You listened to them, but you also saw through them more easily and clearly. We decided that this wasn’t the kind of thing that was going to make a guy into a turncoat to his own country. The more we worked with it, the less we became convinced this was what the Communists were using for brainwashing.”

The early LSD tests—both outside and inside the Agency—had gone well enough that the MKULTRA scientists moved forward to the next stage on the road to “field” use: They tried the drug out on people by surprise. This, after all, would be the way an operator would give—or get—the drug. First they decided to spring it on each other without warning. They agreed among themselves that a coworker might slip it to them at any time. (In what may be an apocryphal story, a TSS staff man says that one of his former colleagues always brought his own bottle of wine to office parties and carried it with him at all times.) Unwitting doses became an occupational hazard.

MKULTRA men usually took these unplanned trips in stride, but occasionally they turned nasty. Two TSS veterans tell the story of a coworker who drank some LSD-laced coffee during his morning break. Within an hour, states one veteran, “he sort of knew he had it, but he couldn’t pull himself together. Sometimes you take it, and you start the

process of maintaining your composure. But this grabbed him before he was aware, and it got away from him.”

Filled with fear, the CIA man fled the building that then housed TSS, located on the edge of the Mall near Washington’s great monuments. Having lost sight of him, his colleagues searched frantically, but he managed to escape. The hallucinating Agency man worked his way across one of the Potomac bridges and apparently cut his last links with rationality. “He reported afterwards that every automobile that came by was a terrible monster with fantastic eyes, out to get him personally,” says the veteran. “Each time a car passed, he would huddle down against the parapet, terribly frightened. It was a real horror trip for him. I mean, it was hours of agony. It was like a dream that never stops—with someone chasing you.”

After about an hour and a half, the victim’s coworkers found him on the Virginia side of the Potomac, crouched under a fountain, trembling. “It was awfully hard to persuade him that his friends were his friends at that point,” recalls the colleague. “He was alone in the world, and everyone was hostile. He’d become a full-blown paranoid. If it had lasted for two weeks, we’d have plunked him in a mental hospital.” Fortunately for him, the CIA man came down by the end of the day. This was not the first, last, or most tragic bad trip in the Agency’s testing program<sup>8</sup>.

By late 1953, only six months after Allen Dulles had formally created MKULTRA, TSS officials were already well into the last stage of their research: systematic use of LSD on “outsiders” who had no idea they had received the drug. These victims simply felt their moorings slip away in the midst of an ordinary day, for no apparent reason, and no one really knew how they would react.

Sid Gottlieb was ready for the operational experiments. He considered LSD to be such a secret substance that he gave it a private code name (“serunim”) by which he and his colleagues often referred to the drug, even behind the CIA’s heavily guarded doors.

In retrospect, it seems more than bizarre that CIA officials—men responsible for the nation’s intelligence and alertness when the hot and cold wars against the Communists were at their peak—would be sneaking LSD into each other’s coffee cups and thereby subjecting themselves to the unknown frontiers of experimental drugs. But these side trips did not seem to change the sense of reality of Gottlieb or of high CIA officials, who took LSD on several occasions. The drug did

not transform Gottlieb out of the mind-set of a master scientist-spy, a protégé of Richard Helms in the CIA’s inner circle. He never stopped milking his goats at 5:30 every morning.

The CIA leaders’ early achievements with LSD were impressive. They had not invented the drug, but they had gotten in on the American ground floor and done nearly everything else. They were years ahead of the scientific literature—let alone the public—and spies win by being ahead. They had monopolized the supply of LSD and dominated the research by creating much of it themselves. They had used money and other blandishments to build a network of scientists and doctors whose work they could direct and turn to their own use. All that remained between them and major espionage successes was the performance of the drug in the field.

That, however, turned out to be a considerable stumbling block. LSD had an incredibly powerful effect on people, but not in ways the CIA could predict or control.

#### Notes

1. During the 1950s, Boston Psychopathic changed its name to Massachusetts Mental Health Center, the name it bears today.
2. Pronounced M-K-ULTRA. The MK digraph simply identified it as a TSS project. As for the ULTRA part, it may have had its etymological roots in the most closely guarded Anglo-American World War II intelligence secret, the ULTRA program, which handled the cracking of German military codes. While good espionage tradecraft called for cryptonyms to have no special meaning, wartime experiences were still very much on the minds of men like Allen Dulles.
3. By no means did TSS neglect other drugs. It looked at hundreds of others from cocaine to nicotine, with special emphasis on special-purpose substances. One 1952 memo talked about the urgent operational need for a chemical “producing general listlessness and lethargy.” Another mentioned finding—as TSS later did—a potion to accelerate the effects of liquor, called an “alcohol extender.”
4. As happened to Albert Hofmann the first time, Abramson once unknowingly ingested some LSD, probably by swallowing water from his spiked snail tank. He started to feel bad but, with his wife’s help, he finally pinpointed the cause. According to brain and dolphin expert John Lilly, who heard the story from Mrs. Abramson, Harold was greatly relieved that his discomfort was not grave. “Oh, it’s nothing serious,” he said. “It’s just an LSD psychosis. I’ll just go to bed and sleep it off.”
5. Army researchers, as usual running about five years behind the CIA, became interested in the sustained use of LSD as an interrogation device during 1961 field tests (called Operation THIRD CHANCE). The Army men tested the drug

in Europe on nine foreigners and one American, a black soldier named James Thornwell, accused of stealing classified documents. While Thornwell was reacting to the drug under extremely stressful conditions, his captors threatened “to extend the state indefinitely, even to a permanent condition of insanity,” according to an Army document. Thornwell is now suing the U.S. government for \$30 million.

In one of those twists that Washington insiders take for granted and outsiders do not quite believe, Terry Lenzner, a partner of the same law firm seeking this huge sum for Thornwell, is the lawyer for Sid Gottlieb, the man who oversaw the 77-day trips at Lexington and even more dangerous LSD testing.

6. A 1975 CIA document clears up the mystery of how the Agency’s military sources could have made such a huge error in estimating Sandoz’s LSD supply (and probably also explains the earlier inaccurate report that the Russians had bought 50,000,000 doses). What happened, according to the document, was that the U.S. military attaché in Switzerland did not know the difference between a milligram (1/1,000 of a gram) and a kilogram (1,000 grams). This mix-up threw all his calculations off by a factor of 1,000,000.
7. Military security agencies supported the LSD work of such well-known researchers as Amedeo Marrazzi of the University of Minnesota and Missouri Institute of Psychiatry; Henry Beecher of Harvard and Massachusetts General Hospital; Charles Savage while he was at the Naval Medical Research Institute; James Dille of the University of Washington; Gerald Klee of the University of Maryland Medical School; Neil Burch of Baylor University (who performed later experiments for the CIA); and Paul Hoch and James Cattell of the New York State Psychiatric Institute, whose forced injections of a mescaline derivative led to the 1953 death of New York tennis professional Harold Blauer. (Dr. Cattell later told Army investigators, “We didn’t know whether it was dog piss or what it was we were giving him.”)
8. TSS officials had long known that LSD could be quite dangerous. In 1952, Harvard Medical School’s Henry Beecher, who regularly gave the Agency information on his talks with European colleagues, reported that a Swiss doctor had suffered severe depression after taking the drug, and had killed herself three weeks later.

#### Source Materials

- The description of Robert Hyde’s first trip came from interviews with Dr. Milton Greenblatt, Dr. J. Herbert DeShon, and a talk by Max Rinkel at the 2nd Macy Conference on Neuropharmacology, pp. 235-36, edited by Harold A. Abramson, 1955: Madison Printing Company.
- The descriptions of TSS and Sidney Gottlieb came from interviews with Ray Cline, John Stockwell, about 10 other ex-CIA officers, and other friends of Gottlieb.
- Memos quoted on the early MKULTRA program include *Memorandum from ADDP Helms to DCI Dulles*, 4/3/53, Tab A, pp. 1-2 (quoted in Church Committee Report, Book I); APF A-1, April 13, 1953; *Memorandum for Deputy Director (Administration, Subject: Project MKULTRA—Extremely Sensitive Research and Development Program; #A/B,I,64/6*, 6 February 1952; *Memorandum for the Record*,

