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BEWARE OF MAD JOHN: POLITICAL THEOLOGY, PSYCHEDELIC  
AESTHETICS AND LITERATURE

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A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of Arts and Humanities

University of Denver

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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by

Roger K. Green

November 2013

Advisor: Clark Davis

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Author: Roger K. Green

Title: Beware of Mad John: Political Theology, Psychedelic Aesthetics and Literature

Advisor: Clark Davis

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## ABSTRACT

Using the discourse of Political Theology as a mode of enquiry we can overcome a longstanding tension between aesthetics and history that characterized much of twentieth century thought. Focusing on literary and occasionally musical works from the mid twentieth century, my aim is to show how works displaying psychedelic aesthetics are important venues for political deliberation with regard to citizenship. Through affective means, psychedelic aesthetics re-imagine the boundaries of liberal subjectivity through a consciousness expansion *and return from that expansion*. The subject who returns from a psychedelic “experience” – which can be attained in various ways – comes to ethically realign and re-norm his or her “self” according to a moral authority beyond the authority of the nation state. While critical of liberalism on one level, this “expanded” citizenship ultimately offers liberalism political advice in crisis situations by performing a public sacrifice on the state and disseminating social responsibility to individuals. Psychedelic aesthetics perform this ‘public sacrifice’ through affective enchantment, using spiritual and religious rhetoric to change the relationship between citizen and state. Because artistic works of the mid twentieth century are essentially “ahead of the game” regarding states of exception and economic crises, it is to this period that we should look for methods of cultural recovery in current ones. But this requires that we take both aesthetic and religious enchantment seriously in a post-secular world.

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This is dedicated with love to E. P. and "misplaced tenderness."

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION: LIBERAL SUBJECTIVITY, RELIGION, AND THE STATE

To speak of an aesthetic is already a gesture toward a notion of transcendence, toward something above and between individual subjectivities. Psychedelic aesthetics<sup>1</sup> re-imagine the boundaries of liberal subjectivity through a consciousness expansion and then a return from that expansion. As such, psychedelic aesthetics challenge liberal subjectivity itself. A subject who returns from a psychedelic “experience” – which can be attained in various ways – ethically realigns and re-norms his or her “self” according to a moral authority beyond the forces that shape liberal subjectivity, beyond the

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<sup>1</sup> I use terms psychedelic aesthetics as a singular collection of a variety of different senses. This is partly because the artistic works that evidence such aesthetics tend to have synaesthetic qualities; however, as will become apparent, my intention is to point to a version of aesthetics that pushes the meaning beyond the concept “of the senses.” My attempt is not to redefine a word so much as to point to a notion of aesthetics that precedes modernity and what Jerome Schneewind calls “the invention of autonomy.” ‘Sensibility’ as an aesthetic quality depends on modern conceptions of the body in a period of secularization, and as Alasdair MacIntyre and others have pointed out, accompanies the emergence of a publicly determined moral politics. In Martin Heidegger’s ‘return’ to ontology as first philosophy in the 1920s, all philosophy becomes the ‘history’ of philosophy. Body and world cannot be easily distinguished from one-another, and in this problem the collapse of subject-object distinction that is pervasive among psychedelic aesthetics emerges. Emmanuel Levinas articulates this with his account of Heidegger’s confrontation with Cassirer (see page 16). Any theory, aesthetic or otherwise, must deal with the distinction of self and world – what makes psychedelic aesthetics important is that the blurring of self and world is foregrounding as a primary feature.



authority of the nation state. He or she has gone on a journey and returned, but this certainly does not amount to saying, “tripping makes you a better citizen.”

