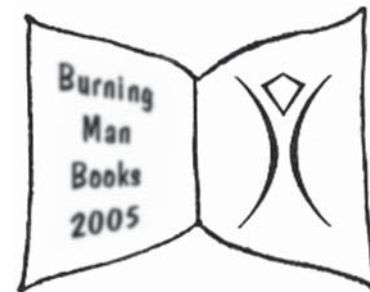


a seventh anthology of writings about psychedelics

edited by raymond soulard, jr. & kassandra kramer

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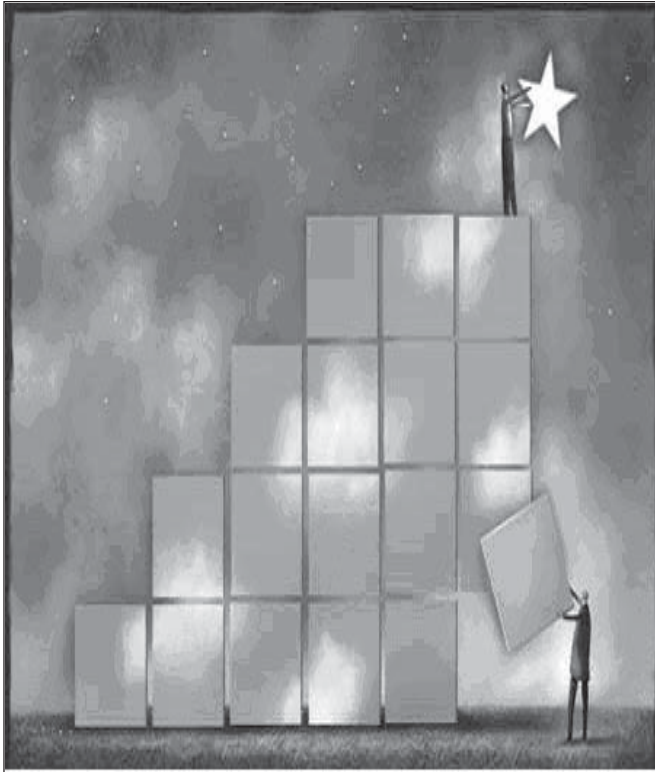
Number Forty

**All is Dream:  
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*Freedom in mind is more  
than simply striking blows  
against the Empire . . .*



*In the morning your face cracks and falls to the sea  
The sun follows your step and leads you back to me  
You keep telling yourself that you're here but you're not alone  
And you get the feeling that your mind is not your own*

*In the evening the sun's red gown turns to brown  
The moon follows you to the beach then it swallows you down  
Strange how you can change and end up at her feet  
You keep telling yourself but you know you're not to be believed*

*You and me and Hercules in between  
You and me and Hercules in between*

*Shadows rise from the plain, fifty men row  
In the distance the ships in the waves cash in their load  
On the hill stands Colossus and your mind is frozen  
Clouds from your past now at last open to receive*

*You and me and Hercules in between  
You and me and Hercules in between*

*Cross the desert sand no one knows your name  
And you wish you were somewhere else with some kind of fame  
What appears as your shadow is formless as a mist  
You keep telling your friends you know it exists*

*One becomes two then before you becomes three  
Words climb your tongue like a ladder to speak  
Drifting as you go but you row till it seems  
All is one, All is mind, all is lost and you find, all is dream*

Mercury Rev, "Hercules," 2001

# Psychedelic Rules

## by James Kent

*Psychedelic Information Theory*, Chapter 5  
<http://tripzine.com/pit.asp?id=pit04>

While these are not hard scientific rules they are in large part agreed upon to be true by people familiar with the psychedelics, and some have become basic axioms of the psychedelic experience. Listed in no specific order, the Rules of Psychodelia are as follows:

1. *A single drug can do many things.* If there is one rule you need to know above all about psychedelics, this is the big one. It is difficult to explain how utterly true this statement is, but the range of experience produced by psychedelic drugs is almost limitless. Every possible facet of human emotion and experience is accessible within the psychedelic experience, and even facets that you never dreamed of can pop right out of nowhere. While practice can get you familiar with the territory, no one really knows exactly what they are going to get when they enter into a psychedelic voyage. Tears, laughter, mania, joy, catharsis, sleep, visions, voices, paranoia, peace, exalted bliss, torturous hell, close encounters with aliens, devils, angels, visits from strange and unknown entities . . . All are possible outcomes of the psychedelic trip, and you may experience them all within the course of a single psychedelic session. It is truly a roller coaster ride into the unknown. Do not take this path unless you know the rules up front. Which brings us to . . .

2. *Psychedelics are Non-Specific Amplifiers.* In *LSD Psychotherapy*, Dr. Stanislav Grof writes: “LSD and other psychedelics function more or less as nonspecific catalysts and amplifiers of the psyche.” This is a truism held over from the heyday of psychedelic research in the late 1950s and early ‘60s, and is still widely accepted as true and accurate to this day. What this means is that psychedelics have the power to amplify any specific facet of the human psyche depending solely on

the situational context or some combination of both the conscious and subconscious focus, desires, and intent of the user. Which brings us to:

3. *It all comes down to ingestion context, or: “Dose, Set, and Setting.”* The tone and content of each psychedelic session all comes down to the amount of the particular drug you’re taking (dose), the frame of mind or mental state you’re in when you take it (set), and where you happen to be and who you are with when it starts to kick in (setting). By paying careful attention to each of these details a user can attempt to program the boundaries and desired outcome of the trip, thus minimizing bummers, freak-outs, or messy intrusions that could move a psychedelic trip into sour territory. But nobody can foresee everything, and sometimes even the best planned trip can go into unknown territory and get very weird very quickly. So it is important to remember:

4. *Psychedelics Dissolve Boundaries.* It’s no secret why the ‘60s counterculture picked up on the “acid” part of *lysergic-acid diethylamide* (or LSD) as the slang handle for the drug. LSD was said to dissolve boundaries, all kinds of boundaries: class boundaries, race boundaries, gender boundaries, and even more abstract things like the boundary between self and other, subject and object, waking and dreaming, the ego and the transpersonal self, even the boundaries between life and death. Under the influence of a boundary-dissolving psychedelic, the concept of the “ego” or “independent self” slowly vanishes as consciousness grapples with heavy concepts like “the illusion of self” or “the fundamental interconnectedness of all things.” For people seeking communion with a higher mind this is a good thing; for other people the dissolution of personal boundaries and the vanishing of the self is the scariest part of the experience. The ability to cope with this fundamental aspect of the trip may very well be at the heart of all “positive” psychedelic trips, and the fear of this specific experience may underlie all “bummers” or negative trips. Which is why you need to:

5. *Relax, Submit to the Experience.* When things get crazy there’s no



use fighting it, you're in it for the long haul and you did it to yourself. Trying to struggle against an uncomfortable experience will only make it worse. The sooner you learn to relax and just go with the flow the better off you'll be. Just because it is weird beyond belief doesn't mean there is any reason to be uncomfortable with what you are feeling or seeing; you should just let it do its thing and try not to get in the way. Some people have a natural resistance to giving up control of the experience, but it's for the best, really. If you get scared just sit still and wait it out. Since psychedelics are non-specific amplifiers, if you choose to fight an experience your mind may exaggerate the conflict or amplify the source of anxiety, thus putting you in an aggressive/paranoid feedback loop. Should you choose to relax, your sensations of peace and calm will only be enhanced by the psychedelic. So whatever you do:

**6. *Don't Freak Out.*** No matter how weird it gets you must not give into the urge to totally freak out, like yelling and screaming and getting violent, especially if you happen to be in an unsafe and uncontrolled environment. Freaking out will just land you in the emergency room and that is the last place you want to be in this state. The main trick to warding off bad trips is simply remembering to stay calm, take a deep breath, clear your mind, and push through whatever is giving you grief. You can feel fear, pain, paranoia, danger, menace, death, nothingness . . . but as long as you stay calm and keep breathing you'll be just fine. If you focus your attention on your own breathing and autonomic systems you'll find that the slower and deeper you breath, the more calm and relaxed you will feel. This is all you need to know to undo even the most hellish downward spirals. Take a deep breathe, relax. Clear your mind. Take another one. See, you're feeling better already, and remember:

**7. *It Will Eventually End.*** No matter how much it may seem so at the time, you will not be stuck in the psychedelic state forever. Like all things, the psychedelic state is fleeting and generally cannot be maintained for long periods of time. The time it takes to have a trip may feel like a lifetime, and the memory of the experience will stay

with you forever, but the truly odd perceptual bits in the middle, those will fade away in a few hours, I promise. It is extremely rare for people to have any lingering perceptual effects from a psychedelic trip; even the notorious flashbacks are extremely rare if not downright mythical. While some people with psychotic tendencies are more at risk for having severe adverse reactions, the average person recovers from a psychedelic trip quite quickly. So don't worry, just try to get something out of it while it lasts.

The key to getting the most out of psychedelics is to be safe and have some kind of intent for the trip. Having a pre-planned focus or ritual for the trip is not essential, but it does help set the tone for whatever will come next. I have also found it helpful in early experiences to find a "ground object" like a watch, or a photo, a polished stone, or anything small and interesting you can return your focus to when things start to get beyond your grasp. The ground object may be a childish notion — like a trail of breadcrumbs to keep from getting lost in the forest — but it can be like a little piece of the "old world" you cling to when everything else falls apart and the "new world" unfolds before your very eyes. It may sound silly now, but if you know what I mean, well, you know how important the little things can be when the foundation of reality starts to come entirely apart.

And believe it or not, that is *it*. Those are all the rules. Within these boundaries just about any outcome you can think of is possible.

# The Brotherhood of Eternal Love

by Stewart Tendler and David May

*Outlaw Days*, Chapter 7

<http://www.druglibrary.org/schaffer/lsd/books/belcont.htm>

The Mystic Arts World Store was opposite a Mexican fast-food stand on South Laguna Beach. At the front it sold the sort of things to be found in a thousand similar stores that were sprouting up across the America of 1966 and 1967—home-made clothes, natural foods, leatherwear, brass, tapestries, pipes and papers for marijuana smoking. Just another “head shop,” a sort of frontier store for America’s newest pioneers, the hippies; a corner shop for the colony of young people moving into Laguna Beach, south of Los Angeles, to enjoy a “Haight-Ashbury on sea.”

But the real business of Mystic Arts lay at the back in the meditation room. The floor was covered from wall to wall by foam rubber overlaid with thick carpeting, making visitors feel as though they were walking on a huge, luxurious bed. At one end, a small waterfall tumbled into an indoor rock garden. The sound was soft and rhythmic, lulling. In another corner stood a water pipe. Scatter cushions had been left here and there for customers, who removed their shoes before entering, to loll at their ease. A group of young men in their twenties might be sitting round at the beginning of an LSD session. Their hair was long. They wore patched jeans and loose shirts, embroidered waistcoats over painted T-shirts and single strings of thick, crude beads. Some had the deep sunburn that you find in this part of California on surfers, where the heat of the sun has burnt into the skin, magnified by the sea-water, and left a rich tan. Others had the thick-set, hard-muscled build of mechanics.