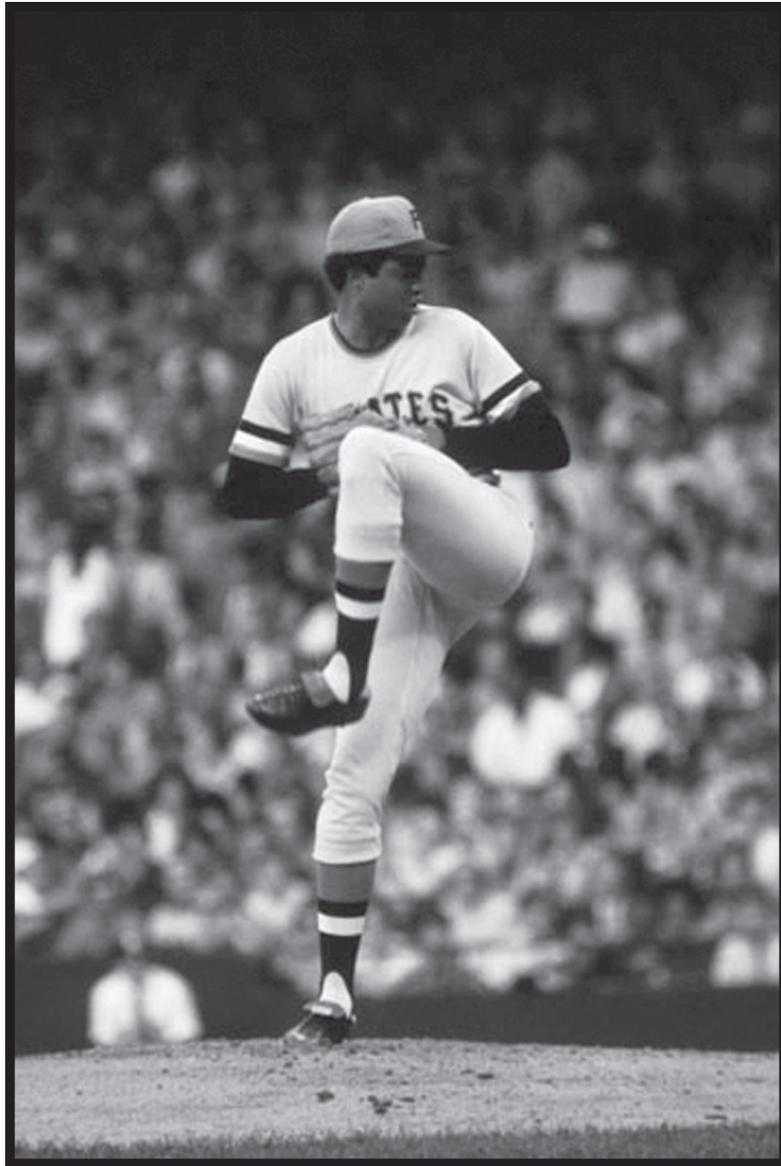
*Subject: Contract with [deleted] #A/B,I,64/29*, undated; and *Memorandum for Technical Services Staff, Subject: Alcohol Antagonists and Accelerators, Research and Development Project*. The Gottlieb quote is from *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Health and Scientific Research of the Senate Committee on Human Resources*, September 21, 1977, p. 206.

- The background data on LSD came particularly from *The Beyond Within: The LSD Story* by Sidney Cohen (New York: Atheneum, 1972). Other sources included *Origins of Psychopharmacology: From CPZ to LSD* by Anne E. Caldwell (Springfield, III.: Charles C. Thomas, 1970) and Document 352, “An OSI Study of the Strategic Medical Importance of LSD-25,” 30 August 1955.
- TSS’s use of outside researchers came from interviews with four former TSSers. MKULTRA Subprojects 8, 10, 63, and 66 described Robert Hyde’s work. Subprojects 7, 27, and 40 concerned Harold Abramson. Hodge’s work was in subprojects 17 and 46. Carl Pfeiffer’s Agency connection, along with Hyde’s, Abramson’s, and Isbell’s, was laid out by Lyman B. Kirkpatrick, *Memorandum for the Record, 1 December 1953, Subject: Conversation with Dr. Willis Gibbons of TSS re Olson Case* (found at p. 1030, Kennedy Subcommittee 1975 Biomedical and Behavioral Research Hearings). Isbell’s testing program was also described at those hearings, as it was in *Document #14, 24 July, 1953, Memo For: Liaison & Security Officer/TSS, Subject #71 An Account of the Chemical Division’s Contacts in the National Institute of Health; Document #37, 14 July 1954, subject [deleted]*; and *Document #41, 31 August, 1956, Subject: Trip to Lexington, Ky., 21-23 August 1956*. Isbell’s program was further described in a “Report on ADAMHA Involvement in LSD Research,” found at p. 993 of 1975 Kennedy subcommittee hearings. The firsthand account of the actual testing came from an interview with Edward M. Flowers, Washington, D.C.
- The section on TSS’s noncontract informants came from interviews with TSS sources, reading the proceedings of the Macy Conferences on “Problems of Consciousness” and “Neuropharmacology,” and interviews with several participants including Sidney Cohen, Humphrey Osmond, and Hudson Hoagland.
- The material on CIA’s relations with Sandoz and Eli Lilly came from *Document #24, 16 November, 1953, Subject: ARTICHOKE Conference; Document #268, 23 October, 1953, Subject: Meeting in Director’s Office at 1100 hours on 23 October with Mr. Wisner and [deleted]*; *Document # 316, 6 January, 1954, Subject: Lysergic Acid Diethylamide (LSD-25)*; and *Document #338, 26 October 1954, Subject: Potential Large Scale Availability of LSD through newly discovered synthesis by [deleted]*; interviews with Sandoz and Lilly former executives; interviews with TSS sources; and Sidney Gottlieb’s testimony before Kennedy subcommittee, 1977, p. 203.
- Henry Beecher’s US government connections were detailed in his private papers, in a report on the Swiss-LSD death to the CIA at p. 396, Church Committee Report, Book I, and in interviews with two of his former associates.
- The description of TSS’s internal testing progression comes from interviews with former staff members. The short reference to Sid Gottlieb’s arranging for LSD to be given a speaker at a political rally comes from *Document #A/B, II, 26/8, 9 June 1954, Subject: MKULTRA*. Henry Beecher’s report to the CIA on the Swiss suicide is found at p. 396, *Church Committee Report, Book I*.

## **The Long, Strange Trip of Dock Ellis (Excerpts)**

Published Aug. 24, 2012 at ESPN.com:

<http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/eticket/story?page=Dock-Ellis>



“Get to the f—ing stadium. I got to pitch.” Decades later, Dock Ellis remembered it like this: sitting in a taxi outside the San Diego airport, running late for work, tripping on acid.

So yeah, maybe the words aren’t verbatim.

It was a Friday. That much is certain. June 12, 1970. Three years after psychedelic Pied Piper Timothy Leary invited America to “Turn on, tune in and drop out.” Four years before Richard Nixon’s resignation marked an inglorious denouement to the counterculture era. The middle of things. A purple haze. The perfect moment for the first and only known no-hitter in major league history pitched under the influence of lysergic acid diethylamide, thrown by the first and only player in major league history to inspire both a biography penned by a future American poet laureate and a seminal article in *High Times*.

Six hours earlier, Ellis had been in Los Angeles, nursing a hangover, dazed and confused, enjoying what he thought was his day off.

Two hours later, he would be standing on the mound at San Diego Stadium, throwing baseballs he couldn’t always feel, in the general direction of batters he didn’t always see, trying very, very hard not to fall over.

He was 25 years old, a right-handed starter for the Pittsburgh Pirates, armed with a big curveball and a bigger mouth, a tall, chubby-faced kid who ran like a fawn. Clubhouse cutup. Media antagonist. Iconoclastic cultural badass. In the words of a teammate, “not afraid of nothing.”

The Pirates were in town to play the San Diego Padres, starting their first West Coast trip of the season. That, too, is certain. The rest is a matter of memory, largely Ellis’, imperfect and addled, culled from interviews, articles, and books. The club arrived on Thursday,

an off day. Ellis rented a car. Dropped a tab of acid. Drove north to his hometown, Los Angeles. He showed up at the home of Mitzi, the girlfriend of an old childhood buddy, Al Rambo.

“Dock,” Mitzi asked, “what’s wrong?”

“I’m as high as a Georgia pine,” he said.

The two drank screwdrivers. Smoked marijuana. Talked through the night. Eventually, Ellis fell asleep. Possibly for an hour. Probably less. Around noon—maybe earlier—he took another dose of LSD.

Meanwhile, Mitzi flipped through a newspaper.

“Dock, you better get up,” she said. “You gotta go pitch!”

“What are you talking about?” he said. “I pitch tomorrow.”

Mitzi gave him the sports page. Ellis scanned the newsprint. Padres-Pirates. Doubleheader. Friday. *Today*. Game time: 6:05 p.m. Game 1 starter: Ellis, D.

“Oh, wow,” he said. “What happened to yesterday?”

### **The Electric Kool-Aid No-No**

Better question: What happened to Ellis? He was a 1970s sports icon, outspoken and controversial, loathed and adored. Charles Barkley with a touch of Ozzie Guillen. Ellis pitched in an All-Star Game. Was a World Series champion. He played 10 major league seasons, won 138 games and was a key member of the 1976 New York Yankees. He was a husband, a brother, an uncle, and a father. He later became a drug counselor, working with addicts, inmates and troubled youth. “If I had never met Dock, I would probably be dead or doing life [in prison],” said John Shandy, a 35-year-old Long Beach resident and recovering addict who was counseled by Ellis while incarcerated. “There’s no doubt about that in my mind whatsoever. That dude changed my life. He changed my world.”

Ellis died of complications stemming from chronic liver disease in a Los Angeles hospital on Dec. 19, 2008. He was 63. To this day, he is sorely missed by those who knew and loved him. His widow. Former teammates. Childhood friends. Legendary skateboard and music photographer Glen E. Friedman, who as a child met Ellis at New York’s Shea Stadium, struck up a friendship and later dedicated his first book to the pitcher.

Not surprisingly, all of this has been forgotten.