The focus here is psychedelic *aesthetics*, not psychedelic drugs. The metaphorical crossover between the two occurs as the result of behavior modification on a massive scale in the middle of the twentieth century. Psychedelic drugs deterritorialize the mind of a subject the same way political boundaries are challenged worldwide. With the focus on aesthetics, I am trying here to get at the *ethic* of the style of psychedelia, but style here is no mere choice among many. In psychedelic aesthetics, life itself becomes the style and is formed by something between freedom and determinism. As such, it gets at the root of human flourishing and even human rights. To be sure, perception is part of this, but it is really a collapse of sight and sound and sense, of epistemology and ontology. Insofar as the aesthetics play on the imagination itself, they are beyond any phenomenology of body alone. In this collapse of senses, a subject’s instantiation in place, custom, manner, habit and dwelling temporarily disintegrates; one “dies” and comes back. We must ask: Does responsibility disappear in such a stateless state? The return to living embodiment, to the ‘I,’ establishes the narrative possibility, not just for an account of what happened during the experience but also for a new way for things to be, for deliberation about a being toward another death. The ethic of psychedelic aesthetics is one of being beyond being-toward-death, and such an ethic has enormous implications for liberal subjectivity.

Psychedelic aesthetics model a subject's deterritorialization on multiple levels of valence simultaneously, and in doing so they inherently provide deep critiques of Western liberalism as well as the theological and metaphysical assumptions that accompany it. This critique, however, is not just a dismantling or a deconstruction. While critical of liberalism, this "expanded," psychedelic citizenship offers liberalism political advice in situations of crisis by performing a public sacrifice on the State as a transcendent entity and then disseminating social responsibility to individuals similar to ancient practices of ritual sacrifice that involved ingesting the divine.

The mythological status of the 1960s is bound up in this potential. The aesthetics during that time aspired to create a popular sovereignty, requiring not just the dissemination of State power but also the maintaining of such power through immanently "enchanted" individuals. The sacrifice of central power affirms the community, but the enchantment is necessary to sustain it; the sacrifice is no mere secular act. The sacrifice requires the belief in the legitimacy and value of the sacrificial act. Psychedelic aesthetics perform this 'public sacrifice' by means of affective enchantment, using spiritual and religious rhetoric to change the relationship between the citizen and the State. As such, artistic works from the mid twentieth century are essentially "ahead of the game" regarding states of exception and economic crises, and it is to this period that we should look for methods of cultural recovery in current ones; but this requires that we take both aesthetic and religious enchantment seriously in a post-secular world.

My aim in this study is to present a theory of psychedelic aesthetics by tracking how psychedelic works attempt to resituate subjectivity beyond the boundaries of the nation State. This is more than an ideological critique. Specifically, psychedelic works in the 1960s attempt to overcome the problem of modern, liberal subjectivity by critiquing *one version* of autonomous subjectivity with a longstanding history disciplined by a European cultural imaginary. Because of this, modern subjectivity is no mere set of beliefs to be transcended through consciousness-raising; it is rather an enculturated sensibility fashioned by habitus.<sup>2</sup> Psychedelic aesthetics essentially perform a different kind of habitus, which amounts to a kind of behavior modification that parallels deterritorialization and depoliticization throughout the twentieth century worldwide. In the psychedelic experience the subject, the citizen and the State collapse and amalgamate in a poetic re-making. This remaking is necessarily dynamic and cannot be isolated, and any theory approaching it must be flexible in terms of temporality. At the same time, such a theory is no mere mythological or structural criticism.

Psychedelic aesthetics do indeed potentially work to change liberal subjectivity above the specific intentions of individuals involved in psychedelic experiences, and so they may operate in a mythological time. In the process, they evangelize a more cosmopolitan version of citizenship that relies less on concepts of the individual and more on affective, inter-subjective waves. They operate where modern utopias and cultural myths meet. The inter-subjective nature is often represented through metaphors

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<sup>2</sup> This is of course Pierre Bourdieu's term, which I give a fuller account of later.

of electricity and “turning on.” More recently, these ‘inter-subjective waves’ have come to play a large part in affective studies, theories of insurrection, and religious theory.