They were men with a cause, yet theirs was not quite the burning ardor of the radicals elsewhere in the country, streaming across the campuses towards the administration blocks and screaming against betrayal, grappling with the police as they denounced L.B.J. and vowing they would never fight in Vietnam. Theirs was another kind

of fervor: there was no violence, just the unswerving confidence of missionaries going about their work.

The meditation room was, on occasion, the private chapel of the Brotherhood of Eternal Love, a legally incorporated religious charity. At other times it was the front office of the Brotherhood of Eternal Love, drug dealers extraordinary. The essence of the Brotherhood might well be summed up in Owsley’s “chemistry is theology.”

The man to watch at the LSD sessions was a short, stocky character wearing a Hopi Indian headband and flowing green Eastern trousers and shirt. John Griggs, dark and intense with bright blue eyes, was the founding figure of the Brotherhood: a man who had discovered LSD in dramatic circumstances.

At the time, Griggs, approaching his middle twenties, was the leader of a marijuana-smoking south Los Angeles motorcycle gang, preying on supermarkets. Largely unschooled, Griggs was a wandering adventurer who had earned the name of “Farmer John” after disappearing into the Californian mountains to live as a trapper. He rode with his pack along the freeways and highways that criss-crossed Los Angeles in search of fresh excitement. On a summer night he led his gang through Hollywood towards Beverly Hills and Mulholland Drive. According to the grapevine, a well-known Hollywood film producer up there kept a cache of pure LSD in his refrigerator. Griggs and the gang decided it was time they tried this LSD stuff everyone was talking about.

They burst in on the producer during a dinner party. All the guests froze as the gang, armed with guns and knives, came out of the darkness . . . but all they wanted was the LSD, and they took it. The host was so relieved that he rushed out to the driveway as they started up their motorcycles and cried after them: “Have a great trip, boys. Jesus, I thought it was something serious.”

The gang roared out of Los Angeles towards the vast, high acres of Joshua Tree National Park beyond the city. They climbed higher and higher into the hills among the yucca trees until they were above Palm Springs and, at midnight, they came to a halt. Motorcycles parked in a group, they stood round in the clear, sharp mountain air

and shared out the LSD, made by Sandoz. Each man swallowed the equivalent of 1,000 micrograms, four times a normal dose, and wandered off to await the result. It was cold and the yuccas with their twisted stems and shrouds of dead leaves cast fantastic shapes in the gloom.

As the sun burst across the sky at dawn, hours later, Griggs threw his gun into the dry scrub and shouted: “This is it. This is it.” The gang regrouped round their motorbikes, shaken and overwhelmed. All had thrown away their weapons. They started home for Anaheim, a flat Los Angeles suburb of pale-colored houses, and what was to be a new life.

Griggs was the proselytizer, the moving spirit. He talked to old school friends like Glen Lynd and Calvin Delaney. Lynd had already tried marijuana and now took the LSD Griggs passed on to him. Like Griggs, Lynd was in his middle twenties and something of a drifter. The group that began to assemble totaled nine. Most of the young men, all in their early or middle twenties, came from Anaheim. Michael Randall was from Long Beach, although he had attended Anaheim Western High School. He started smoking marijuana in 1963 but remained on the edge of the group, since he was finishing a course in business administration at California State College.

At first, the group did little more than meet at the weekends to try out the psychedelics, but Griggs had wider visions. He urged the others to move with him out of Los Angeles, east to Modjeska Canyon, in the countryside beyond the city. The group shared a couple of houses, feeling, like Alpert and Leary had felt at Harvard, that they had “something wonderful in common.” Those who had jobs continued to work—Russ Harrigan for example was a longshoreman—but all now began a little drug dealing as well. Lynd and Harrigan went down to San Pedro with the odd kilo of marijuana brought back from trips to Mexico, and all the group sold LSD from San Francisco to visitors to Modjeska Canyon. Several of them enrolled in research programs at the University of California, Los Angeles, in order to continue using the psychedelics for free.

But on Wednesday nights they came together to talk about their futures. Lynd said later: “There was hopeful thought of buying land

. . . the purpose was to buy it so people could live on it. We could farm it or whatever.” Plans began to form round the notion. Lynd had heard Leary lecturing and had been impressed. Griggs went east to meet him at Millbrook. Leary was taken with him: “an incredible genius” was how he described Griggs; “although unschooled and unlettered he was an impressive person. He had this charisma, energy, that sparkle in his eye. He was good-natured, surfing the energy waves with a smile on his face.” As far as Griggs was concerned, Leary was his guru, one with some useful practical ideas.

In the summer of 1966 when Griggs went to Millbrook, Leary was working on his plans for the formation of the League of Spiritual Discovery. Griggs and his friends seemed to have a good thing going out there in the West, so why not set up something similar? The new psychedelic religion was not something all-embracing and spiritually omnipotent. There was no Pope to set out the prescribed dogma. This religion was about a new kind of spiritual freedom which you found for yourself. The basic tenets of the League included: “enthusiastic acceptance of the sacramental method by the young. . . a recognition that the search for God is a private affair . . . the rituals spring from experiences of the small worship group... the leaven works underground . . . friends initiate, teach, prepare and guide...”

Ten days after California banned LSD in October 1966, Lynd, his wife, and a friend walked into the offices of a Los Angeles attorney on Sunset Boulevard and signed the papers incorporating the Brotherhood; Lynd was the only Brother who did not have a criminal record, so he was designated to organize the incorporation. According to the legal papers, the Brotherhood, tax exempt, was dedicated “to bring to the world a greater awareness of God through the teachings of Jesus Christ, Rama-Krishnam Babaji, Paramahansa Yogananda, Mahatma Gandhi and all true prophets and apostles of God.” Was there a hint of Leary’s influence in this list? Griggs had recently returned from a trip to the East, and the Brothers were largely ‘unschooled’.

To achieve its ends, the Brotherhood intended to “buy, manage and own and hold real and personal property necessary and proper for a place of public worship and carry on educational and charitable



work.” Was there an echo of the League’s tenets in article 4-D which read: “We believe in the sacred right of each individual to commune with God in spirit and in truth as it is empirically revealed to him”? This was “a recognition that the search for God is a private matter,” written another way. Lynd said years later: “Well, it was John Griggs’ main idea to incorporate because he had talked to Leary, and it was possible to incorporate to become tax-exempt as far as land goes and, if and when marijuana ever becomes legal, become tax-exempt on marijuana.” There were no fixed rules for joining; no name signing or ritual. But there was one basic rule among the Brothers—they believed in taking as much of the psychedelics as possible, the largest doses of LSD they could buy. The articles of association did not explain how the Brotherhood intended to buy its land or establish its place of worship. You cannot really tell a lawyer or the State of California that you intend to raise capital by breaking the law—by massive dealing in drugs.

Laguna Beach is an artists’ colony and resort thirty miles south of Los Angeles. There are only two roads into the town: the Pacific Coast Highway or, from inland, down Laguna Canyon. The town itself, like the stage of an amphitheatre, sits at the base of a semicircle of sandstone hills rising to 1,200 feet above the Pacific. Amid the bright flowers and clapboard homes the hissing rush of the surf, rolling across the sand eight to twelve feet high, is the major disturber of the peace. The plastic and concrete sprawl of Los Angeles could be on another planet. The peace brought the artists—Laguna has a museum devoted to the works of early Californian painters—and the ocean brought the surfers. In the early 1960s Laguna was a sleepy little township with the sort of mix to be found in many Californian communities. The American Legion and the Daughters of the American Revolution thrived alongside the artistic community—indeed, the local high school football team was called the Laguna Beach Artists. Once a year on Labor Day, things got a mite out of hand on the “Walkaround,” a fifty-year-old custom in which the passing of summer was mourned by a walk from bar to bar along the Pacific Coast Highway. Other than that, not much happened in

Laguna.

But in the mid-1960s, the number of young surfers was growing and they brought with them other young people eager to live a rude life away from the cities; among them were the Brotherhood. A mile from the beach, a cluster of about fifty houses made up a sub-suburb called Woodland Drive, beneath one of the sandstone hills in Laguna Canyon. It was a ramshackle area of gorse and dirt tracks, running down to badly paved streets and a single street light, but it was home for the colony of youngsters. The Brotherhood moved into four white-painted houses.

The scene was painted for a journalist some years later by one of the young men who lived in the Drive: “I went to school in Hollywood and got into surfing and just like everyone else I wound up in Laguna. Things were happening then, opening up. The chicks were seeing things and there was a lot of grass and there was a vibe that you could make it with love and digging each other... I’d go down to Laguna more and more and finally I just moved into a place on the Canyon with some chicks and a couple of other guys. It was cheap and it was fun. You know the bond, the thing that tied us up together was surfing and dope and balling. We’d get up early in the morning, stay out in the sun all day and somebody always had more grass. . . Then this cat Farmer John started coming around and he was really into acid. So we did a lot of acid and dug it and Farmer John was putting down a heavy brother-love rap.” Griggs, a charismatic figure, began to enlarge the Brotherhood, drawing people in to create concentric rings which spread out from the central core of Brothers who had moved into Laguna.

The Brotherhood and its apostles were no longer occasional dealers. The business was now a full-time occupation, financing the way they lived and the opening of the Mystic Arts World Store. At first, there had been odd deals of marijuana tucked inside matchboxes—and, the next moment, consignments of kilos. They arrived in Laguna so often that Lynd for one no longer found anything strange in this new life. “It was just an everyday occurrence. We would buy kilos of marijuana across the Mexican border and sell them to other Brothers who would turn round and sell them, with the money

going to the store. Then there was the LSD sales. Different people would go up to San Francisco which was the place to buy LSD and buy it in quantity to resell in Laguna,” he said. As far as the marijuana was concerned, “there could be anything from one kilo to as many as 300 to possibly 400 kilos at a time. I had taken kilos most likely on half a dozen occasions, possibly even a dozen occasions to places like San Francisco. Most of the money that was made was turned into the shop. Randall would collect money and Johnny Griggs would collect. . .” The two men were at the centre of the distribution system for the marijuana. According to Lynd, kilos were bought for \$45, sold to Griggs and Randal for \$65-\$70, who then sold them for \$100 or more. The buyers broke down the kilos to smaller dealers selling on the streets. Sales were not confined to the houses up in Woodland Drive. At night, the area round the Taco Bell fast-food stand, close to the Mystic Arts World, and crowded with surfers, beach bums and hippies, buying and trading small deals.

Lynd may have sounded nonchalant about the source of supply in Mexico, but the Brothers worked out a careful system centred on a town near Tijuana, a few miles south of San Diego. The long-haired Brothers may have seemed unlikely company for an officer in the Mexican police, but once a month they met for a quiet chat. There was not much that a policeman missed in a tiny Mexican town. A group of young Americans renting a house, coming and going with battered cars and trucks on the dusty roads in and out of town stood out among the local peasantry and the tourist buses thundering past. But a policeman has to live, even a local police chief. He had arranged their tenancy and offered to watch the house for a few dollars; for \$30 a month, the Brothers paid him not to. In return for this outlay, the Brothers could buy their marijuana, hide it in the fenders of their cars and drive across the border without problems. No one seemed to bother them.