The first line in Ellis’ *Los Angeles Times* obituary reads, “. . . the former major league pitcher who claimed to have thrown a no-hitter while on LSD.” Claimed? Ellis didn’t claim. Ellis expounded. Go to YouTube. Use Google. Type “Dock Ellis and the LSD No-No.” You’ll find a popular, award-winning *No Mas* short film about the game, illustrated and animated by artist James Blagden and featuring audio from a 2008 NPR interview of Ellis by Donnell Alexander and Neille Iles. A mash-up of popping, psychedelic colors and stark, black-and-white drawings, the film depicts the pitcher as a literal human cartoon—when an animated Ellis covers a grounder at first base, he yelps, “I just made a touchdown!”

This fits.

After all, Ellis could have called in sick. Stayed in Los Angeles. Never bothered with catching an afternoon flight to San Diego, let alone catching a cab to the stadium. Barring that, he could have kept his mouth shut. Instead, Ellis recorded a 2-0, no-hit victory against the Padres—and 14 years later, the pitcher confirmed to reporter Bob Smizik of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* that he had played the game on acid. Smizik had asked. He knew to ask because he was working off a tip. A tip from Pirates fan David Lander, better known as the TV actor who played Squiggy on *Laverne & Shirley*. Stranger things have happened.

For instance, Ellis’ claiming that he received the LSD in question from Leary himself.

True story: In the summer of 1999, Ellis became the inaugural member of the Baseball Reliquary’s Shrine of the Eternals. Based in Pasadena, Calif., the reliquary is a sort of people’s bizarre Hall of Fame, an organization with no permanent home and an eccentric collection of baseball artifacts that includes the jockstrap worn by 3-foot-7 pinch hitter Eddie Gaedel, who walked in his only major league plate appearance. The morning before Ellis’ induction ceremony at the city’s public library, reliquary executive director Terry Cannon met the retired pitcher by the large sculpture of Jackie Robinson that stands outside City Hall.

Ellis told Cannon that Leary—a former Harvard psychology professor who championed the use of psychedelic drugs and once played a softball game in Mexico while tripping—had been interested in researching the effect of LSD on professional athletes. The professor had approached the pitcher: Would Ellis take a tab of LSD, play, and

then report on the experience?

“I suppose Dock could have been pulling my leg,” Cannon said. “But he was very straightforward about it.”

Problem No. 1: Leary biographer Robert Greenfield said the anecdote is almost certainly bogus because, in 1970, Leary was locked up in a California prison on a drug conviction and didn’t escape until September. Problem No. 2: Ellis told Alexander that he got the acid from a UCLA laboratory. Problem No. 3: Leary’s personal archivist, Michael Horowitz, said that the Leary-Ellis connection is highly unlikely—but that when Horowitz first heard about the no-hitter, he bought copies of the pitcher’s 1971 Topps baseball card and gave one to Leary.

“Tim proudly carried it in his wallet, and showed it to any fans of sports and psychedelics he ran into,” Horowitz said.

Did Ellis . . . or didn’t he? Tony Bartirome, a former Pirates trainer and longtime friend of the pitcher, is skeptical. “He might have said that just to jerk somebody off.”

Maybe so—not that it really matters. By now, the myth and man have become inseparable. So far this season, major league pitchers have thrown six no-hitters and three perfect games. None resonate like Ellis’ long, strange trip. For the psychedelically inclined, the mere notion of a LSD no-no stands as the counterculture answer to Babe Ruth’s called shot, the pinnacle of mastering one’s high. For everyone else, the game is *far out, man*, a funky bit of sports folklore, appropriated and embellished, passed around like an old baseball card.

Writer and eventual poet laureate Donald Hall included a full, non-bowdlerized version of the tale in a 1989 revision of his 1976 Ellis biography, *Dock Ellis in the Country of Baseball*. (In the original book, Hall replaced LSD with screwdrivers at the request of Ellis, who didn’t want to antagonize Yankees owner George Steinbrenner.) Robin Williams riffed on the no-hitter during a stand-up routine. A New York City art gallery displayed and sold a baseball coated with acid. Ellis became the subject of psychedelic paintings, T-shirts, and surfboard designs. Blagden’s Internet short film has been viewed more than 2.5 million times. An online petition demands that Major League Baseball release broadcast footage of the no-hitter, and the lack of said footage has prompted conspiracy theories. (No such footage is believed to exist, although a Pirates team photographer did record a few grainy, black-and-white minutes of Ellis throwing and slipping on the mound,

later broadcast by HBO.)

Over time, the game has become the thing; the acid, the story. As for the pitcher himself?

Blotted out. Just like his pain.

### A Pharmacological Feast

When Ellis arrived at San Diego Stadium about 4:30 in the afternoon, he swallowed a handful of uppers—Dexamyl pills, known as “Greenies”—then walked to the dugout, where a female acquaintance was waiting by the railing.

The woman had a gold pouch, small and pretty. Inside were “Bennies.” Benzedrine pills. Another stimulant. Ellis took some, part of his usual pregame routine. The Pirates suspected Ellis was on something but weren’t entirely sure because the pitcher always acted a little nuts.

The evening was dreary. Mist and drizzle. The ballpark was mostly empty. The Padres were lousy, a year removed from their inaugural campaign, a light-hitting club that ultimately lost 99 games. Ellis struck out six batters. He walked eight. He hit Padres center fielder Ivan Murrell with a pitch. In the HBO footage, silent and incomplete, Ellis sporadically slips and stumbles during his follow-through. He later recalled a sense of euphoria. Sometimes, the ball felt big. Like a balloon. Sometimes, it felt small. Like a golf ball. Ellis couldn’t always see the hitters—nor his catcher, Jerry May. He focused on May’s fingers, wrapped with reflective tape. He remembered pitching erratically, balls in the dirt, the Padres batting scared, ducking and diving, hitting off the ends of their bats.

In the dugout, Ellis ignored the stadium scoreboard. He concentrated on cleaning his muddy spikes. His superstitious teammates avoided eye contact, except for rookie second baseman Dave Cash.

“You got a no-no going,” Cash said.

“Yeah, right,” Ellis replied.

The article in *High Times* reported that Ellis saw a comet tail behind his pitches and a multicolored path to May. A few years ago, *The New York Times* claimed that Ellis saw Nixon behind the plate, calling balls and strikes. So goes the myth. The old baseball card, passed around anew. On the game’s final pitch, Ellis struck out pinch hitter Ed Spiezio with a curveball. He spun around on the mound and screamed,

“A m—f—ing no-no!”

Or so he claimed to remember. Fact is, Ellis didn't remember much: When sportscaster Curt Gowdy interviewed him the next day during a nationally televised game, the pitcher was still blotted out, as high as a Georgia pine.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Ted Widmer*

## Psychedelic Comix: Interview with Artist R. Crumb

Excerpts from *Paris Review* 193 | Summer 2010

<http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/6017/the-art-of-comics-no-1-r-crumb>

### INTERVIEWER

So how did you finally find publication?

### CRUMB

Well, the hippie revolution happened. In 1964 I first got laid, I met my first wife, Dana, and all these proto-hippies in Cleveland. A lot of them were Jews from Cleveland Heights, Shaker Heights. They started taking LSD and urged me to try it, so Dana got some LSD from a psychiatrist; it was still legal in '65. We took it and that was totally a road-to-Damascus experience. It knocked you off your horse, taking LSD. I remember going to work that Monday, after taking LSD on Saturday, and it just seemed like a cardboard reality. It didn't seem real to me anymore. Seemed completely fake, only a paper-moon kind of world. My co-workers, they were like, *Crumb, what's the matter with you, what happened to you?* Because I was just staring at everything like I had never seen it before. And then it changed the whole direction of my artwork. Other people who had taken LSD understood right away what was going on, but the people who hadn't, my co-workers, they didn't get it.

### INTERVIEWER

How did it change your artwork?

### CRUMB

I had been working along in this modern adult cartoon trend, very influenced by the modern, expressionistic, arty quality of work by Jules Feiffer, Ronald Searle, Ralph Steadman. Then, on LSD, I got flung back into this cruder forties style, that suddenly became very powerful to me. It was a kind of grotesque interpretation of this forties thing, Popeye kind of stuff. I started drawing like that again. It was bizarre to

people who had known my work before. Even Kurtzman said, *What the hell are you doing? You're regressing!*

#### INTERVIEWER

How long were you in New York?

#### CRUMB

I stayed there nine months and tried to make it as a commercial artist. It was too competitive for me. There were just too many really driven, ambitious career-oriented artists there. I couldn't handle it. I went back to Cleveland after nine months. I was still taking LSD and I just wasn't up for the rat race at all.

#### INTERVIEWER

Did you consider yourself part of the radical counterculture?

#### CRUMB

I wasn't that passionate about it. I agreed with it, but at the political demonstrations I would get very nervous when people started chanting in unison. I didn't like that. I usually disliked those smash-the-state kind of guys, even though I agreed politically with them. I took LSD, I said *groovy* and *far-out*, but I was kind of a detached observer.

#### INTERVIEWER

How did you find yourself in the middle of it?

#### CRUMB

In January of 1967, in a bar, I met two guys I knew who were going to San Francisco. I said, *Can I go with you?* and they said *yeah*. I was stuck in Cleveland at age twenty-three with a dreary job and a needy, insecure young wife. I was desperate to bust out, and here was my chance. So that night I went with them, left my wife, didn't say anything, left the job. All I had with me was a sketchbook and some pocket change. Three days later we arrive in San Francisco in this old beat-up car.