The purpose for a theory of psychedelic aesthetics is to articulate these recent cultural trends and historically situate them. For example, drawing heavily on Marxist and poststructural theories, a group calling itself The Invisible Committee published a politically incendiary book entitled *The Coming Insurrection* in 2007 in France as a response to riots in French suburban ghettos known as *banlieues* (13). In November of 2008, members of the Invisible Committee were arrested by French authorities on the charge of “criminal association for the purposes of terrorist activity,” and the book was used as evidence (5). After it was translated into English and published by the small academic journal, *Semiotext(e)*, then distributed by MIT Press, political pundits on the right jumped on the publication as a sure sign that liberalism was under attack by academic elites. Ironically, the pundits gave far more public exposure to the incendiary ideas in doing so. *The Coming Insurrection* then served as a motivating factor for philosopher Simon Critchley’s exploration of political theology and “supreme fiction” in *Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (2012), in which Critchley calls for a return to poetry as a way to revive faith in liberal democracy.

As described by the Invisible Committee, affective waves bring violence and destruction to the nation-state that cannot be traced to one source, and the lack of subjectivity resists any culpability necessary for legal prosecution. No *one* or no *one group* can be deemed responsible.

Revolutionary movements do not spread by contamination but by *resonance*. Something that is constituted here resonates with the shockwave emitted by something constituted over there. A body that resonates does so according to its own mode. An insurrection is not like a plague or a forest fire – a linear process that spreads from place to place after an initial spark. (12)

What looks like literary criticism here becomes justification for de-politicization or, for some, terrorist insurgency with no central authority or command structure. The question becomes one of not just the intentionality of the resonating individual but what effect intentionality has on a larger chorus. Like Deleuze and Guattari's descriptions of affect with terms like "becoming" and "assemblage," insurrections work more like music, "whose focal points, though dispersed in time and space, succeed in imposing the rhythm of their own vibrations, always taking on more density" (Invisible Committee 13). Yet, unlike the 1960s activist terrorism in the United States, according to The Invisible Committee, the "weather underground" cannot control the forces of nature. Insurrection for them is not a matter of a cell or an organization but an assemblage of violence. One does not "help the revolution along." The Invisible Committee claims a kind of "becoming" that happens extra-subjectively. Their rhetoric embraces an enchanted and vibrant vitalism, and the fear that the book inspired expresses the fact that political officials take seriously the radicals' claims, at least implicitly, to be in touch with the infinite forces motivating life and death. There is an implicit hermeneutic fusion with the "force of nature." With this, The Invisible Committee participates in a return to nature as primordial and pre-political typical of psychedelic aesthetics. As the mind-manifested return to the pre-political formulates an emerging political desire, The Invisible

Committee's uniting of affective alliance to religious violence and extremist terrorism resounds with studies in Political Theology.

Such studies accompany alarmist critiques that "secular society" is in danger from a breakdown in liberalism during the post-Cold War era, which has accompanied an increase in religious fundamentalism. For example, Olivier Roy has argued in *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* that the same forces of globalized secularism which produced neo-fundamentalism in discussions of "Islam" post 9/11 are also those forces which have produced conservative Christian "neo" fundamentalists with their intensified interest in affective and personal relationships with God (220-231). New Age religions adapt to commercializing forces of globalization, "diluting" traditional religiosity, and then producing the desire for stronger religious bonds among especially de-territorialized converts. According to Roy, "religious norms are not so much culture-compatible as culture-blind, because they bypass the very concept of culture in the same way as the US army dreams of an 'any-religion-compatible' combat ration" (330). Roy then claims, "the culture-blind approach of neofundamentalists explains why, in Christianity as well as Islam, only fundamentalists are winning more converts in an era of globalization and uprootedness." The desire for "stronger" religion here appears to be in the anchoring it provides for an individual to be a subject, but this also appears to be a reaction to the historical contingencies arising with globalization and "uprootedness" or de-territorialization. Neo-fundamentalism in this reading would then be an attempt to re-

territorialize after the expansion and trauma of de-territorialization. How such global positioning occurs would then produce effects on citizenship.

But the roots for theorizing such moves occur in the 1960s. Unsurprisingly, it was during this time that the terms of poststructural criticism came into play to account for the dynamic forces affecting and resituating subjectivity (self) and objectivity (world or territory). The criticism was intertwined with the French State's relation to insurrection decolonization in the postwar years, and it receives a renewed vigor in the United States after 9/11.