Griggs was so excited by the Brothers’ successes, he would telephone Leary at Millbrook: “Hey, Uncle Tim, we’ve just moved half a ton of grass and we’ve got some righteous acid.” The calls came in about once a week, but Leary tended to dismiss them, although Jack, his son, now in his teens, decided he would go west to California

and have a look. He returned home to Millbrook filled with enthusiasm. One evening, he told his father, Griggs was counting out a stack of \$1,000 bills by the light of candles. The air in Griggs’ home on Woodland Drive was heavy with incense and the smell of marijuana. Jack Leary leant over, took a banknote and lit it with one of the candles. As a thousand dollars disappeared in a bright flame, black ash and the smell of burning paper, no one batted an eyelid.

But back at Millbrook, Leary was astonished. He called Griggs and offered to repay the \$1,000 dollars, but Griggs would have none of it. “Hey, Uncle Tim, we all wanted to burn a thousand-dollar bill. It was a great thing he did, very enlightening.”

Leary was becoming a frequent visitor to the West Coast as he toured the country lecturing and lobbying. When he decided to visit Laguna with Rosemary, his latest wife, he was greeted like an elder statesman and given conducted tours of the Brothers’ achievements. He said: “They were running the store which was an enormous, beautiful place. Just a group of guys who were pooling all their resources to raise consciousness. They were dedicating their lives to becoming better people. They could see it happening round the country. They were pioneers.”

Hollingshead, the man who had given Leary his first LSD experience, had returned from Britain and joined Leary in Laguna. “The Brotherhood felt they were leading a new society,” he remembered. “California was the country of the future. It was as if the culture had entered into them. They were responding. Righteous dealing was a sacrament, with Tim as their guru. I have always found them very gracious people, very honest, very wise—but also very naive. It was the Dead-end Kids who took acid and fell in love with beauty.” The Brothers were making money out of dealing, but Hollingshead said: “Griggs was not thinking in those terms. He was only thinking of getting the psychedelics on the streets so that people could take them. They were totally committed. They had tremendous determination. They were all very tough; once they were moving dope, they were manic. When the stuff came from Mexico they did this non-stop thing. . .”

Lynd slammed down the boot of the car, climbed into the driving seat and drove over to pick up his wife and children. Once they were settled, he turned the car northwards out of the suburbs of Phoenix, Arizona, on to the long, dusty desert roads; a young man and his family innocently about their business. Christmas 1967 was just a few days away. Perhaps they were heading home for the holidays, visiting the grandparents. The highway patrols ignored them.

The brand-new Cadillac, the dream and envy of many a fullblooded American, took the miles of tarmac like a stately liner. There was no rest for the huge chrome car. The family slept as Lynd crossed America straight as an arrow on the long country roads, whistling past farms, towns, cities. He drove, eyes fixed, for New York. The car's air-conditioning went off and the heating came on as the air outside grew colder. The roads were sometimes snow-lined now.

As he drove into New York, Lynd, tired after his marathon, searched for a telephone. Griggs had told him to call a certain number in New Jersey and the people at the other end would be ready. In the boot were 250 kilos of best marijuana.

He rang. No money yet. Leary needed \$5,000 fast. Lynd tried the contact number again. The buyer had raised a stake. Lynd dropped his family off, and grabbed a flight back to the West Coast. At one in the morning he was back in Laguna with the money for Leary. He took another flight back to New York to finalize the deal on the marijuana.

He had hardly recovered his breath back home in Laguna before he was on the road again. As 1968 opened, the Cadillac had been replaced by a big Ford camper and a cargo of 500 kilos, again bound for New York and the same buyer. This time there were no hitches. Ten days later Griggs appeared in Woodland Drive with two suitcases. He opened them up in front of Lynd and Randall, revealing wads of banknotes. Three times the Brothers counted the money and then they were satisfied. Lynd's two drives had yielded \$98,000. Over \$40,000 had to be paid to a connection in Los Angeles who provided the marijuana. The arrangement with the Mexican police chief had fallen through after someone had tried getting across the border

without paying the monthly dues and had been caught on a tipoff from the policeman. Mexican marijuana now came to the Brothers from the barrios of Los Angeles, or across the border in Arizona.

Nearly \$50,000 the richer, the Brothers drove over to Palm Springs. Leary's advice was to do what they had always promised themselves—buy land. Led by Griggs, the Brotherhood put a cash down-payment on the Idylwild Ranch and bought themselves a 300-acre retreat. Not for them the crowded streets of Haight-Ashbury and a beaten-up Victorian house. Southern California slept on in the sun, paying them no heed.

# The Psychedelic [in] Society: A Brief Cultural History of Tripping

by Charles Hayes

*Tripping, An Anthology of True-Life Psychedelic Adventures*, Introduction  
<http://www.psychedelicaadventures.com/BriefHistory.htm>

Psychedelics are notorious today because of the rude splash they made in the Sixties and Seventies, when the tidal wave of altered consciousness they unleashed billowed across the social landscape, upsetting many an apple cart, Newtonian and otherwise, along the way. During the course of this insurrectional drive to expand the human mind, millions of students, artists, and other seekers were ushered by chemical agents toward—and, hopefully, through—the “doors of perception,” a term borrowed from William Blake by Aldous Huxley to describe, in his 1954 book of the same title, the expansive universe to which drugs such as LSD can open up the mortal brain—a realm in which everything appears, in Blake’s words, “as it is, infinite.”

Timothy Leary’s calls to “tune in” psychedelically and Ken Kesey’s Electric Kool-Aid Acid Tests—the multimedia LSD extravaganzas immortalized by Tom Wolfe—steered untold legions through these portals into a molten state of being which is all but smothered today beneath the buttoned-down collars of straight-laced yuppie composure. Because most psychedelic drugs have been illegal since 1966, there are no accurate polls to determine the numbers of people who experimented. But many at least temporarily heeded Leary’s clarion call to abandon middle-class security and catch the wave of revelation by gulping down psychotropic chemicals. Leary’s death in 1996 has sparked a burst of introspection on the impact of the drugs he proselytized, and the high numbers of Baby Boomers who stormed heaven with them now have the stature to contemplate the fruits of their rebellions.

The demographics of tripping are actually much broader than one might suspect. You needn’t be a hippie to have a psychedelic background. The corporate and civic leaders who are running the country today are likely to have once been experimental long-hairs in their school days. We know that President Bill Clinton and both major-party candidates vying to succeed him, Texas governor George W. Bush and Vice-President Al Gore, have admitted or intimated they’ve used illegal drugs. Indeed, many in high places today have been in even higher ones in their youth, touring the outer galaxies of their own minds on acid and other psychedelics. Millions have a unique lens embedded in their minds composed of the rarefied fibers of their hallucinogenic experiences. Meanwhile, many who didn’t “turn on” are wondering, “What did I miss?” Still others, psychedelic veterans among them, find “recreational” drugs and the culture of their “indulgence” disquieting, and for good reason from their perspective. Trips, after all, were known to go awry.

As the new millennium begins, the use of psychedelics is again on the rise after tapering off in the 1980s. How could this be happening? Wasn’t the first time around, the convulsive Sixties and Seventies, too unsettling for anybody to want to go back? Well, the fact is that human beings will always want to suspend everyday reality, be it by legal means or otherwise, and they will always be at least curious about alternate states of consciousness, especially those that are consecrated in many of the world’s ancient traditions.

Veneration for the induced visionary experience has roots in virtually every culture on earth, however sublimated or repressed it is today. In fact, one could argue that the use of visionary plants and hallowed drafts has been seminal to the development of civilization. Two of the most pervasive and influential cultures the planet has ever seen, that of Hellenistic Greece and Aryan India, contained at their very core inspirations derived from the ingestion of psychedelic concoctions.

For two thousand years before its eradication by Christians in the fourth century A.D., the celebration of the Eleusinian Mysteries was the peak-experience of the ancient Greeks, a “holy institution,” according to religion historian Huston Smith, for regularly opening

“a space in the human psyche for God to enter.” After a half year of rites, the pilgrimage to Eleusis just west of Athens climaxed with the re-enactment of a sacred drama that was enhanced by the drinking of *kykeon*, a grainy beverage believed to contain barley ergot. Among notable initiates were Socrates, Plato, Sophocles, Aristotle, Aeschylus, Cicero, Pindar, and possibly Homer. A communion between gods and men, between the living and the dead, the ceremony at Eleusis was a symbolic journey to the underworld to claim back from death Persephone, the daughter of the grain goddess Demeter. The setting for this ur-psychedelic experience was a *telesterion* (initiation hall) at the very site where Persephone is said to have emerged from Hades with the newborn son she’d conceived in death there. A series of breathtaking, masterfully orchestrated special effects enthralled the senses and conjured the specter of deliverance from the forces of darkness through a ritualized resurrection. The whirlpool of stimuli that washed over initiates involved an Oz-like chimera of voices, music, perfumes, mists, light and shadows. At the peak of the crescendo, the “bellowing roar of a gong-like instrument that outdid . . . the mightiest thunderclap, coming from the bowels of the earth” announced the arrival of the queen of the netherworld.

All were forbidden by penalty of death to tell what they’d seen. According to Carl A.P. Ruck, co-author with R. Gordon Wasson of *The Road to Eleusis* (1978), “Even a poet could only say that he had seen the beginning and the end of life and known that they were one, something given by God. The division between earth and sky melted into a pillar of light.” Of course, some couldn’t hold their tongues about such a marvel. A scandal ensued when some aristocratic Athenians began celebrating the Mysteries at dinner parties in their homes with groups of “drunken” revelers. Socrates himself was tried and condemned for using the sacred brew recreationally. (Such a profanation of the holy potion might have a modern-day parallel in the spilling of LSD into the well water of the mass media and youth culture during the early Sixties).

Notably, the Mysteries were not freely conjured by anyone who could get their hands on the *kykeon*. They were the exclusive charge of two families who served as hierophants for two thousand years.

Clearly, the indoctrination and rites leading up to the swigging of the mash were at least as influential as the concoction itself in weaving the phantasm that stole over the pilgrims’ senses. Such congregational participation and extensive preparation for a psychedelic experience is almost unheard of in the modern West. If anything like the Eleusinian Mysteries had survived the hi-tech world of today, it would almost certainly be diluted and profaned, taking the form of a commercialized adventure-tourism attraction involving a multimedia circus of light and sound somewhat akin to the group-mind experience of a Trips Festival or a rave. Re-creation of the *kykeon* brew has proved elusive, however, even to such consummate ergot specialists as Albert Hofmann, who used the fungus in his 1938 invention of LSD.

The earliest known religious texts are a collection of hymns called *The Rig Veda*, written by Aryans who swept down into India from Siberia. Among the one thousand twenty-eight verses, considered the foundation of the Hindu religion, a hundred and twenty are devoted to praise for the rootless, leafless plant called Soma, which is deified for conferring immortality and divine inspiration: “We have drunk the Soma; we have become immortal; we have gone to the light; we have found the gods” (*Rig Veda* 8.48.1-15).