They knew some guy in North Beach and we camped out in his tiny apartment. I wandered over to Haight-Ashbury—I'd been told it was a happening place. I was sitting in this place called the Psychedelic Shop, thinking, *What am I gonna do, I've got no money, I've got nothing*. Just then this guy I knew from Cleveland wandered in and saw me and said, *Crumb! What're you doing here?* He took me to his house, and I stayed there for a few weeks. Then I felt guilty about my wife,



I called her up, she came out—she had some money in the bank that we'd saved—and we got an apartment and I started doing some cards for the greeting-card company again, freelancing. Then I started doing comics for these underground papers. They would take anything, they weren't very fussy.

**INTERVIEWER**

They were just small papers around San Francisco?

**CRUMB**

I started doing these psychedelic cartoons and they caught on really fast. Other underground papers started reprinting them. There was no money in it, but it was just a thrill to see anything of mine in print. They started getting printed in all the underground papers, and then a guy from Philadelphia named Brian Zahn proposed I do a whole comic, and that's how *Zap Comix* happened. That was my dream, to make my own comic book, and I couldn't believe what this guy offered. He said, *I'll take what you make, the whole comic book, and I'll pay for it.* I said, *Wow.* I very quickly turned out two issues of *Zap Comix*. Zahn didn't come through, but a guy named Dan Donahue published the first issue.

**INTERVIEWER**

So you had no problems coming up with story ideas?

**CRUMB**

That was no problem at all. It just poured out of me in those days.

**INTERVIEWER**

Were you still interested in LSD?

**CRUMB**

I was taking LSD periodically, every couple of months. I was in a strange state of mind, influenced by these visions.

**INTERVIEWER**

And you were rendering it as you were seeing it?

**CRUMB**

I was trying to draw it in my sketchbook, and that began to coalesce into these comic strips that were stylistically based on grotesque, vulgar humor comics of the thirties and forties.

**INTERVIEWER**

How did you come up with ideas for major figures like Mr. Natural?

**CRUMB**

All of those characters came out of that crazy visionary period that I couldn't shut off. It was spontaneous, but I was so crazy, I was really out of my mind, it was like schizophrenia. It was like what produces art by crazy people in a madhouse. Anything could be an influence, anything I heard. I was in Chicago in early '66 and the radio was on, there was some tune playing, it was a black station, and this announcer said, *That was Mr. Natural.* I just started drawing Mr. Natural, this bearded guru-type character in my sketchbook, it just came out. I said, *Hey, that's kind of good,* and then played around with that some more, this faux-guru character.

**INTERVIEWER**

At *Zap*, you were editor-in-chief, and artist, and writer of dialogue.

**CRUMB**

And publisher, and folder, and stapler, and seller on the street. Everything.

**INTERVIEWER**

Did it sell well?

**CRUMB**

At first it didn't. We took them around to all the shops on Haight Street and they'd say, *We don't sell comic books, this is a psychedelic-poster shop, you know. A comic book?* They didn't have anything to do with comic books. But it caught on fast. *Zap Comix* caught on and then other artists started coming out of the woodwork who wanted to draw comics, hippie comics, and the whole thing blossomed into a movement—underground comics.

**INTERVIEWER**

How did you get to draw an album cover for Janis Joplin?

**CRUMB**

She liked the comics. She was around, and she came to me and asked me to do that cover. I liked Janis personally, that's why I did it. I wasn't crazy about their band. But Janis was a very talented singer.

**INTERVIEWER**

That must have been a big leap forward in terms of recognition, right?

**CRUMB**

For a while I was most well known for that, and for *Keep on Truckin'*. That was a drawing that came out of LSD trips, and the words came from a Blind Boy Fuller song from 1935. I drew it in my sketchbook and then for *Zap*. It sort of caught the popular imagination. It became a horrible popular thing.

**INTERVIEWER**

That is a signature of your career—no matter the ups and downs, you were always cranking it out.

**CRUMB**

I finally ground to a halt in 1973. My life was such a mess, such a chaos, what with the girlfriends, and the first wife, I kind of had a breakdown. I never went back to that pace again. The rest of the seventies I was very confused and lost. The inspiration of the LSD wore off. A lot of people were left adrift then, washed up on the beach.

**INTERVIEWER**

When did you feel you had turned a corner?

**CRUMB**

I never saw it as turning a corner. I just kept working and I was never sure what I was doing. I was never as cocksure again after that first LSD inspiration. Especially with fame and reputation. You become very uncertain, you have to follow your own act. I never did get that kind of spontaneous cocksureness back again. It's like going from being the observer to the observed. I had been used to being invisible when I was young. After I became well-known, it was very hard to be anonymous in the world. Of course, at first I liked all the attention. Suddenly, good-looking girls were interested in me! Wow! I couldn't believe it.

**INTERVIEWER**

What led you to be so open?

**CRUMB**

Well, maybe it was the LSD that inspired me to use comics to reveal my inner self, but along with this spiritual or positive side, there was a dark side, which I kept hidden until a certain moment. Seeing S. Clay Wilson's work was a big breakthrough, because he just drew anything

that came into his head, any violent, crazy, sexual thing. I saw that and I said, *OK, anything goes, I'm just going to show it all, and reveal the dark side, everything.*

Sometimes I try to psychoanalyze those old comics, like the Big Ass Comics that I did in 1969 or '70, those sex-fantasy stories, and figure out what they're really about. There are these big, powerful female bird monsters that have predatory heads with big sharp beaks and powerful female bodies, and the hero, the protagonist, is a little funny cartoon guy and he's got to deal with this whole society of these big female bird monsters. There are no males, they're all female, there's attraction and yet also fear. They're powerful and predatory. Give me twenty years on the couch with Freud and I'll figure it out. I don't know. You could even see how it's a larger metaphor, the story of the struggle of the little guy with these big, powerful, attractive, predatory creatures. A whole society of them and they are there in power, and they're organized, and they're of one mind.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Henrik Dahl*

## **A Brief History of LSD in the Twenty-First Century**

*This article first appeared in the  
Psychedelic Press UK Journal (June, 2015 Volume III):  
An issue dedicated to the history and literature of psychedelics,  
and in particular LSD.*

<http://psypressuk.com/2015/07/07/a-brief-history-of-ldd-in-the-twenty-first-century/>

Since Swiss scientist Albert Hofmann accidentally discovered LSD's psychedelic properties in 1943, a plethora of books, news articles, film documentaries, academic papers, and conferences about the substance have seen the light of day. Add to that numerous artistic expressions—artworks, designs, films—that feature references to acid. It is simply fair to say that interest in LSD has been huge. However, most of the activity took place in (or is focusing on) the twentieth century. One may even get the impression that acid is a historical phenomenon that barely exists today. But nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, the past 15 years have seen many important developments in connection with LSD.

My first contact with LSD culture came primarily through the Scandinavian rave scene of the late 1990s. Had I been born in another time and place, my encounter with Hofmann's potion—had it happened at all—would have been completely different. It should also be said that my perspective as a writer is that of a white male in his early forties living in Sweden, which of course has influenced my approach to writing this article. When discussing LSD culture, one should keep in mind that it is a global, multifaceted, and loosely connected movement—and few, if any, psychedelic researchers can claim to know the full story of what has happened during the past decade and a half. Yet what follows is an attempt at outlining some of LSD's recent underground as well as above ground use.

At the turn of the new millennium the future looked somewhat bleak for LSD. In his book *Albion Dreaming*, UK acid historian Andy Roberts says that during this time public interest in LSD was at an

all-time low, and that LSD appeared to be yesterday's drug.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, there was a major drop in availability of underground acid in the early twenty-first century, at least in the States.<sup>2</sup> It is generally believed that the drop had to do with a particular event, namely the seizure of an LSD lab in Wamego, Kansas in 2000, which led to the draconian conviction of William Leonard Pickard and Clyde Apperson, now serving two life sentences and 30 years in prison, respectively.

The event has become known under several different names including the Wamego bust, the Pickard bust, and the Kansas missile silo bust. The latter comes from the fact that the laboratory was stored in a renovated Atlas-E missile silo owned by Gordon Todd Skinner, a drug aficionado and con man moving in psychedelic circles.

For reasons that are not entirely clear, Skinner decided to become a DEA informant and revealed the laboratory to the authorities. He received total immunity and was never charged for his involvement in the case. Incidentally, Skinner is now serving life plus 90 years for kidnapping-related charges.<sup>3</sup> Titled "Operation White Rabbit" by the DEA, the Wamego bust is described by the agency as the largest LSD manufacturing case in history. Yet, according to *Erowid*, the scale of the laboratory's production appears to have been vastly exaggerated.<sup>4</sup> Many of the details surrounding the case nevertheless sound like something out of a crime novel.

Leonard Pickard was an academic already in his mid fifties when he was arrested in 2000. In an *SFGate* article published that same year, he comes across as a somewhat unlikely figure to end up with two life-sentences for the large-scale manufacturing of LSD. Described by Mark Kleiman of UCLA as "a character out of a Pynchon novel," Pickard is portrayed in the piece as a non-smoking and non-drinking vegetarian who runs marathons and practices yoga. According to Kleinman, Pickard is also a "superbrilliant chemist." In the mid 1990s, Pickard won a Harvard fellowship to study drug policy and addiction, and as the deputy director of the Drugs Policy Analysis Program at the UCLA in the late 1990s, he helped track the emergence of new street drugs in Russia.<sup>5</sup> Although Pickard has a history of drug related arrests and convictions that go back to the mid 1970s, he has never made a confession in the Wamego LSD case.