While in the late 1960s and 1970s, an interest in post-structuralism may have implicitly signified a kind of radical leftist critique of culture, the interest in post-structural theory no longer implicitly signifies a political view on a horizontal spectrum of right or left. Religious theorist John Caputo, in *The Weakness of God*, has turned to Jacques Derrida and postmodern thought while arguing for an uninstitutionalized reading of God: "prayer is not the private property of the faithful but a common passion, indeed, the common lot of us all, for we are all praying and weeping for the coming of something, even if, especially if, we know not what, which leaves us praying to be able to pray" (18). Similarly, Don Cupitt has argued for an anarchic reversal of European universalism in *Mysticism after Modernity*, a reversal that takes place in the act of writing as a kind of practical mysticism. As the discourse of Political Theology shows, in our current era, faith has become increasingly publicized as radically affective, vertical, and subjective – often based on charismatic gnosis, which like the counterculture in the 1960s

challenged traditionally authoritative institutions through affective identification. It is my contention that the forces concerning liberal society today have roots in 1960s activism and are informed by what I am calling psychedelic aesthetics.

If I am correct, this lineage and political shifting creates a state of confusion between notions of political conservatives and liberals as identity categories. It is not merely that bipartisan politics do not work; it is the framing of the political identities themselves that does not work. Neo-fundamentalism, I will claim, is largely “psychedelic,” and traditional distinctions between liberals as “secularists” and conservatives as “religiously pious” or “Christian right” no longer hold. The challenge such a statement poses to dogmatic liberals, to those for whom a turn to strong faith is the exact opposite of the ideals of the 1960s, lies in the tension between religious enchantment and unexamined beliefs in narratives of secularization and modernism. Psychedelic aesthetics, however, move beyond traditional conceptions of nation-states and have larger concerns than bipartisan politics or horizontal political spectrums.

Rather than focusing on religious studies or social scientific approaches to the phenomena of de-territorialization and re-positioning, I believe that to study affective waves requires the study of aesthetic works across multiple mediums. As Aldous Huxley, perhaps the grand theorist of psychedelic aesthetics and unassuming political theologian pointed out in *Ends and Means* in the late 1930s, social problems need to be addressed from multiple angles simultaneously. My focus in this work is literary prose and philosophical theory, with the intention to build on my previous work, *Toward an*



*Ethical Aesthetics: A Study of Levinas, Mid Twentieth Century Avant-garde Jazz, and Poetry.* In that work, my central claim is that attempts to dismantle traditional notions of aesthetic form in avant-garde jazz and poetry of the 1960s relocate the form of an artistic work as the body of the artist, thus creating heightened ethical and communicative relationships between performers and audiences through instant interaction. In the current work, this concept is extended through my analysis of Antonin Artaud's affect on Abbie Hoffman's activism. In both works there is a heavy transatlantic quality that perhaps makes my work seem a bit Eurocentric. My goal, however, is not so much to claim direct lineage for aesthetic ideas that permeate culturally. In fact, I tend rather to believe that social ideas work in affective waves that are oversimplified by strictly causal historical and even material-historical analyses. Artistic ideas do not work in linear sequence, and I believe that aesthetic enquiry is the most useful way to track these waves. But that does not mean historical situations are irrelevant in aesthetic studies. The historical forces that come to shape this project are large – much larger than the 1960s – and I root my study within the discourse of Political Theology so that I may access the idea of liberal subjectivity that I feel psychedelic aesthetics challenge. The philosophical theories I employ here allow me to move more efficiently through the historical forces that shape the development of psychedelic aesthetics.

For a myriad of reasons, aesthetic studies have been difficult to perform in relation to politics in the United States, to religion, and to publics as a result of a narrative of secularization that “officially” claimed the “disenchantment” of the world, a claim that

does not currently appear to have held true in what scholars are now calling the post-secular age. Frankly, the appeal of a disenchanted, secularist narrative has accompanied a materialist and purely consumerist view of art that deprives it of spirit. And this is no mere moaning for more attention to the humanities.