Wasson conjectured that Soma was *Amanita muscaria*, the red-capped fly agaric mushroom depicted ubiquitously to this day in European folktale literature, and used ritualistically by Siberian and some Native American tribes. This conclusion was based, in part, on the *Amanita*’s unique property of being able to inebriate people who drink the user’s urine, which is corroborated by a reference in *The Rig Veda* to ceremonial urine drinking. Wasson tried *Amanita* several times himself, but never really got off. Terence McKenna believes that Soma is actually the *Psilocybe cubensis* mushroom, in part because of the generally weak and erratic performance of the *Amanita* mushroom in modern trials. Uncovering the ancient ethnobotanical truth about Soma is an ongoing endeavor, but there is little doubt that the very ether of Indian religion is a psychotropic, probably mycelial, plant.

The average American today still has little if any inkling of the traditions for the sacramental use of mushrooms and other plants by cultures across the globe, lumping all drugs into one baggie-full of



stupefying intoxicants that will turn you into a sick, lazy low-life bound for jail or an early death. Unlikely as it may seem, however, an appreciation for the induced visionary experience is apparent not so far beneath the surface of mainstream modern culture. For me this remnant sensibility is epitomized in the vision of Walt Disney (a known cocaine user), whose *imagineered*<sup>TM</sup> re-creations of classic fables often alluded to the fruitful alterability of consciousness.

The pivotal scene in *Dumbo* (1941), for instance, is the transformation of consciousness and augmentation of capacity—in this case, the big-eared elephant’s motor skills—via a hallucinatory delirium brought on when the dejected pachyderm drinks a barrel full of water into which, unbeknownst to him, a bottle of spirits had been accidentally spilled. To the foreboding lyrics and serpentine melody of “Pink Elephants on Parade,” Dumbo begins seeing things “you know that ain’t” (a succession of fractals and geometrical patterns, forms morphing into new ones, and scenes of Oriental mystery and erotica), then passes into oblivion, from which he wakes up in the highest branches of a tree. Thus Dumbo earns his wings not through an act of obeisance to the Ten Commandments but in the throes of a psychotropic-induced visionary state.

*Fantasia* (1940) features scenes that portray synesthesia (“See the music, hear the pictures,” reads the video’s promotional copy) and other phantasmic phenomena that make it one of the most beloved of all films to view while tripping. According to psychedelic scholar Peter Stafford, Disney’s “chief visualist” for the project was a mescaline subject of Kurt Beringer (an associate of Carl Jung and Herman Hesse), who published *The Mescaline Inebriation* in 1927. In the early decades of Disneyland, a pink elixir was served upon entry in the Enchanted Tiki Room to accentuate the pleasure of the tropical respite and render the bird songs that much sweeter. The psychoactive element of the potion was “make believe,” of course, but today, in deference to stricter notions of “family values” now in vogue, the suggestive little cocktail is no longer offered to visitors.

Since the cataclysms of the Sixties and Seventies, a more tenacious if less overtly messianic subculture has grown up around the psychedelic. Nowhere in the industrial world is psychedelic

consciousness more above-board and appreciated than in the computer software business, where it is regarded as the inspiration for cybernetics—the very definition of twenty-first century communications efficiency—by many of its most illustrious practitioners. According to Jaron Lanier, a pioneer in the virtual reality industry, “. . . almost to a person, the founders of the [personal] computer industry were psychedelic style hippies . . . Within the computer science community there’s a very strong connection with the ‘60s psychedelic tradition, absolutely no question about it.”

In the TNT docudrama *Pirates of Silicon Valley* (1999), Apple founder Steve Jobs is depicted on an acid trip in which he conceives himself the conductor of his own cosmic symphony. Bob Wallace, one of the early developers of Microsoft, who now runs Mind Books, the online purveyor of tomes devoted to psychedelic and alternative consciousness, has said that his conception of shareware as a formal business application was psychedelically inspired. Lotus spreadsheet designer Mitchell Kapor, co-founder with Grateful Dead lyricist [John Perry Barlow](#) of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, an Internet advocacy organization, has attributed certain “recreational chemicals” with sharpening his business acumen. Bob Jesse left his position as vice president of business development at Oracle, the world’s second largest software company after Microsoft, to head the Council on Spiritual Practices, a non-profit organization that advocates (among other things) the responsible use of *entheogens* (divine-manifesting drugs) for religious purposes. Such a marriage of technology and psychedelic consciousness—and a resoundingly profitable and influential one at that—might have been foretold by Marshall McLuhan’s 1968 observation that “the computer is the LSD of the business world.”

The possibility that industrial success might in any way be attributed to the psychedelic is not overtly bantered about in Wall Street boardrooms, where psychedelic acuity is not yet measured out in lucre as an asset or variable in a company’s fortunes. But according to author and media theorist Douglas Rushkoff, firms “such as Sun Microsystems that lead the Valley of the Nerds [Silicon Valley] recognize the popularity of psychedelics among their employees.” You

need only one look at the covers of the cyber-age magazines *Wired* and *Mondo 2000* to conclude that the computer cognizents have had at least some contact with the whirring currents of the psychedelic Mainframe.

The phrase “We’re all connected!”—often exclaimed during a psychedelic experience—might just as well be uttered by a PC user tapping into the mycelium-like World Wide Web for the first time. Cyberspace is, in many respects, an electronic mirror of the hyperspatial web of synaptic nerves running through the Universal Mind, the Indra’s Net of impulses and receptor sites that some say they’ve accessed by psychedelics. According to ancient myth, Indra, the king of the Hindu pantheon, created a vast web comprised of strings of jewels. Each jewel both reflected and was reflected by all the others, thus revealing both its uniqueness and its universality. A sort of invisible yet real medium of contact between any and all points, cyberspace is a habitat for the mitosis-like proliferation of the idea germs called *memes*, and an endless mind field on which to explode the fractal equations that portray the parallel orders of controlled chaos in the universe.

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Much of what I unearthed about contemporary psychedelic culture would be considered elementary or passe to the many who tune into recordings of McKenna’s incandescent rants; travel hundreds of miles to raves, Rainbow Gatherings, or neo-pagan festivals like Starwood and Burning Man; subscribe to hyperspatial mind rags like *TRP*, *Head Magazine*, and *Magical Blend*; and log on to the homepage for the *Salvia divinorum* Research and Information Center and other psychedelic websites. But I uncovered a great deal of information about the subject that I wish I’d known back when I was a teenage tripper in the 1970s. My research revealed how much I and others were in the dark—and still are—in regard to maximum safety and security issues, the history of psychedelic substance usage, and the wisest methods of navigating the various hazards and hassles of the psychedelic experience. Although there have been many new

developments since I started out (new substances, resources, methods), much of the apparent change that I perceive in psychedelic culture is only a function of my earlier ignorance. When I started tripping at age fifteen, I’d barely boned up on the subject. There was information and guidance available, of course, but I was aware of very little of it.

I have since learned that the modern psychedelic revolution first germinated in the time and place that I was born, in mid-Fifties Los Angeles, unofficially inaugurated on a brilliant morning in May 1953, when Huxley threw back 400 milligrams of mescaline sulfate in the tawny, then-unspoiled Hollywood Hills. The psychedelic then enjoyed a decade of expansive development before generating so much heat that the law was provoked to come down harshly on it. The State of California’s ban on LSD took effect on October 6, 1966, and the other states soon followed suit. Many might be astonished that “mind-blowing” psychedelics once enjoyed an age of relative freedom of proliferation and experimentation, during which one worried not about getting busted and only minimally about “freaking out.” During that window of opportunity, psychologists, Beats and artists, and various members of the intelligentsia, including some pillars of the ruling class, experimented quietly and not so quietly with mescaline sulfate, psilocybin tablets, and LSD-25 to mostly rave reviews.

Cary Grant, the very emblem of debonair Forties-era class, admitted taking acid over a hundred times under psychiatric supervision in the 1950s. Thrilled with the results, he credited LSD with helping him control his boozing and come to terms with unresolved conflicts involving his parents. I recall a circa 1970 article in a Chicago daily in which Grant described how, during an early acid experience, he was so overwhelmed with the expurgatorial power of the drug that he felt he was about to let loose with a terrific, system-wide, psychical bowel movement. Time/Life publisher Henry Luce described “chatting up God” on a golf course during an LSD session, while his wife, Claire Boothe Luce, cleaned her psychical house with the medicine. A right-wing ideologue, Mrs. Luce believed that LSD was fine for the elite, but not advisable for the masses. “We wouldn’t want everyone doing too much of a good thing,” she is reported as saying.

Before the ban, psychedelic research focused on the use of LSD in treating alcoholism, depression, sexual neuroses, autism, compulsive syndromes, and criminal psychopathology. By 1965 there were more than two thousand scientific papers describing the treatment of up to forty thousand patients with psychedelic drugs. Success was commonplace. Among the more stunning results were from studies in which LSD was used in the treatment of autistic children at UCLA Neuropsychiatric Institute, and of chronic alcoholics at Hollywood Hospital in British Columbia and Spring Grove State Hospital in Baltimore. In a 1961 letter to Leary, Alcoholics Anonymous founder William Wilson waxed glowingly about the “immense and growing value” of “LSD and some kindred alkaloids,” having personally experienced their ability to break down barriers within the self.

By the time I boarded the psychedelic bus in 1970, the commotion over LSD had already spawned a backlash against the dispersal of the chemicals far beyond the enclaves of the elite to the teenyboppers of a mass media fed youth culture. Leary is held largely responsible for this debacle. After conducting several laudable studies as a Harvard psychologist, and pioneering and then road-mapping the psychedelic landscape in highly serviceable books used as bibles by trippers in-the-know during the Sixties—*The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead* (1964), and *Psychedelic Prayers after the Tao Te Ching* (1966)—the zealous pie-eyed piper actually helped ruin the name—and hence the experience of LSD as well as other psychedelics—by his puerile jingoism and shenanigans. The rise and fall of the psychedelic revolution is chronicled brilliantly in *Storming Heaven: LSD and the American Dream* (1987) by Jay Stevens, which depicts the social factors and cumulative events that led to the national hysteria over LSD—which overtook the country and finally led to the drug’s criminalization.

The dark age of the Leary hangover may now be giving way to new light on the psychedelic horizon, visible through some cracks in the wall of proscription. Thirty-four state legislatures and the District of Columbia have passed laws—yet in conflict with federal law—recognizing marijuana’s medical value. The FDA has recently ended its decades-long ban on clinical psychedelic use and approved new

trials for LSD, psilocybin, DMT, MDMA, and ibogaine. In Brazil the Uniao do Vegetal (UDV), a religious order that uses ayahuasca as a sacrament, got the legal right to do so by the national government in 1992. According to Curtis Wright, director of the addictive drugs division at the FDA, “It’s clear that these agents have a role in understanding how the mind works, and there’s also a role for them as potential ways to help people.”

Back when I did most of my tripping, there were basically five psychedelic substances in use among my circles: LSD, so-called “mescaline” (usually inferior acid), peyote, psilocybin mushrooms, and MDA. Today, there is a whole galaxy of new choices, including an apparently infinite string of synthetic analogs banned automatically by the Analog Act of 1986. Alexander (Sasha) Shulgin, the former research scientist at Dow Chemical affectionately dubbed “the Godfather of MDMA [Ecstasy],” has annexed an extensive archipelago of new territory to the psychedelic continent by creating—and then self-testing—new potions with the flick of a molecule. In *PiHKAL* (1991), an acronym for “phenethylamines I have known and loved,” Shulgin and his wife Ann document his laboratory inventions and their psychoactive properties in the context of “A Chemical Love Story,” the courtship between these two now august and beloved figures in the psychedelic community.