Following his arrest in 2000, Pickard received backing by some seemingly unexpected characters, including the two "British aristocrats" Lord James and Lady Amanda Neidpath, the latter better

known as Amanda Feilding of the Beckley Foundation. In a letter to the court the two vowed that Pickard was trustworthy. “We find it difficult to believe . . . he can be involved in anything criminal,”<sup>6</sup> it said.

It seems most people, even within psychedelic culture itself, have accepted the Wamego bust as the main reason why there was an LSD shortage in the early 2000s. “The best explanation is a bust, a really big bust,”<sup>7</sup> wrote Ryan Grim about the LSD drought in his article “Who’s Got the Acid” published on *Slate* in 2004. There is, however, reason to be a little critical towards this popular, and not to mention media-friendly, explanation. Although it appears the Wamego bust was something of a blow to acid culture in the early twenty-first century, at least in the States, there are several additional factors that may have strongly contributed to the acid shortage.

In his piece “International LSD Prevalence: Factors Affecting Proliferation and Control,” written by Pickard by hand from prison and presented by writer and Mind States conference co-founder Jon Hanna at the World Psychedelic Forum in Basel in 2008, Pickard says that the drop in LSD availability partly had to do with the great influx at the time of MDMA, which he believes had a displacement effect on LSD use. According to Pickard, another major reason for the shortage of LSD in the early 2000s—which actually had been in steady decline since 1996—had to do with difficulty in obtaining one of the key materials used by chemists when producing LSD, namely, ergotamine tartrate (ET). Since the early 1990s, ET is subject to strict controls in most countries. “This synthetic bottleneck, the dependency on ET supply, may be the most important single factor affecting proliferation of clandestine laboratory sites,”<sup>8</sup> wrote Pickard.

In 2000, Federal, State and local forensic laboratories in the U.S. analyzed 1,785 exhibits of LSD. The following year the number was down to 1,368, and in 2002 a mere 198 samples were analyzed. Although there is no arguing that this was a remarkable drop, most people discussing the U.S. LSD drought rarely mention the fact that availability of the drug actually increased throughout the decade. After having remained low for a couple of years, the number of LSD exhibits that were analyzed slowly increased to 844 in 2007.<sup>9</sup> While this number is relatively low compared with what was seen in 2000, it nevertheless shows that there was still an existing American LSD culture at the end of the decade.

According to the DEA, very few labs are responsible for the

worldwide LSD production. In 2010 they stated that, “[a] limited number of chemists, probably less than a dozen, are believed to be manufacturing nearly all of the LSD available in the United States.”<sup>10</sup> However, according to Pickard, it is more likely there are many small labs operating that are less easily detected and easier to move. In his paper, Pickard mentions Casey William Hardison as an example of someone who was running one such small lab. The latter made LSD and other psychedelics in a lab that would fit into a bedroom.

Despite the shortage in the early twenty-first century, there were certainly many people who continued to take LSD. For example, this was evident by the appearance of “Hofmann Millennium” around 2000, a reissue of a blotter LSD from the mid-1990s. The blotter features an illustration of a smiling Albert Hofmann taking his legendary LSD bicycle ride in the Swiss countryside, complete with a snow-clad mountain in the background. Already a classic, the image has become one of the most well-known examples of blotter art produced over the past decades, and, besides having appeared on t-shirts and other commercial products, un-dipped “vanity” blotter can be bought online. Clearly, there were enough acid enthusiasts out there to make sure LSD would survive into the new millennium.

In the early 2000s, LSD was also present in art. For example, in 2000 British visual artist and art world superstar Damien Hirst, believed to be one of the wealthiest living artists in the world, made an artwork titled “Lysergic Acid Diethylamide (LSD).” The motif, which features a number of colored dots, has been reproduced on several commercial products including an “LSD” iPhone case, making sure your phone is always on acid.

Another artist taking interest in LSD in the early twenty-first century was Rodney Graham. In his 2001 film *The Phonokinetoscope*, Graham created a re-enactment of Albert Hofmann’s original 1943 LSD bicycle ride. Naturally, the artist himself was on acid while making the film.

Although many of today’s psychedelic artists take inspiration from a wide range of mind-altering substances, including plant-based psychedelics such as ayahuasca and psilocybin mushrooms, LSD continues to be used for artistic purposes in the twenty-first century. For example, visionary artist Luke Brown sees LSD as his probably most consistent influence,<sup>11</sup> and several artists featured in the art book *Juxtapoz Psychedelic* (2013) list acid as a source of inspiration.

The early 2000s also saw the release of Connie Littlefield's excellent documentary film *Hofmann's Potion* (2002). Using the tagline "The story of 'acid' before it hit the streets," it featured unique interview material with Hofmann and other senior key figures in psychedelia.

And when it comes to literature on psychedelics, Marlene Dobkin de Rios turned to the subject of LSD in her 2003 book *LSD, Spirituality, and the Creative Process*, which was based on Dr Oscar Janiger's LSD research in the 1950s and 1960s.

Looking at acid and its accompanying culture from a broader perspective in the early 2000s, its influence was also still very much seen in psychedelic manifestations such as the, at the time, recently started Boom Festival in Portugal, and of course the Burning Man festival in Nevada's Black Rock Desert.

Moving on to the mid-2000s, LSD again made the news when the aforementioned Casey William Hardison, an American living in Britain, was arrested in February 2004 for making psychedelics. Alongside DMT and 2C-B, Hardison manufactured LSD. Interestingly, just like Pickard many years earlier, Hardison was an active figure in the psychedelic subculture, and in addition to attending psychedelic conferences he wrote articles for *MAPS* and *Erowid*. Talkative and quick-witted, Hardison acted as his own lawyer during his trial.

Being an advocate of cognitive liberty, he argued that it was his human right to use entheogens. His arguments were rejected and, after an eight-week trial Hardison was convicted in March 2005. As is usually the case when it comes to LSD, the sentence was stern: In April 2005 Hardison was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment in the United Kingdom.

Illicit drug manufacturers are generally seen as unscrupulous and greedy individuals with no morals by society at large. Yet it is safe to say that Hardison was an acid idealist with a strong belief in LSD's transformative potential who became yet another victim of the War on (some) Drugs. In a recorded message played at the World Psychedelic Forum in Basel in March 2008, Hardison, at the time four years into his sentence, made sure to remind the audience that "[i]t is easy to forget that the majority of those present in this forum, who have tasted Albert's Problem Child and Wonder Drug, LSD, probably did so via the flask of a chemist who was risking severe restrictions on his or her liberty simply to bring the blessed entity, LSD, into existence."<sup>12</sup>

During the years leading up to his release in May 2013,

Hardison became something of a legend in his own time, at least to some people in the inner circle of contemporary psychedelia. A website titled *Freecasey.org* was launched, making sure his case was not forgotten. After he was released, he appeared on the *Dose Nation* podcast and was interviewed live via Skype by his wife, psychedelic researcher and cognitive liberty advocate Charlotte Walsh, during the 2013 Breaking Convention conference. Appropriately enough, he was also back writing for *Erowid*.

So what motivates an individual such as Casey Hardison to manufacture LSD? The answer might lie in the drug itself. It is my guess that the vast majority who make acid have had powerful transformative experiences themselves, and want to give others the opportunity to reach similar altered states of consciousness. Hardison, an alcoholic from the age of 14 who found his way to the 12 steps of the AA, first took LSD on a cold night in December of 1993. It was a solid dose of approximately 250 micrograms, and during the trip he experienced oneness of all things. "Perennial wisdom dawned and my heart burst forth in praise, gratitude, and love, rooted in a mindset of compassion for self and other,"<sup>13</sup> he eloquently wrote in his piece "(A Brief History and) Motivation of an Entheogenic Chemist." Needless to say, acid made a huge impact on Hardison. So much so that he made a commitment to himself that he would synthesize LSD.

In late 2003, ten years after his first acid trip, Hardison was given "a mass of dark resinous material purported to be ergotamine tartrate (ET)."<sup>14</sup> ET, as stated above, is the sought-after material used by underground psychedelic chemists for the purpose of making LSD. In February 2004, after having failed repeatedly in his attempts, Hardison succeeded in making LSD from the ET he was given. "In ordinary circumstances, I might have been awarded a novel synthesis patent; instead, I was awarded a twenty-year prison sentence."<sup>15</sup>

So far, this article has been concerned with LSD made by underground chemists and, for obvious reasons, people who use street acid very rarely know the dosage and purity of the substance they are about to ingest. But what about the recurring question of whether or not street acid actually contains *any* acid?

Around the middle of the first decade of the twenty-first century, it seemed that the vast majority of the substances that was sold as LSD blotter or microdots *did* in fact contain LSD. A 2005 analysis carried out by the Spanish Medicines and Health Care

Products Regulatory Agency showed that LSD was indeed detected in all the samples that were tested. Eleven of the samples had their place of origin in Spain, and an additional six originated from Switzerland. Interestingly, the quantity of LSD found on the samples was very low.