The simplest reason for an aesthetic study, as opposed to a sociological, material-historical, cultural or religious studies approach is that in the twentieth century, aesthetic theory moved beyond subject-object relationships. Much of this comes from European philosophy. No single thinker is ever entirely responsible for such changes, but a good heuristic to start with is Martin Heidegger's return to the study of ontology in the 1920s. Heidegger's philosophy inaugurated a re-reading of the entire history of philosophy, and in returning to questions of the nature of being, he moved beyond 'modern' conceptions of subjectivity that had informed and been posited by thinkers like Immanuel Kant. Emmanuel Levinas, an important student of Heidegger, recounts a famous encounter between Martin Heidegger and the neo-Kantian Ernst Cassirer at Davos in 1929.

Heidegger was presenting

being understood starting from its verbal form as the event of being and as that which is an issue for men. A necessary meaning to the understanding of all beings. For Heidegger, science is certainly one of the modalities of the intelligible, but a modality that is already derivative. He sought the origin in the human being, whose being consists in understanding being and thus the point where the being of beings acquires meaning. (35)

Heidegger's thinking as perceived by the young Levinas and his peers signifies the overturning of modern European philosophy and especially neo-Kantian philosophy. He

says, “For a young student the impression was of being present at the creation and the end of the world” and that “Cassirer presented an order that was going to be undone.” As I will frame it, Immanuel Kant’s thinking accompanied the emergence of modern, European autonomous subjectivity – a subjectivity that still powerfully informs aesthetic sensibilities. This means that while the art and the study of aesthetics may have moved beyond subject-object relationships throughout the twentieth century, many people remain habituated to modernist aesthetic sensibilities; even if they have never heard of Kant, he is still present and relevant.

The overcoming of subject-object distinction in post-Heideggerian (and in a different way, pragmatist) thought presented classical ‘theory’ of all sorts – but especially aesthetic theory – with a conundrum: If there is no inside and outside, how can one possibly *do theory*? How can one philosophize at the “end” of philosophy? How can one speak of aesthetics – of “the senses” – except in a way to show the transference of power: that is, to show who has been *subjected* to what? The difficulty of such questions led many to believe by the end of the twentieth century that any “theory” was either impossible or ‘dead’ or served merely to distinguish an academic elite from the public. But these questions themselves inherit and express the *burden* of modern-subjectivity informed by Kant, the *burden* of subjective responsibility. It is in some ways an arrogant burden – one that takes on the burden as a performance to maintain its own discursive authority and subjectivity. As such, I believe the refusal to engage with the ‘impossibility’ of theory is merely an act of bad faith that perpetuates intellectual

arrogance. Such regressive and complacent thinking has led more recent philosophers like Simon Critchley, heavily informed by Levinas, to call for a “faith of the faithless” or an “ethics of infinity” in his books of the same titles. In such theories, subjectivity itself is an ongoing ethical question, and it is ongoing because it is politically deliberative, especially with relation to conceptions of freedom and spirituality. As this philosophical shift in perspective moved across the Atlantic Ocean, largely through a mass exodus of European scholars between the wars, it mingled with the always more “enchanted” American thought – be it pragmatism or New Thought.

Mitchell Aboulafia, in *Transcendence: On Self-Determination and Cosmopolitanism*, brilliantly shows this problem to crisscross the Atlantic Ocean during the twentieth century by comparing the work of Jean-Paul Sartre to the pragmatism of John Dewey – two philosophers not regularly thought of together. “The ‘trick’ to addressing the similarity between Dewey and Sartre,” Aboulafia says,

is to see that they both assume that experience entails prereflective and reflective relationships to the future . . . Even though Sartre’s account of how the anticipatory is possible is different from Dewey’s more naturalistic account, their theories of action both depend on a practical orientation toward the future. (37)

The theoretical moves that thinkers like Critchley and Aboulafia make use of implicitly point well beyond conceptions of either the ‘death’ of theory or the ‘end’ of philosophy. Indeed, they push toward a conception of being beyond ‘being-toward-death,’ which had characterized human life for Heidegger, Sartre, and to a lesser extent Levinas. But for me, they don’t reach far enough. The collapse of subjectivity and objectivity are at the

heart of psychedelic aesthetics, and studying them can build off of the deliberative qualities of these philosophers by grounding them in literary study. Such an approach must necessarily be interdisciplinary.