In 1997 I sat in on a DMT cell group in Manhattan, the likes of which, according to one member, has propagated as a response to McKenna’s irresistible endorsements. A cluster of fellows smoked the high-octane tryptamine in a dark room, then soared off internally for twenty minutes or so, returning to their senses to compare notes. The experience is so intense and otherworldly that it can take awhile to piece together just a fraction of what has happened. “If only I could remember the last thing I saw before I came out. . . ,” stammered one of the psychonauts, struggling to reassemble the bolt of truth that had just laid siege to his mind.

No longer a mere trend, rave (or dance) culture has swept the world since the late 1980s, a pacific movement by a mycelial network of MDMA-fueled Techno music revelers from Manchester, England to Koh Phangan, Thailand. In the UK, where rave took off and where

youth culture burns fiercest perhaps, it is believed that the number of MDMA “pills” taken every week has increased steadily from one million in 1992. The ravers I met in London in 1997 gave me to believe that their legions, along with their defiant temperament, are growing. In the working-class district of Brixton, I talked to a laser technician for rave shows who predicts an apocalyptic confrontation between the British government and the increasingly Ecstatic youth. It remains to be seen whether the commercialism and popstar iconoclasm that has most recently crept into rave events once notable for their spore-like spontaneity and the diffuse anonymity of the music, will numb the nerve-ends of the movement and render it increasingly harmless from the perspective of authorities.

The organic counterpart to Shulgin’s artificial pharmacopeia is the burgeoning field of ethnobotany, led by intrepid, rainforest-trekking scholars such as McKenna, Wallace, and Jonathan Ott, all intent on cataloging Mother Nature’s psychotropic tools and their use in shamanic rites by traditional cultures across the globe. There’s an ample and growing body of scholarship devoted to indigenous practices related to sacred plants, with passages on psychedelic seeds, snuffs, brews and other preparations that read like the accounts of occult fetish worship in James Frazier’s *The Golden Bough* (1890) or Margaret Mead’s *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928). The adventure-travel circuit is riddled with mystical-magical locales where one can participate in authentic tribal rites with ayahuasca or the San Pedro cactus, take mushrooms or Ecstasy on a tropical beach under the full moon, or eat legal hash from a government shop. For the armchair traveler, Paul Devereux’s *The Long Trip: A Prehistory of Psychedelia* (1997) charts the use of sacred plants all over the world from the beginning of recorded history.

The ancient Mayan civilization, whose shamans apparently made ample use of the psilocybin mushroom, figures heavily in the mythology of today’s psychedelic culture. One of my participants, the London laser specialist I’ll call Stan, was keen to this, while embodying several matrices of contemporary psychedelic sophistication. Coming of age in what might be called “old wave” psychedelia, dropping acid at free festivals during the Seventies, his

trade involves synchronizing beams of light to the rhythms of Goa Trance and Drum ‘N Bass music for throngs of MDMA-popping twenty-somethings who are gearing up for the new millennium and the Advent of the Alien. But Stan’s real cup of tea is a fascination with both the anthropology and the headspace of the tryptamines.

A few years ago Stan was studying the Mayan codices in the British Museum Library when he spotted a glyph that a Christian scholar had identified as a “night light” (i.e., the artificial light of candles or paraffin), but which he believed was actually a cross-section of the *yage* vine, a component of ayahuasca. Finding it curious that there were carvings of kings from separate generations sitting together eating, he translated a codex that gave what he interpreted as a recipe for time travel, using the *yage*. To celebrate the discovery, he and his brother-in-law, a mycologist, undertook a risky regime of psilocybin in combination with harmaline, an MAO inhibitor meant to potentiate the tryptamine in the mushrooms, over a period of several days.

In the course of their visioneering expedition, they encountered a network through time constructed by Mayan psychedelic shamans, who, Stan believes, set dates when they’d meet up with ancestors or progeny. When they knew that cosmological conditions were aligned for them to contact a royal figure from another age, the shamans would drink a tryptamine brew and use a form of psychical telekinesis to time-travel to meet up with him. Meanwhile, the long-departed or distant-future king would, in turn, be looking back because he knew that the shamans were looking for him. Disintegrating into the biospheric mesh of the planet, Stan recalls, “we immediately saw them and they saw us.” After upping the dose of harmaline to dangerous levels, they had visions of the last scenes of the Mayan civilization, people dying of Old World diseases such as small pox, diphtheria, and cholera. However accurate his archaeological findings and historical notions, Stan’s experiences bespeak the transtemporal and cosmopolitan sensibility of the contemporary psychedelic scene.

Oral ingestion of DMT with beta-carboline MAO inhibitors is now a sort of totem among many of today’s trippers, a way to both encounter and embody the Archaic Revival, the return to pure,



autochthonic theology, often via modern chemistry, extolled in McKenna's 1991 compilation volume of that name. These days there's many an amateur ethnopharmacologist and psychedelic brewmeister out there, calculating the tryptamine to MAOI ratios just so. Indeed, MAOIs can be dicey admixtures that can cause blackouts when taken in combination with tryptamines and possibly death when mixed with MDMA. Prescription MAOIs carry a slew of warnings about dangerous combinations. Writes R.U. Sirius (co-founder of *Mondo 2000*, which *Time* calls "the cyberculture mindstyle manual-magazine"): "You can find it [the independence and erudition of the new counterculture] on the Net, where millions of youths log on to psychedelic bulletin boards. Read through the public conversations, and you'll start to wonder how many young psychedelic chemists conversant in biotechnology, comparative religion and visionary literature, are hiding in the American heartland."

There is no doubt that with the advent of the new millennium, the use of psychedelics will continue to rise, both responsibly and otherwise, as they are increasingly seen as tools for penetrating the veils of quotidian *maya* and mass-media illusion spun by corporate greed. According to the best hopes of the new psychedelic vanguard, the expanded intelligent use of these plants and chemicals will usher in an eon of shamanic vistas and stronger definitions true to primordial forms: a pagan, aboriginal order in which the spirit will reign pre-eminent.

# Psychedelic Culture: One or Many?

by Erik Davis

<http://www.tripzine.com/articles.asp?id=erikdavisms2>

*Erik Davis made a splash with his keynote speech on psychedelic culture at the recent Mindstates II conference in Berkeley, CA. For those of you who can't catch the radio program we now have the edited transcript of his speech here. This article originally appeared in Trip 6.*

What I'd like to do here is paint a picture of psychedelic culture and how it relates to the larger world that we're in. There are a lot of interesting angles with which people approach psychedelic culture. Of course there've always been very different models of how psychedelics influence the greater culture—how they should influence it, and how they do influence it. If you go back to the Sixties, sometimes we have a simplistic idea that the counterculture was one great wave of psychedelic experience that was united in its ethos, in its ways of thinking about what way the world should go. That's not really the case. There were a lot of very different subsets of people, even at that time. You had people driven very much by a kind of psychotherapeutic approach—how is this going to help in dealing with individual psychology, and the psychology of groups. You had the sort of elitist perennialism of Aldous Huxley and his school. On the other side of it, you had the Prankster approach, which was far more anarchic—let's throw it all out there and see what happens, let's spread it wide, let's bring it all down. You had the great tensions between, especially in the Seventies, Timothy Leary and Ram Dass. At some point in the Sixties, Leary was often seen as sort of a semi-guru guy, but at a certain point he really very strongly turned away from that model, from the custard mush of Hindu spirituality, and became much more invested in a kind of proto-extropian, highly technological view of the future of humanity. Whereas on the other



hand, you had his former colleague, Richard Alpert, really keeping the connections between psychedelic experience and a variety of mystical and spiritual traditions very closely bound.

So even if we look at the background of where we've come from, we see a lot of divergence. And today we also have a great deal of divergence. You have people who are very scientifically oriented and in many ways quite skeptical of the kinds of claims you can make about the worlds of experience that psychedelics open up. On the other hand, you have a very strong pull towards religion and/or spirituality in certain kinds of forms; there's the idea that there are certain spirits behind these experiences, that they have a kind of collective message, and that by engaging in this we're learning a certain kind of truth which is organized often by certain institutions or groups. This divergence of course is extremely productive. It's very dynamic; it's very open-ended. The best aspect of psychedelic culture in terms of what it presents to the larger culture is this open-endedness, a lack of resolution, a constant dynamic interplay between matter and spirit, science and experience, subjectivity and chemistry. That tension of constantly moving relationships is in many ways what makes this such a productive and fascinating part of our culture.

But what does "psychedelic culture" mean? In the broader respects, in many ways you can look outside and say that psychedelics won. If you look at advertising, if you look at MTV, if you look at computer graphics, if you look at a lot of things inside of the emerging cybersphere, you will find traces and sometimes overt quotations of psychedelic experience and psychedelic culture. I'm sure if you took some of the advertisements you see for soda pop and international financial institutions back to 1967 and said, "Check this out," they'd say, "Wow, that's the stuff." And that's a fascinating tale. If we ever know—and I do hope someday we know—the extent of the influence of psychedelics on the computer industry, I'm sure it's remarkable. And we know some of what that is, but for obvious reasons, it's a story that remains untold. I was talking to Lawrence Hagerty [author of *The Spirit of the Internet: Speculations on the Evolution of Global Consciousness*] who was talking about how Sun Microsystems is beating the pants off some of the other monsters out there, and Sun is one

major corporation out there that doesn't do drug testing. Very interesting.

So clearly the ideas and experiences of this culture are trickling out and they have all sorts of influences that are hard to trace. What really interests me is how this psychedelic experience and psychedelic thinking can engage with the world that we're moving into, a much broader and very strange and rapidly changing world.

## SHAMANISM

What's a nice, traditional, solid model of the function of psychedelics within a larger culture? We have the great image of the shaman, a very romanticized image, very overwritten in many ways, used to mean many different things outside of its original ethnographic context. I'm not going to go into any specifics about particular shamanic cultures, but I would like to draw sort of a general picture to point out something I think is very important about psychedelic culture. One thing you can say about the shaman or witch is that she lives on the edge of cultural maps. The shaman can be seen as a kind of interface between the specific human culture of a particular tribal group and the world outside, a world that we can think of not only as nature, of course, but the cosmic, the spiritual. The witch lives at the edge of the village as we start to move into the wild. And that's a very potent way of thinking about that relationship of being a transfer point between the outside and the inside of specific human cultures. One of those interesting paradoxes of shamanism is that, on the one hand, it is very technological, very savvy, full of knowledge in almost a modern sense of knowledge, like scientific knowledge. And yet the worlds that are being produced and performed are extremely cultural, spiritual, mythological. Look at a healing ceremony, and think about what exactly is happening in a healing ceremony. Let's say that the illness is healed through the use of quartz crystals being pulled out of the body. What's happening there? What's really going on?