Two of the blotters, “Marilyn” and “Pink Triangle,” only contained 19 micrograms of LSD each, and the three microdots in the analysis each contained between 20 and 26 micrograms. Of the 17 samples, eight of them contained less than 30 micrograms. The sample with the largest quantity of LSD in the study contained 102 micrograms.<sup>16</sup>

If the latter sounds like a large dose, one should keep in mind that a common dose in the sixties counterculture was about 250 micrograms. Many of the blotters and microdots in the Spanish analysis contained threshold doses, which only produce mild, sometimes barely noticeable, effects of the drug. The lowest doses that were found in the Spanish analysis were in fact equivalent to the ones used when microdosing LSD. It is also common that a single blotter LSD is cut in pieces and shared between users, which, if it is weak to begin with, makes the drug little more than a placebo.

Paradoxically, low doses of LSD can sometimes produce anxiety.<sup>17</sup> Generally speaking though, when people are taking acid recreationally in crowded settings, such as nightclubs and festivals, where many other drugs such as MDMA, amphetamine, cannabis, and alcohol are used as well, low doses most likely prevent many difficult experiences. As the former LSD chemist Tim Scully pointed out in 2003, “One blessing of the small doses popular now is that extreme bad trips are more rare.”<sup>18</sup>

When it comes to the Spanish analysis, one also needs to consider the handling of the 17 samples. Needless to say, poor handling by street dealers/users or those who carried out the analysis may very well have affected its outcome. Once LSD is added to a sheet of blotter, it is extremely sensitive. According to Scully, blotter is a “very bad distribution method since it leaves the acid vulnerable to rapid decomposition.”<sup>19</sup> His old colleague, the legendary LSD chemist Owsley Stanley, wrote in an email exchange with the present writer in 2003 that “[b]lotter is not even stable for 30 hours. Deterioration commences as soon as the liquid carrier is soaked into the paper.”<sup>20</sup>

Hence, many of the LSD blotter samples that were used in the Spanish analysis may in fact have been more potent when they were

fresh from the lab. That said, it is still safe to say that LSD doses in the twenty-first century are generally considerably weaker than they were in the drug’s early days.

In the case of LSD and other psychedelics, the subject of dose is often overshadowed by set and setting. While the latter two are extremely important for the outcome of the psychedelic experience, dosage can make all the difference too. As stated above, the low doses that have been prevalent in underground LSD culture in the twenty-first century have most likely prevented many emergency room visits. Yet it has also resulted in a generation of threshold trippers who sometimes have a poor understanding of LSD’s transformative and therapeutic potential. Clearly, ingesting a threshold dose is very different from taking a medium to high dose, if one wishes to utilize LSD’s visionary and healing effects.

Like any other movement, LSD culture has its own pioneers and celebrities. The first 15 years of the twenty-first century have seen the passing of several of these figures, including Merry Prankster Ken Kesey (2001), psychiatrist and LSD researcher Oscar Janiger (2001), psychiatrist Humphrey Osmond (2004), author Laura Huxley (2007), underground acid chemist Owsley Stanley (2011), author and psychedelic researcher Myron J. Stolaroff (2013), and author and orator Stephen Gaskin (2014). In their own unique ways, these people are forever part of the history of LSD.

In addition to these, the 2000s also saw the passing of one of psychedelia’s most celebrated persons, namely Dr. Albert Hofmann. By when the Swiss scientist died in April 2008, at the age of 102, his discovery had affected millions of people worldwide. Needless to say, LSD took on a life of its own early on and, during his lifetime, Dr. Hofmann saw how the drug he discovered was adopted by scientists, academics, and various subcultures (including the hippie counterculture, the Deadhead scene, and parts of rave culture).

Besides a number of vibrant LSD subcultures, Hofmann lived long enough to see how psychedelics, through the strenuous efforts of organizations such as MAPS, Beckley Foundation, and Heffter Research Institute, were beginning to find its way back to science. It was clear that Hofmann’s potion still had quite a following.

This was evident by the appearance of a 2006 conference in Basel celebrating the Swiss scientist. Titled “LSD: Problem Child and Wonder Drug: International Symposium on the Occasion of the 100th

Birthday of Albert Hofmann,” the three-day conference attracted over 2000 visitors from 37 countries. More than 80 experts delivered talks on the subject of LSD, including Dr. Hofmann himself.

As the years went by in the new millennium, there were many signs of a renewed interest in LSD. Several retrospective works discussing the drug appeared in the late 2000s, including the 2008 books *Psychedelic Psychiatry* by Erika Dyck and the aforementioned *Albion Dreaming* by Andy Roberts. The late 2000s also saw the release of the film documentaries *Peyote to LSD* (2008) and the National Geographic Explorer film *Inside LSD* (2009), the latter narrated by actor and former Digger Peter Coyote. LSD also made a cameo in Gaspar Noé’s DMT inspired 2009 film *Enter the Void*, which features wise words or platitudes, depending on what you make of it, such as the following line from character Alex: “You know the good thing about LSD, if you can manage to overcome your fears, you can take your hallucinations wherever you want.”<sup>21</sup>

In the 2010s, works focusing on LSD has continued. These include a new edition of Albert Hofmann’s classic autobiography *LSD: My Problem Child*. Published in 2013, the year that marked the 70th anniversary of the discovery of LSD, the book features a new translation by ethnobotanist Jonathan Ott, and a foreword by Amanda Feilding. A year before he passed away, Hofmann asked Feilding if she could publish his seminal autobiography, and shortly before he died he approved Ott’s new translation.<sup>22</sup>

The history of LSD is in fact two parallel histories: One of them is a multifaceted subculture involving millions of people. The other has taken place in science and academia, and has involved a comparatively very small number of scientists, study participants, and psychiatric patients. After many decades of being more or less banned, scientific studies involving LSD were at last beginning to see the light of day in the twenty-first century.

In 2014, the results of a historical LSD study conducted by Dr. Peter Gasser near Bern in Switzerland between 2007 and 2012 were published in the *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*. Gasser is the president of the Swiss Medical Association for Psycholytic Therapy, which were given permission to use LSD as a tool in psychotherapy in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Largely funded by MAPS, the pilot study was the first to be approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in 40 years,

and was conducted to examine safety and efficacy of LSD-assisted psychotherapy. Approved in 2007 and begun in 2008, it included 12 terminally ill patients separated into two groups. One group was administered 200 micrograms of LSD while the other group only received 20 micrograms. The low dosage group said their anxiety increased, while the higher dosage group said the LSD therapy had very positive effects on their anxiety.<sup>23</sup>

The study, which evidently was a success, has received a lot of mainstream media attention with articles in *Scientific American*, *The New York Times* and *The Huffington Post*, to name a few. Incidentally, when Albert Hofmann heard that Steve Jobs regarded LSD as one of the most important things he had done in his life, he wrote a handwritten letter to the Apple co-founder in 2007 asking if he wanted to support the Swiss study.<sup>24</sup> Clearly, LSD’s return to science meant a lot to Hofmann.

In addition to the MAPS-directed LSD study in Switzerland, another study receiving considerable attention is the Beckley Foundation’s pioneering LSD brain imaging study. Set up in 2009, the Beckley Foundation-Imperial College Psychopharmacological Research Programme is a collaboration established between Beckley Foundation director Amanda Feilding and Professor David Nutt, Head of Neuropsychopharmacology at Imperial College London, with Dr. Robin Carhart-Harris as lead researcher. The programme recently carried out the first fMRI and MEG research with LSD (which incidentally was purchased from a Swiss pharmaceutical company). The neuroimaging work was done at Cardiff University and included 20 participants, of which 15 were men and five were women. After they were injected with 75 micrograms of LSD, a moderate dose, their brain activity was monitored.<sup>25</sup>

The team behind the study is currently in the process of analyzing the data from the tests. In order to raise money for this work the Beckley Foundation turned to Walacea, a new crowdfunding site for scientific projects. Titled the “The World’s First Study of the Brain on LSD,” the campaign’s goal was to raise £25,000. When the campaign ended on April 19 this year—the very date that Albert Hofmann intentionally dosed himself with LSD for the first time, and which has become known by acid enthusiasts all over the world as “Bicycle Day”—, the campaign had raised more than £53,000.<sup>26</sup> Needless to say, this is an impressive figure and, if anything, it shows that there is a

renewed interest in LSD.

Other scientists who are doing LSD-related work include researcher Teri Krebs of the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, and clinical psychologist Pål-Ørjan Johansen. In 2012, the Norway-based team published a retrospective meta-analysis of LSD as a treatment for alcoholism where they presented evidence for a beneficial effect of LSD on alcohol abuse. In addition to their scientific work, Krebs and Johansen recently started a non-profit organization called EmmaSofia for the purpose of expanding access to MDMA and psychedelics. The organization is also working towards making psychedelics legalized.

Compared with the “crisis” at the start of the new millennium, one could say there are signs of an LSD revival, at least when it comes to psychedelic science. However, it should also be said that the shortage of street acid that was seen in the early 2000s continues some 15 years on. Interestingly, it appears that it is especially hard to come across acid in the United States, the very birth-country of the LSD counterculture. A recent *Reset.me* article even went under the blunt title “It’s Extremely Hard to Find LSD in the US—Here’s Why.” The article recounted the usual possible reasons to why it is so hard to come across street acid. These include the decade-and-a-half-old Wamego bust, difficulty in obtaining ergotamine, and the two-decades-old demise of the Deadhead scene.

The shortage of street acid is reflected in the entry pages of *Erowid’s* pill-testing program *EcstasyData.org*. Despite its name, *EcstasyData.org* publish test results of a wide range of drugs, including LSD. When browsing the lab results, LSD samples are scarce and far between. So far in 2015, there are only three entries of LSD. All three of the samples were blotters. One was bought online, while the other two originated from cities in the U.S. Interestingly, some of the samples tested between 2013 and 2014 contained higher doses than what was seen in the previously discussed 2005 Spanish analysis. A blotter originating from Spain that was tested in July 2013 contained 123.8 micrograms of LSD. Such doses are rarely found on blotter acid. Other Spanish blotters tested in 2013 contained between 52.1 and 81.9 micrograms. In addition, a blotter originating from Atlanta, Georgia that was tested in December 2014 contained 89.7 micrograms.<sup>27</sup>

In the early 2010s, there has been an unpredictable and troubling development in LSD culture, namely the appearance on the

illicit drug market of a research chemical named 25I-NBOMe. It is still too early to say to what extent the drug will affect the street use of LSD, but there is no doubt that those using the latter will have to be more cautious of what they are ingesting.

Just like LSD, 25I-NBOMe is distributed on blotter, and what is even more troubling is that there are several known instances where the drug has been sold as LSD or acid. In fact, 25I-NBOMe has even appeared on sheets featuring the classic Hofmann bicycle ride illustration. Unlike LSD, which has never resulted in any known pharmacological deaths among humans, 25i-NBOMe and other substances in the same group of chemicals, referred to as “25Is”, have already led to several fatal overdoses and prolonged hospitalizations in its very short time of recreational use.

Discovered by chemist Ralf Heim at the Free University of Berlin in 2003, 25I-NBOMe appeared on the illicit drug market around 2010, and is often referred to as a drug with similar effects to LSD. The drug has already been banned in several countries including Australia, Israel, USA, Sweden, and Russia. Interestingly, critique against the 25Is is also coming from within the psychedelic movement itself.

For example, web forum *Bluelight* has posted a safety message, complete with skull and crossbones in a yellow triangle, stating that 25I-NBOMe carries “substantial risks that must be highlighted” and that the drug has killed at recreational doses. Unlike LSD, NBOMes are said to have bitter taste—hence the advice: “If it’s bitter it’s a spitter.” However, in order to be certain about the actual content of a drug, *Bluelight* urges users to use testing kits.<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, *Erowid* has included a note on their LSD page saying that blotter and liquid LSD being sold in 2013 in the US and Europe actually contained NBOMes. The *Erowid* website also contains a list of pharmacological (and a few behavioral) fatalities resulting from taking these research chemicals. Several of those who are included in the list took what they believed was LSD.<sup>29</sup>

The entry pages of *EcstasyData.org* contain samples of NBOMes, some of which were sold as LSD. For example, a blotter named “Bicycle” sold as LSD in Spain contained 25I-NBOMe.<sup>30</sup> This red and yellow sample tested in 2013 is clearly part of the upper right corner of a blotter sheet featuring the classic Hofmann bicycle ride illustration.

Moreover, a 2012 test of a liquid sold as LSD in Wisconsin showed that it contained 2C-NBOMe.<sup>31</sup> Seeing that the appearance of counterfeit acid will probably continue, the work carried out by *EcstasyData.org* and other similar harm-reduction websites will continue to be hugely important.

Needless to say, the appearance of 25Is presumably has had a psychological effect on most LSD users. Before the NBOMes, the worst that could happen when taking LSD was having a difficult, or even traumatic, experience. Today, LSD users stand the risk of unknowingly taking a completely different drug that may lead to a fatal overdose or hospitalization. Rarely has Dr. Timothy Leary's old motto "Just Say Know," or good advice such as "Know Your Source," been more appropriate as when it comes to contemporary use of street acid.

Only time will tell what will become of these research chemicals. If enough users realize the risks associated with these drugs and stop using them, they might be reduced to a short episode in twenty-first century illicit drug culture. However, if the War on (some) Drugs continues, there may turn up new substances that are equally, if not more, problematic as the NBOMes.

New technology often brings with it new behavioral patterns. This has also affected the way LSD is being sold. Before the millennium LSD was often traded at rave parties, music festivals, and concerts, but in the 2010s the drug also became available online. The most well-known marketplace for drugs, including psychedelics such as LSD, was Silk Road. The online black market existed on and off between 2011 and 2014, and was operated as a Tor hidden service, which enabled users to browse the site anonymously. Of the 10,000 products for sale by vendors in March 2013, 70 percent were drugs.<sup>32</sup> Although Silk Road has been shut down, the online sale of LSD continues on the Darknet.<sup>33</sup>

The draconian laws for manufacturing or selling LSD persist throughout the world. But the twenty-first century has also seen a wave of decriminalization of recreational drugs, including LSD, for personal use. For example, as of January 2010, drug users in the Czech Republic can possess small doses of various psychoactive substances. When it comes to LSD, the possession of up to 5 doses is considered a mere misdemeanor offense, which, should the user get caught, would lead to a fine equal to a parking ticket.

Few other psychedelics have been as widely discussed as LSD, yet it has been a very long time since the drug was the main driving force behind the psychedelic movement. Instead psychonauts of today tend to use a number of different substances including psilocybin mushrooms, DMT, Salvia, Ketamine, MDMA, and 2-CB, to name a few.

In addition, over the course of the twenty-first century, ayahuasca has spawned a movement of its own, which has received a substantial amount of mainstream media coverage. Although several of these mind-altering substances were around already in the 1960s and the 1970s, they were not as widely used. For example, very few hippies in the early counterculture had experimented with ayahuasca.

In his 2012 piece "What Can Entheogens Teach Us?" writer James Oroc mentions how different psychedelics are viewed in the contemporary psychedelic movement. Interestingly, it seems Hofmann's potion is approached with caution even among psychonauts. Many of the 20-somethings that Oroc talks to at festivals "seem to love DMT but are terrified of LSD, having already experienced a trip too long and arduous for them . . . and they probably ate a quarter of what their parents did for their first time in the 60's!"<sup>34</sup>

In trying to understand LSD's place in the contemporary psychedelic movement, one also needs to consider the hugely influential writer and speaker Terence McKenna. Despite the fact that he has been dead for a decade and a half, he still has a considerable following, and many of his die-hard fans keep his ideas alive on social media. In fact, had it not been for McKenna it is questionable if psilocybin mushrooms and ayahuasca would have become as widely used as they are today.

His strong focus on plant-based psychedelics clearly brought less focus on LSD—a semi-synthetic substance manufactured by a chemist in a laboratory—and it is likely that his views have affected how people look upon LSD. When it came to the latter, he simply did not seem impressed by it. For example, in one of his workshops McKenna said that, "LSD is like psychoanalytical Drano. It's not a personality."<sup>35</sup> Instead, he was drawn towards psilocybin mushrooms, which he talked of as having a "voice," and ayahuasca, which is referred to as "Mother Ayahuasca" (i.e. a "she") by many of its users.

Admittedly, associating psychedelics with personality is tricky. After all, what people experience on mind-altering substances is highly

subjective and varies considerably among different individuals. That said, it is safe to say that very rarely is LSD referred to as having a “voice,” or as a “mother” or a “she,” by its users. This supposed lack of personality is not necessarily to LSD’s disadvantage though. Instead, seeing that there is no personality getting in the way, it may be exactly what makes it suitable to applications such as problem-solving or exploring the arts. Although LSD can lead to deeply spiritual or religious experiences, it is safe to say that the drug is less associated with the New Age spirituality (no negative connotation intended) that is increasingly seen in contemporary psychedelia.

Andy Roberts was probably right when he wrote that LSD seemed like yesterday’s drug in the early twenty-first century. During the MDMA craze of the 1990s, which continued into the new millennium, it is probable that many young people thought of LSD as an old hippie drug. However, it seems that every time acid is starting to become a thing of the past, something happens that brings it back into contemporary culture. At the moment, that “something” includes Beckley Foundation’s current brain imaging study on LSD.

According to psychedelic researcher Teri Krebs, people have used “at least half a billion doses over the years.”<sup>36</sup> However, despite the fact that huge numbers of people have taken acid, exceptionally few speak openly about their experiences. Even within contemporary psychedelia there are very few outspoken acid advocates. This is not to say that there are no exceptions. For example, in her piece “There is No Hiding with LSD,” published in *The Guardian* in 2011, writer and lecturer Dr Susan Blackmore described LSD as “the ultimate psychedelic.”<sup>37</sup>

So, even with draconian laws and strict controls of ergot alkaloids, it is highly unlikely that LSD will disappear in the foreseeable future. As we all know, governments all over the world have tried to stamp out LSD ever since its ban in the 1960s. Yet it is still here, just like cannabis, another “evil” that the powers that be often tend to demonize. And as long as humans feel compelled to enter altered states of consciousness, for the sake of ecstasy, healing, mind-exploration, problem-solving, or simply for cosmic entertainment, LSD will most likely continue to be used.