One way of looking at it is that the shaman is playing a two-fold game. On the one hand, he knows very well what he's actually doing, that he's pirated a little quartz crystal in his palm, that he's

using very specific plants which have very specific properties which engaged together can produce effects, both specifically related to health and in larger psychoactive issues as well. There's a tremendous amount of knowledge there. And yet, what does the shaman do in the actual situation of the healing? She performs. And what she performs is a whole cultural embeddedness of those knowledges, not simply as in our modern science—"take this pill, it'll work out for you." The knowledge is kept on the inside. And what the person perceives is a cultural story, of the illness being removed from the body. So it's not that the shaman is a skeptical trickster just playing games with quartz crystals. It's that the shaman understands some of the technology of producing cultural knowledge and transformation within that cultural matrix, and is willing to perform it as if it were fully engaged. We're realizing now that the placebo effect plays a tremendous role in healing of all sorts. And so to artfully produce the placebo effect is of course an incredibly valuable activity.

But again, what is the function here? The shaman takes a sort of liminal role. Liminality is a concept in anthropology that describes, again, a place on the edge of cultural maps, a place between the wild and the culture, between hot and cold, between different villages. A place of tremendous liminal power in the ancient world were crossroads. Crossroads were where people from different cultures would encounter each other. And there's a whole mythology of trickster figures—Hermes, Coyote, these kinds of characters—are figures that model this relationship between inside and out. Liminality is a very important way of approaching what function, what role, what space in the whole overall cultural environment psychedelics take up.

So if you look at this model, it's a very exciting model. Of course, many people in attempting to really take advantage of psychedelic drugs in the modern world have looked to the model of shaman healer. It's an exciting model to try to emulate in some fashion or another. But there's one very important distinction, I believe, between the world view of the traditional shaman healer and what we are faced with, which is that we do not have a coherent, contained world view. We no longer have a specific cultural story that can be

performed in that mythological sense. We're at this very strange juncture in history when all these cultures are smashing into each other, we have globalization, we have fragmentation, it's a very open-ended situation. I think sometimes if there's an error in the shamanic interpretation of modern psychedelic culture, it's a kind of romanticism that wants to reconstruct or re-embody some fully coherent mythological world view. I don't want to say that in a way that undercuts the power of ancient myths and ancient knowledge. Of course one of the things that composes modern psychedelic culture is knowledge, is reception of stories, practices from the world over, and those things inform our evolving picture or cultural story about what we're doing, because that cultural story helps make the reality of experience come to be. But I think that sometimes there's a desire or a tendency to want that story to be fully realized, so that we know that actually what we're doing is engaging the mind of the planet, and the planet is telling us something. And I think in some ways those are very valuable stories, but at the same time, I think it's very important to recognize that, at the moment, we are still part of this tremendous, bizarre, horrible, and fascinating process of technological modernity. We can see it breaking apart. We can see its horrible claws, its absences, and there's a desire to overcome these things quickly, or overcome them fully or entirely, leave that framework entirely in order to enter into a different kind of re-enchanted world. That desire to re-enchant the world is a profound thing that we're all feeling. It's incredibly legitimate. And yet, I think that the way in which we move forward with that is not by recovering simply a kind of mythological world view. We must keep up our relationship with those aspects of modernity that are part of psychedelic culture.

## SCIENCE

One of the more obvious models, of course, is science. And one of the paradoxes if you approach psychedelics from a scientific point of view is that on the one hand, obviously we're dealing with material substances. Obviously we're dealing with chemistry. We're dealing with tiny little objects that we can describe in the

institutionalized, image-free language of science. And yet, these compounds open up worlds which seem to pull the rug out from under a more limited view of science. And yet, we cannot fully inhabit the magical, open-ended world, because we are also very much aware of the fact that they are material compounds, produced through material means that are playing all sorts of games and fascinating tricks on our neural systems. So it's a kind of Möbius strip, where the trigger opens up the space that pulls out the rug from under the whole world of triggers, the whole world of mechanism. And yet, we can't entirely resolve that, we can't leave the world where we're still acknowledging the tremendous complexity and marvels of natural science. So that's why psychedelics, more than most regions of the culture, are a place for getting very close to this magic line, where it's almost a tight rope walk between these different world views.

Another very important aspect about psychedelics, from the perspective of more materialist and scientific ways of looking at the world, is the question it poses about consciousness, and whether first-person perspectives have any value in our attempts to understand what consciousness is. There's a tremendous amount of energy amongst the people who are doing the most work to describe what's happening in consciousness from the perspective of the brain. There's a tremendous tendency in that world to deny first-person experience as a valid way of understanding what's happening in consciousness; we can only really talk about it from a third-person perspective. Someone like Daniel Dennett is a great example of this, where any sort of internal information you get from meditation, from drugs, etc., it's just not really worth very much because we can't really capture it entirely in the kinds of frameworks that science prefers. But that's what makes it so powerful and so productive, because it's like we're opening up a gate inside of the scientific worldview, but what comes in that gate cannot be captured by it entirely. We see the same kinds of things happening now, as there's more discussion of a sort of neurology of mysticism or spiritualism, like the cover of *Newsweek* recently on "God and the brain." It's again a very similar kind of topic. Interestingly, they did not raise the issue of psychedelics at all. But they were approaching this odd point where we're beginning to

get pretty good at a third-person description of a lot of what's going on with some of the most exalted and powerful states that human beings can achieve. And yet, there's something sort of obvious: if we're getting so close to it from this third-person perspective, how can we possibly not include a first-person perspective?

But then it actually feeds into an aspect of our culture that is very frightening, which is a certain tendency towards control, towards the idea that what causes human beings to be the way they are are a whole set of factors that can be controlled from the outside, for the interests of this kind of way of thinking. You find it in government, you find it in science, you find it in psychotherapy, you find it in motivational speaking, you find it in all sorts of places, this tendency to say, "Well, all you have to do is trigger human beings a certain way and they will be happy or they will be productive in a capitalist sense." And so the tendency to think about consciousness from a strictly third-person point of view also plays very much into the hands of the people who believe they can use third-person perspectives in order to organize such activity. Whereas if you stepped across that line and said, "This is absurd, of course I'm going to plunge in with my own individual consciousness and make inferences, make discoveries, explore myself, explore social interaction from the perspective of these new states," you're already just in that investigation making a claim for the primary importance of subjective experience as a place to instruct, to understand, and to relate to the world. So that's another way in which psychedelics have a very interesting trickiness, because even from the perspective of hard core third-person scientists, they're inevitably fascinated by these compounds on some level or another. And yet, the closer you get to these substances, the more they pull you into a very different kind of world. It becomes more difficult to account for the phenomenon from that perspective. So it's sort of eating in and eroding some of the more regressive and reductive tendencies inside of brain science.

## SET & SETTING

These compounds pull the rug out from under from simple

mechanistic cosmology. We all know about set and setting. Set and setting have a tremendously powerful role in producing experience. But set and setting are not mechanistic activities. They're cultural elements. They're narrative elements. They have to do with meaning. So by going into a psychedelic experience, even from a skeptical point of view, anyone who's really investigating the phenomenon will recognize that your own mind frame, and your own physical setting, will help produce the different qualities of the events. So there's no way to fully account for that from the perspective of brain science alone. You have to go to culture. You have to go to the shaman's performance, the fact that it looks like I'm pulling a quartz crystal out of your body at some point or another. So it opens up this whole problem or issue of self-programming, programming environment, intentionality. And all of those elements, especially intentionality, are precisely the elements that are extremely vital for us to keep at the center of our vision as we move into what I often fear is a fairly concerted attack on certain kinds of individual liberties and the liberties of consciousness itself.

But again, there's kind of an interesting problem, which is the same thing that I talked about with the shamanic worldview. If we were in a traditional society, the framework, the intention, the set and setting would be a given. We are brought up in it, we already know to some extent what's going on, what's going to happen with these experiences, and they are organized and explained and integrate us, because we already have that map. We've grown up into it, it's in the background, and maybe the shaman is a technician of culture, aware of how to maintain that cultural reality to some degree, using things that are maybe not included in that cultural reality, even using tricks to maintain that perception for the tribe. But we don't have that option any more. So what do we do? What is our intention? What is the frame? What is the set and setting that we organize? These are very big questions.

## THE CORPORATE STATE

How does the liminal role of psychedelics fit into our world in

terms of policy, in terms of the law? It's interesting to look at the role of psychedelic culture within the larger picture of drugs as constructed by the state, or by the concurrent consensus reality. What interests me is that in some ways, it's not a bad thing. And I don't mean that to say that it's not bad that people are being incarcerated and having their lives ruined. Obviously major suffering goes down and I'm not talking about that. What I'm trying to say is that nonetheless, it puts psychedelic culture in a very curious place inside the larger cultural framework. It has some very productive qualities to it.

One of those is that it avoids some of the traps that occur with any sort of mainstream or corporate or state-oriented recuperation of psychoactive substances. This really came to me in an interesting way. I'm not entirely sure I believe myself on this one, but I do think it's an interesting issue to raise. When Rick Doblin [founder and president of MAPS] was talking about his plan to get MDMA made legal [at the Lindesmith Center-Drug Policy Foundation's "The State of Ecstasy" conference], it was a very sophisticated, very interesting plan. But when he was presenting it, at the end of his presentation he was casting his vision of these "Ecstasy clinics," where people would go and they would be legitimate, and you'd have nice paintings and everything would be set up, and you'd have these kind people who'd be helping you through these sorts of experiences. I kind of had this weird feeling inside. I had this little strange kind of shiver, of like, "Okay, but I don't know that that's all of it." And the reason I say that is that one of the things I think is going to happen—it's already happening, you see it all over the place—is this transformation of the corporate culture of psychoactivity and psychoactive drugs. If you look at Prozac, if you look at Ritalin, you see that there is a willingness inside of civilization or whatever you want to call this particular monster, to willingly use powerful psychoactive drugs in order to restore certain models of normal behavior, certain models of happiness, certain models of satisfaction. And there's nothing wrong with happiness or satisfaction. There's nothing wrong with recognizing profoundly dysfunctional behaviors and finding ways, even very technological ways, of overcoming those behaviors. Nonetheless, there is something that happens when those activities and those possibilities

become incorporated into the state. And by the state, I don't just mean the government. I mean the kind of large corporate state that we live in. And so there's a profound difference between decriminalization and legalization. And we're not anywhere near a point where we're going to be able to deal with these things. At the moment, people are suffering and we have to fight that battle, and again I'm not talking about keeping things the way they are. But what I am talking about is that I don't think it's an accident that psychedelics occupy this curious position

MDMA is a very different category in a lot of ways. MDMA is operating again in a very liminal space, between the crazy world of psychedelics that must be suppressed—those wild and crazy kids, those nuts from California—and Prozac. So you start to see mainstream media going, “This stuff's not so bad!” *The New York Times*, *Time* magazine: “Hmm, you know, it's not that different from the serotonin-based SSRIs and such.” But one of the things about that is because Ecstasy by itself, though incredibly productive and marvelous in so many ways, does not puncture consensus reality the way psychedelics puncture consensus reality. And so I don't think it's an accident that it's in this zone, because in some ways you can imagine a reorganization of our current environment in which Ecstasy is somehow integrated. That's not necessarily a bad thing. It's just that as soon as you start to integrate it, then it becomes manipulated by that cultural machine, which has agendas that have nothing to do necessarily with you feeling better, with you discovering more love and intimacy in your life. It becomes a regulatory mechanism, a way of managing human subjectivity in an increasingly dense and chaotic and open-ended social environment.