## Notes

1. Roberts, Andy, *Albion Dreaming: A Popular History of LSD in Britain*, (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2012) pp. 263-264.
2. Anders, Charlie Jane, “There Really Is An LSD Shortage, and Here’s Why,” *io9* (2015), <http://io9.com/there-really-is-an-ld- shortage-and-heres-why-1677123866>
3. Mason, Michael, Sandel, Chris and Chapman, Lee Roy, “Subterranean Psychonaut: The Strange and Dreadful Saga of Gordon Todd Skinner,” *This Land* (2013), <http://thislandpress.com/gordon-todd-skinner/>
4. “Erowid Character Vaults: William Leonard Pickard,” *Erowid*, [https://www.erowid.org/culture/characters/pickard\\_leonard/pickard\\_leonard.shtml](https://www.erowid.org/culture/characters/pickard_leonard/pickard_leonard.shtml)
5. Rosenfeld, Seth, “LSD Trafficking Suspect Has Intriguing Backers / D.A. Terence Hallinan and British Aristocrats,” *SFGate* (2000), <http://www.sfgate.com/politics/article/LSD-Trafficking-Suspect-Has-Intriguing-Backers-2720760.php>
6. *Ibid.*
7. Grim, Ryan, “Who’s Got the Acid? These Days, Almost Nobody,” *Slate* (2004), [http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/hey\\_wait\\_a\\_minute/2004/04/whos\\_got\\_the\\_acid.2.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/hey_wait_a_minute/2004/04/whos_got_the_acid.2.html)
8. Pickard, William Leonard, “International LSD Prevalence: Factors Affecting Proliferation and Control” *Erowid* (2008), [https://www.erowid.org/culture/characters/pickard\\_leonard/pickard\\_leonard\\_article1.pdf](https://www.erowid.org/culture/characters/pickard_leonard/pickard_leonard_article1.pdf)
9. *Microgram Bulletin*, Volume 43, Number 3, March 2010, 23, [https://www.erowid.org/library/periodicals/microgram/microgram\\_2010-03.pdf](https://www.erowid.org/library/periodicals/microgram/microgram_2010-03.pdf)
10. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
11. Sudhölter, Judith, “Keeping the Doors of Visionary Experience Cracked Open: A Portrait of Psychedelic Artist Luke Brown,” *Psychedelic Press UK 2014*, Volume I, p. 81.
12. Hardison, Casey, “Casey William Hardison’s Recorded Speech Given to the 2008 World Psychedelic Forum in Basel, Switzerland,” *Erowid* (2008), [https://www.erowid.org/culture/characters/hardison\\_casey/hardison\\_casey\\_2008\\_wpf\\_speech.shtml](https://www.erowid.org/culture/characters/hardison_casey/hardison_casey_2008_wpf_speech.shtml)
13. Hardison, William Casey, “(A Brief History and) Motivation of an Entheogenic Chemist,” *Erowid*, p. 2, [https://erowid.org/culture/characters/hardison\\_casey/hardison\\_casey\\_2007\\_motivation\\_of\\_an\\_entheogenic\\_chemist.pdf](https://erowid.org/culture/characters/hardison_casey/hardison_casey_2007_motivation_of_an_entheogenic_chemist.pdf)
14. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
16. Hidalgo, Eduardo, “LSD Samples Analysis,” *Erowid* (2009), [https://www.erowid.org/chemicals/lsd/lsd\\_article3.shtml](https://www.erowid.org/chemicals/lsd/lsd_article3.shtml)
17. *Ibid.*
18. Dahl, Henrik, “A Correspondence with Tim Scully,” *The Oak Tree Review* (2009), [http://www.theoaktreereview.com/tim\\_scully.html](http://www.theoaktreereview.com/tim_scully.html)
19. *Ibid.*
20. Dahl, Henrik, “Struck by White Lightning: A Correspondence with Owsley Stanley,” *The Oak Tree Review* (2009), [http://www.theoaktreereview.com/owsley\\_stanley\\_2.html](http://www.theoaktreereview.com/owsley_stanley_2.html)

## Useful Cyberspatial Links for Further Research into Worlds of Psychedelia

21. "Enter the Void (2009)," IMDb, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1191111/quotes>
22. Oxford University Press, <http://ukcatalogue.oup.com/product/9780199639410.do>
23. Thomas, Emily, "First LSD Study In 40 Years Shows Promising Medical Uses," *The Huffington Post* (2014), <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/03/06/lsd-anxiety-study-psychotherapy- n 4906596.html>
24. Beiser, Vince, "LSD Inventor's Remarkable Letter to Steve Jobs" *The Fix* (2011), <http://www.thefix.com/content/steve-jobs-acid-lsd-apple-letter7002>
25. "People's Brains Scanned While on LSD in Study in Cardiff," *BBC News* (2015), <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-wales-south-east-wales-31740491>
26. "The World's First Study of the Brain on LSD," *Walacea* (2015), <https://walacea.com/campaigns/lsd/>
27. *EcstasyData.org*, [https://www.ecstasydata.org/results.php?start=0&search\\_field=substance&cs=lsd](https://www.ecstasydata.org/results.php?start=0&search_field=substance&cs=lsd)
28. "The Big & Dandy 25I-NBOMe Thread," *Bluelight*, <http://www.bluelight.org/vb/threads/551797-The-Big-amp-Dandy-25I-NBOMe-Thread>
29. *Erowid*, "25I-NBOMe (2C-I-NBOMe): Fatalities / Deaths," *Erowid*, [https://www.erowid.org/chemicals/2ci\\_nbome/2ci\\_nbome\\_death.shtml](https://www.erowid.org/chemicals/2ci_nbome/2ci_nbome_death.shtml)
30. "Bicycle" (ID: 2922), *EcstasyData.org*, <http://www.ecstasydata.org/view.php?id=2922>
31. "Unknown Liquid" (ID: 2633), *EcstasyData.org*, <http://www.ecstasydata.org/view.php?id=2633>
32. Chen, Adrian, "The Underground Website Where You Can Buy Any Drug Imaginable," *Gawker* (2011), <http://gawker.com/the-underground-website-where-you-can-buy-any-drug-imag-30818160>
33. "Comparison of American LSD Vendors," *Darknet Markets*, [http://www.reddit.com/r/DarkNetMarkets/comments/31p2ss/comparison\\_of\\_american\\_lsd\\_vendors/](http://www.reddit.com/r/DarkNetMarkets/comments/31p2ss/comparison_of_american_lsd_vendors/)
34. Oroc, James, "What Can Entheogens Teach Us?" *Tryptamine Palace* (2012), <http://dmtsite.com/blog/2012/04/04/what-can-entheogens-teach-us-the-oroc-mystical-value-scale-and-the-effect-of-the-ego/>
35. "The Danger is Madness" (podcast 430), *Notes from the Psychedelic Salon* (2015), <http://www.matrixmasters.net/salon/2015/01/podcast-430-the-danger-is-madness/>
36. Cormier, Zoe, "On the Anniversary of the First Acid Trip, What Do We Now Know About LSD," *Motherboard* (2015), <http://motherboard.vice.com/read/bicycle-day>
37. Blackmore, Sue, "There is No Hiding With LSD," *The Guardian* (2011), <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2011/mar/22/lsd-acid-trip-self-knowledge>

- **The Lycaeum—Entheogenic Database & Community—**  
<http://www.lycaeum.org>
- **The Psychedelic Library—**  
<http://www.druglibrary.org/schaffer/lsd/lsmenu.htm>
- **Burning Man in Black Rock City, Nevada—**  
<http://www.burningman.com>
- **Rainbow Family of Living Light—**  
<http://www.welcomehome.org>
- **The Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies—**  
<http://www.maps.org>
- **DanceSafe—Promoting Health and Safety within the Rave and Nightclub Community—**<http://www.dancesafe.org>
- **High Times Magazine—**<http://www.hightimes.com>
- **The Vaults of Erowid—**<http://www.erowid.org>
- **Hyperreal—Music, Chemistry, & Rave Culture—**  
<http://www.hyperreal.org>
- **The Shroomery—**<http://www.shroomery.org>
- **Bibliographia Studiorum Psychedelicorum: Explorations in the Psychedelic Experience—**  
<http://www.psymon.com/psychedelia>
- **The Deoxyribonucleic Hyperdimension—**<http://www.deoxy.org>
- **SpiritPlants Online Community—**<http://www.spiritplants.org>
- **NORML: The National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws —**<http://www.norml.org>
- **Drug Policy Alliance—**<http://www.drugpolicy.org>
- **The Lazy Man's Guide to Enlightenment by Thaddeus Golas—**<http://freespace.virgin.net/sarah.peter.nelson/lazyman/lazyman.html#contents>
- **Hallucinogenic Plants by Richard Evans Shultes; Illustrated by Elmer W. Smith—**  
<http://www.zauberpilz.com/golden/g01-10.htm#contents>
- **Carlos Castaneda's Don Juan's Teachings—**  
<http://www.primagem.com/castaneda>
- **The Center for Cognitive Liberty & Ethics—**  
<http://www.cognitiveliberty.org>
- **AlterNet DrugReporter—**<http://www.alternet.org/drugreporter>
- **Reality Sandwich—**<http://www.realitysandwich.com>
- **EarthRites—**<http://www.earthrites.org>
- **SpiritPlants Radio: Global 24/7—**  
<http://www.spiritplantsradio.com>