So in some ways, psychedelics have a very interesting place because they're not integrated into that world. And for me, one of the things that is the most productive and full of potential about them is that they're going to puncture your consensus reality. They're going to knock you out of whatever that structure is, even in terms of your models of healing, even in terms of your models of deeper interconnection with nature. You think you're going to get the great earth momma embracing you in some kind of jaguar-rich forest, and

you get sucked into some sort of interdimensional wormhole built by malevolent-looking insectoid creatures, and you go, “Man, I was going for the nature vibe sort of thing!” That's great. It's that pulling the rug out from under you. And so it's very interesting to look at the difference between MDMA and psychedelic culture in that sense.

## RELIGION & SPIRITUALITY

The final zone I want to talk about in terms of this liminality is religion or spirituality. A good example of something analogous to where we are in terms of the role of psychedelics in our spiritual/religious quest today from history is to look at the mystery religions of late antiquity. Many people have drawn what I think are very valid connections between the last few centuries of the Roman Empire, and our world now. You have a potentially globalized environment full of huge varieties of different kinds of people, a sort of mechanized state that is very efficient but utterly corrupt at the top. You have a very urban environment, in which many different kinds of people are coming together, and people are pulled out of their tribal connections to the places they come from. There's a lot more movement in the empire. And it's in this environment that you see the rise of the mystery religions. Not particularly the famous mystery religion of Eleusis, which is a very important part of our psychedelic story, but was actually much older than most of these mystery religions. But it was more the sense that the way to serve this spiritual hunger was to enter into these cult sects, where at the heart of the whole operation was an experience, an otherworldly experience. And they were not by any means all produced by psychoactive substances; in fact, I don't think you necessarily need very much psychoactive substances involved in the production of these kinds of mystical experiences in order for them to be very heavy and transformative. And yet there was a desire for this kind of experience, for a sense of the self that went beyond the body, that was very similar to now.

So it's interesting to think about how we relate to this model of the mystery religions. I see an unfortunate reductive tendency of some psychedelic research, particularly the historical stuff, to find



behind all of these vast mysteries of religions across the globe some kind of substance that's "actually" producing things. We know there's something going on with soma, we know there's something going on with Eleusis, we know that stuff is going on, and there's little fragments of it here and there, and we want to reconstruct what is actually going on. In this way, we're very modern still. We're still looking for the mechanism. We're still looking for the actual substance that allows these things to be. It's my belief that once you take into account the way that cultural reality can program or set up a certain set of expectations, a certain set of experiences, then you actually don't need many chemicals thrown into the mix in order to produce a tremendously powerful experience, and I always find it unfortunate when in some psychedelic historiography, it's almost saying, "Real spirituality is the psychedelic experience, and everything else we see is a pale reflection of it, some attempt to recapture it using some longer, slower, more painful method, or leaving aside the methods, you just have some crusty, dogmatic ideology that is the leftover of this living spiritual experience." I mean, in some ways I think that's probably an accurate description in a lot of respects, but I think it also misses a lot, and one of the things it does is it cuts against our willingness to look at what those cultural frameworks are, what the stories are that are embedded in these experiences. By overly emphasizing the "secret mushroom" behind all of the iconography or all of the lore, I think we tend to undercut the role of meaning, the role of our ongoing cultural frameworks in producing these experiences.

Another issue that's raised by the mystery religions is the larger question about what is the role of experience spiritually in the first place? There's a fairly consensus idea that we have spirituality over here, we have religion over there, and they kind of overlap. Spirituality on whatever level is about your experiences: what's actually happening, how you're becoming more integrated, your mystical experiences, the real deal, the immediacy of spirit. Whereas religion we tend to associate very justly with institutional frameworks, with collective stories, with power relations, with manifest social relationships. And there's this curious sort of balance between the two. What you have

with a traditional mystery religion is that at the heart of it, there is something like gnosis. Maybe it's produced through a substance, maybe not. But there is an experience, a profound experience of the divine, of the otherworldly. And yet, again, it is embedded in this whole set of stories and frameworks, which a) help produce the shape of those experiences, and b) even more importantly, help integrate the residue of those experiences into ordinary life.

So there's a tendency, a very strong one and very understandable, inside of psychedelic spirituality, to say, "This stuff is getting us to the goods, now we can skip all that 'religion' stuff and get right to the heart of it. We can go spiritual, we don't need religion in the broadest and most positive sense of the word." But I'm not entirely sure that that sums up the issue, because again I think without a certain kind of framework for understanding and integrating, then the spiritual experience, even the most profound state of gnosis, can become a kind of wacky hedonism. Nothing wrong with hedonism. But you probably people know people like this, or you can see it in the culture very much, where any kind of substance that you're taking in a demythologized environment where you're buying a piece of blotter or you're taking a pill, however you try to frame it, it can become just a mechanistic repetition. It can lose any edge of genuine openness and integration.

But I don't have an answer for this, because I don't know what these frames are. I don't know what the big maps are. I tend to be very distrustful of people who know what the big map is. They "know" what the story is that's organizing these experiences. We can see, for example, if you look at some Brazilian ayahuasca sects, there are some very interesting things that are happening there from a religious anthropology perspective. And yet, it doesn't take much interaction with them to see things that at least from a Western perspective are difficult: institutional hierarchies, ways of saying what's a good experience, what's a bad experience, what is the meaning of all this, and answering those questions beforehand becomes somewhat authoritarian in a traditional religious way. So it can have a great deal of social power and actually aid people in a lot of ways, and yet I think a lot of us in psychedelic culture are

uncomfortable with that. So once again this is that “in betwixt, in between”: we know there are frames, we know that by accepting and creating a spiritual environment, a spiritual story, the experiences themselves will have a much greater richness. I mean, sometimes they’ll just come in and do whatever they’re going to do anyway, but that is very much a part of it. And yet, what is our frame? What really is the story we’re telling ourselves? I don’t have an answer for that, but it fascinates me very much that there is something to the need to produce these cultural frameworks.

And I’m not sure whether the kinds of frameworks that we have so far are sufficient. If you look at them, what are the two main ones you can talk about? One of them is the therapeutic model. Again, incredibly productive, and yet I’m not always so sure whether that is getting at the real heart of the spiritual potential of these molecules. Another example is rave culture. That’s probably the best example of a kind of mass movement with a great deal of cultural power, within which people are having tremendous psychoactive experiences, and which is organized in a certain way to produce trance effects, to suggest certain kinds of images which are keying off archetypes, the drugs really plug into the music and the music plugs into the drugs, as an example of the way that technology and the drug states are really mirroring each other and as they evolve, they sort of co-create these environments. Again, they’re incredibly rich and productive in some ways, and yet in other ways I don’t think you have to be too much of a worrywart to look at some aspects of rave culture, and wonder, what are they doing? What is this for? What’s going on here? There’s always that tendency, particularly in our culture, to have things turned into a form of entertainment or a form of numbing yourself.

And so the question I always ask myself is: How can you communicate the best aspects of “psychedelic values”? There are certain kinds of psychedelic values that many people develop after a long apprenticeship with these things. I mean, I know I’ve met individuals from older generations, and there’s just certain things you pick up, a certain kind of openness, a certain kind of tolerance, a certain kind of sweetness, a certain kind of mirth that really strikes

me as part of these values. They’re almost unspoken. How do you transmit these? Is there a way to transmit them? Is it all just out of control? As soon as you start to try to control it, then you make it more like religion, you make it more like “this is the right way and this is the wrong way.” And yet, in some ways the chaotic effects of introducing these things at an increasingly mass level are worrying.

So again, I don’t have a lot of answers. But I really just wanted to paint a big picture, throwing out some questions that I know will be approached from a variety of different ways within our culture. Of course, one of the good things about the old mystery religions and that kind of model is that they’re esoteric. There’s levels of secrecy. And so in order to work yourself up to the encounter, the experience, you have to go through a lot of social machinery, a lot of preparation, a lot of preparing yourself for not really necessarily knowing what goes on. And that structure also allows the production of wisdom people, whether you call them shamans, whether you call them masters, whatever you want to call people who know their stuff, who know these worlds inside and out, but there’s a way that that knowledge passes on. There’s apprentices, and those apprentices are able to reproduce those environments, changing them always slightly as the culture itself transforms. Now we’re in an information environment, where that kind of hermeticism still goes on, and it’s vital that it does go on—most secret elite pockets are vital to the continual creation of this culture and its encounters with psychoactives. But it’s also the case that the genie is seriously out of the bottle. It’s much easier in some senses to “get” things, to pluck on the information networks and come up with a lot of very powerful information, that in a more traditional society which would be highly guarded by the wacky alchemists, the witch at the edge of the village. Now it’s all open. That raises some really interesting ethical issues.

# Psychedelic Medicine: Mind Bending, Health Giving

by John Horgan

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JOHN HALPERN clearly remembers what made him change his mind about psychedelic drugs. It was the early 1990s and the young medical student at a hospital in Brooklyn, New York, was getting frustrated that he could not do more to help the alcoholics and addicts in his care. He sounded off to an older psychiatrist, who mentioned that LSD and related drugs had once been considered promising treatments for addiction. “I was so fascinated that I did all this research,” Halpern recalls. “I was reading all these papers from the 60s and going, whoa, wait a minute! How come nobody’s talking about this?”

More than a decade later, Halpern is now an associate director of substance abuse research at Harvard University’s McLean Hospital, and is at the forefront of a revival of research into psychedelic medicine. He recently received approval from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to give late-stage cancer patients the psychedelic drug MDMA, also known as ecstasy. He is also laying the groundwork for testing LSD as a treatment for dreaded super-migraines known as cluster headaches.

And Halpern is not alone. Clinical trials of psychedelic drugs are planned or under way at numerous centres around the world for conditions ranging from anxiety to alcoholism. It may not be long before doctors are legally prescribing hallucinogens for the first time in decades. “There are medicines here that have been overlooked, that are fundamentally valuable,” says Halpern.

These developments are a remarkable turnaround. Scientists first became interested in psychedelic drugs—also called hallucinogens because of their profound effect on perception—after Albert

Hofmann, a chemist working for the Swiss pharmaceutical firm Sandoz, accidentally swallowed LSD in 1943. Hofmann’s description of his experience, which he found both enchanting and terrifying, spurred scientific interest in LSD as well as naturally occurring compounds with similar effects: mescaline, the active ingredient of the peyote cactus; psilocybin, found in magic mushrooms; and DMT, from the Amazonian shamans’ brew ayahuasca.

At first, many scientists called these drugs “psychotomimetics” because their effects appeared to mimic the symptoms of schizophrenia and other mental illnesses. However, many users rhapsodised about the life-changing insights they achieved during their experiences, so much so that in 1957, British psychiatrist Humphry Osmond proposed that the compounds be renamed “psychedelic,” from the Greek for “mind-revealing.” The term caught on, and psychiatrists started experimenting with the drugs as treatments for mental illness. By the mid-1960s, more than 1000 peer-reviewed papers had been published describing the treatment of more than 40,000 patients for schizophrenia, depression, alcoholism and other disorders.

A prominent member of this movement was Harvard psychologist Timothy Leary, who among other things tested whether psilocybin and LSD could be used to treat alcoholism and rehabilitate convicts. Although his studies were initially well received, Leary eventually lost his reputation—and his job—after he began touting psychedelics as a hotline to spiritual enlightenment. Leary’s antics helped trigger a backlash, and by the late 1960s psychedelics had been outlawed in the US, Canada and Europe. Unsurprisingly, clinical research ground to a halt, partly because obtaining the necessary permits became much more difficult, but also because few researchers were willing to risk their reputations studying demonised substances.

But to some brave souls, psychedelic medicine never lost its allure. One of them is Rick Doblin, who in 1986 founded the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS) in Sarasota, Florida, and who earned a doctorate from Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government after writing a dissertation on the federal regulation of psychedelics. For nearly 20 years MAPS has lobbied the FDA and other government agencies to allow research on psychedelics

to resume. It has also persuaded scientists to pursue the work and raised funds to support them. A similar body, the Heffter Research Institute in Santa Fe, New Mexico, was founded in 1993 by scientists with an interest in hallucinogens.

In the past couple of years their efforts have begun to pay off. Doblin is optimistic that psychedelic research is back for good, and this time it will do things right. “This gives us the chance to show that we have learned our lessons,” he says. Halpern, too, is anxious to lay to rest the ghost of Leary. “That man screwed it up for so many people,” he says.

With this in mind, Halpern says the first task for him and others is to evaluate the safety of psychedelics. And they are up against an entrenched orthodoxy: a 1971 editorial in *The Journal of the American Medical Association* warned that repeated ingestion of psychedelics causes personality deterioration. “Only a few of those who experience more than 50 ‘trips’ are spared,” it warned.

So Halpern’s first big foray into psychedelic research was aimed at risk-assessment. In the late 1990s he launched a study of members of the Native American Church, who are permitted by US law to consume peyote. Halpern examined 210 residents of a Navajo reservation in the south-west US, who fell into three categories: church members who had taken peyote at least 100 times but had had little exposure to other drugs or alcohol; non-church members who abstained from alcohol or drugs; and former alcoholics who had been sober for at least three months.

Halpern tested the subjects’ IQ, memory, reading ability and other functions. His interim results showed that church members had no cognitive impairment compared with the abstainers, and scored significantly better than recovering alcoholics. Church members also reported no “flashbacks”—sudden recurrences of a psychedelic’s effects long after the initial trip. Halpern believes this study, which he expects will be published soon, shows that contrary to the 1971 editorial, peyote at least can be taken repeatedly without adverse effects.

He is now conducting a similar assessment of MDMA. This drug is sometimes called an “empathogen” because it heightens feelings of compassion and reduces anxiety. Anecdotal reports suggest it has

therapeutic potential, and some psychiatrists used it alongside psychotherapy before it was outlawed in 1985. However, anecdotal and scientific evidence have also linked MDMA with brain damage, though the research is controversial.

### Ecstasy impact

Judging the true impact of MDMA is complicated by the fact that users often combine it with other drugs and alcohol. To get around this, Halpern recruited a group of American mid-westerners who admitted taking MDMA but said they shunned other substances. He separated them into “moderate” users, who had consumed MDMA 22 to 50 times, and “heavy” users, who had taken it more than 50 times.

Halpern recently reported in the journal *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* that, compared with controls, heavy users displayed “significant deficits” in mental processing speed and impulsivity. Moderate users, however, had no major problems. Halpern believes this shows that MDMA’s benefits may outweigh its risks for certain patients. And apparently the FDA and the McLean Hospital agree, since both have approved Halpern’s plan to test MDMA as an anti-anxiety drug for a dozen late-stage cancer patients. Halpern still needs permission from the Drug Enforcement Administration, but he expects to begin recruiting patients soon.

He is also interested in the potential benefits of the true hallucinogens. In 1996, he reviewed almost 100 substance abuse trials involving LSD, psilocybin, DMT and ibogaine, an extract of the African shrub *Tabernanthe iboga*. Halpern found tentative evidence that the drugs can reduce addicts’ cravings during a post-trip “afterglow” lasting for a month or two. Exactly how this happens is something of a mystery. A popular theory is that the benefits stem from the drugs’ psychological effects, which include profound insights and cathartic emotions, but Halpern suspects that there may be a biochemical explanation too.

For now, however, Halpern isn’t planning to pursue addiction therapy. He is more interested in another medical use for LSD and



psilocybin: treating a debilitating condition known as cluster headaches. These attacks appear to be caused by swelling of blood vessels in the brain and are worse than migraines. Sufferers say the pain exceeds that of passing a kidney stone or giving birth without anaesthetics. They affect about 3 in every 1000 people sporadically, and 1 in 10,000 chronically. “There’s a tremendous potential need for this,” says Halpern, who investigated the problem after being approached by a patient group.

Many patients get little or no relief from painkillers, but some claim that small doses of LSD or psilocybin can alleviate the headaches and even prevent them from occurring. Halpern was intrigued; LSD is chemically related to ergot, a naturally occurring compound that constricts blood vessels, and the derivatives ergotamine and methysergide are commonly prescribed for migraines.

Halpern and his Harvard colleague Andrew Sewell are now gathering evidence to persuade licensing officials—and themselves—that LSD and psilocybin merit a clinical trial. Sewell has gathered more than 60 testimonials from cluster headache sufferers who have treated themselves with LSD or psilocybin.

Another member of the vanguard in the psychedelic revival is Charles Grob, a psychiatrist at the Harbor-UCLA Medical Center in Los Angeles, California, and co-founder of the Heffter Institute. After years struggling to get permits, Grob says he is slowly moving forward with a study into using psilocybin to reduce distress in terminal cancer patients. He points out that studies done in the 1960s suggested that psychedelics can help patients come to terms with their impending death. So far Grob has treated three patients, but he hopes to enroll more subjects shortly.

Grob has also led several investigations like Halpern’s peyote study, but looking at ayahuasca, the DMT-rich shamanic brew. Ayahuasca often causes nausea and diarrhoea, and its psychedelic effects can be terrifying, but Amazonian shamans nonetheless prize it for its visionary properties. Since 1987 it has been a legal sacrament for several churches in Brazil, the largest of which is União Do Vegetal. UDV combines elements of Christianity with nature worship, and claims 8000 members.

In 1996 a team led by Grob reported in the *Journal of Nervous And Mental Disease* that UDV members who regularly took ayahuasca were on average physiologically and psychologically healthier than a control group of non-worshippers. The UDV followers also had more receptors for the neurotransmitter serotonin, which has been linked to lower rates of depression and other disorders. Many of the UDV members told the scientists that ayahuasca had helped them overcome alcoholism, drug addiction and other self-destructive behaviours.

More recently, Grob has found that adolescents who grew up participating in ayahuasca ceremonies showed no ill effects and were less likely to engage in crime and substance abuse than members of a control group. Of course, Grob acknowledges that they could be benefiting from the social effects of membership in a church as well as the effects of ayahuasca itself. Grob plans to publish these results this year.

Several other scientists are quietly pursuing psychedelic research. Since 2001, psychiatrist Francisco Moreno of the University of Arizona in Tucson has been testing psilocybin as a treatment for obsessive-compulsive disorder. Psychotherapy and antidepressants such as Prozac help many patients, but some have such severe symptoms and are so resistant to treatment that they turn to electroshock therapy and even brain surgery. As with the work on cluster headaches, Moreno’s study was motivated by reports from people with OCD that psilocybin relieves their symptoms.

So far, Moreno has given both sub-psychedelic and psychedelic doses of pure psilocybin to nine treatment-resistant OCD subjects, in a total of 29 therapy sessions. His preliminary findings suggest firstly that it is safe to ingest psilocybin, which was a primary concern of the trial. Beyond that, Moreno calls his results “promising,” but won’t discuss them further, since he plans to submit a paper to a peer-reviewed journal this year.

Meanwhile in Charleston, South Carolina, physician Michael Mithoefer is carrying out a MAPS-sponsored clinical trial of MDMA as a treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder. PTSD affects up to 20 per cent of people who experience a traumatic event, and involves distressing symptoms such as nightmares and panic attacks.



Conventional treatments typically consist of cognitive therapy and antidepressants, but many patients don't respond to these. In the past year Mithoefer has given "MDMA-assisted" psychotherapy to six treatment-resistant patients, all traumatised by violent crimes; he plans to treat 20 patients in all.

The longest-running psychedelic therapy programme started almost 20 years ago in Russia. Evgeny Krupitsky, a psychiatrist who heads a substance-abuse clinic in St Petersburg, has treated more than 300 alcoholics and about 200 heroin addicts with ketamine. Used primarily in veterinary medicine, ketamine is an anaesthetic that can trigger an extremely disorienting hallucinogenic episode lasting an hour or so. Krupitsky's subjects often emerge from their sessions filled with revulsion for their past lives and determined to change. The therapists encourage these feelings with tricks such as forcing the subjects to sniff a bottle of vodka at the peak of their session; the patients' disgust often persists long after the ketamine's effects have worn off.

In one of Krupitsky's studies, 73 out of 111 alcoholics stayed dry for at least a year after their session, compared with 24 per cent of those in a control group. Yet his programme, which was funded by MAPS and the Heffter Institute, was recently shut down because the Russian government tightened restrictions on ketamine. Although Krupitsky says he and his colleagues "are in the process of getting permission to continue," it may be several years before research resumes.

Although disappointed by this setback, Doblin is encouraged by developments elsewhere. He is lobbying officials in Spain and Israel to approve studies of MDMA for PTSD, and is raising funds for a substance-abuse trial of ibogaine outside the US together with the Heffter Institute. MAPS has also supported Frans Vollenweider, a psychiatrist at the University of Zurich in Switzerland, who has done basic research on the physiological effects of psilocybin and MDMA, and hopes to begin clinical research soon.

Doblin's primary goal is to see psychedelics legally recognised as medicines. But he also hopes that someday healthy people may take these substances for psychological or spiritual purposes, as

members of the Native American Church and União Do Vegetal do, and as he did in his youth. After all, drugs such as Prozac and Viagra are already prescribed not just to heal the ill but also to enhance the lives of the healthy.

It is still an uphill struggle. Government funds for psychedelic studies are hard to come by, and drug companies have shown absolutely no interest in supporting the research. But there are signs that the wind is changing. Although psychedelics are still classified in the US as schedule-1 drugs, and so are banned for all non-research purposes, in November a US Federal Appeals Court in Colorado ruled that a branch of the UDV based in Santa Fe, New Mexico, could import ayahuasca for use in ceremonies. Among the research findings cited in the court decision were Grob's studies showing no ill effects from ayahuasca. The Department of Justice is appealing the decision, but if the Supreme Court denies the appeal, UDV members in the US will be able to ingest ayahuasca legally.

Maybe, just maybe, after more than 30 years in the wilderness, this powerful, misunderstood but potentially mind-healing class of drugs is ready to be rehabilitated.