### *Methodological Problems in the Disciplines*

It has been a problem in literary studies to move beyond the relationship of text and reception of text, just as in philosophy there has been a tendency to oversimplify the stability of texts and their relationships to authorship. Too narrow a conception of literature as “text-based” frames the experience of literature in terms of a subject-object relationship. Of course, many post-modern literary works destroy such a conception and make theory in its older sense more difficult. In this space, texts, whether literary or critical, become more performative than simply expressive or descriptive. Criticism becomes literature and vice versa. Over-specialization in disciplinary fields that cannot conceive of the generative aspects of both literature and criticism, but rather attempt to posit that writing and reading can be separated from one another, or that the text can be studied “scientifically,” remove the deliberative qualities of literary study and theory by relegating literature to the place of an historical artifact. As such they remove all politically discursive power of art, no matter the medium while essentially siphoning-off enchanted qualities of that art into homogenous ether. This disciplinary fragmentation creates the exigency for a return to aesthetics as an ethical frame for study. Such work is being done in philosophy and theory, with thinkers like Simon Critchley and Victoria

Kahn<sup>3</sup> who call for attention to poetics as “making” and *Homo Faber*. If this work appears as heavily ‘philosophical,’ that is why. Aesthetic focuses can reorient and perhaps ameliorate professional tensions within various ‘disciplines’ that are simply unproductive while putting them into dialogue with other, more culturally relevant public areas of study – biopolitics, religious studies, political economy, etc.

If an aesthetic focus is adopted, a methodological problem arises: how do we study “affective waves” that move beyond subject-object distinction? Rather than focusing heavily on affect theory itself, my treatment here will be partly historical. In doing so, I hope to provide some scholarly backing for the rise in affect theory itself, although my true aim is something more politically motivated with regard to citizenship and less interested in a “field” of Affect Theory. In my reading, affective ‘waves,’ like cultural ‘movements’ exceed form. Like Gilles Deleuze’s ‘rhizomatic’ thinking, developed from Henri Bergson’s vitalism, studies of plant-life have changed traditional notions of how consciousness operates. This research is ongoing in the “hard sciences,” especially with relation to psychedelics. For example, The Cottonwood Research Project, headed by Rick Strassman,<sup>4</sup> who conducted extensive research on Dimethyltryptamine (DMT) in the 1990s, recently announced the publication of a paper documenting the presence of DMT in the pineal gland of live rats:

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<sup>3</sup> See particularly with regard to Kahn, “Political Theology and Liberal Culture: Strauss, Schmitt, Spinoza, and Arendt” in *Political Theology & Early Modernity*, edited by Graham Hammill and Julia Reinhard Lupton.

<sup>4</sup> Strassman is also the author of *DMT: The Spirit Molecule*, which documents his research.

Research at the University of Wisconsin has recently demonstrated the presence of the DMT-synthesizing enzyme as well as activity of the gene responsible for the enzyme in pineal (and retina). Our new data now establish that the enzyme actively produces DMT in the pineal. The next step is to determine the presence of DMT in cerebrospinal fluid (CSF), the fluid that bathes the brain and pineal. CSF is a possible route for pineal-synthesized DMT to effect changes in brain function. Successfully establishing DMT's presence in this gland adds another link in the chain between the pineal and consciousness and opens new avenues for research.

DMT has been found to be a common compound in many forms of organic life. This research is pushing the boundaries not only of consciousness studies, but also of the definitions between humans and animals. Like recent philosophers, who, building out of Heidegger's return to origins of speech and being, and, through poststructuralism challenged the traditional notions of subjectivity inherited through the Kantian tradition call for a return to poetics as "making," contemporary scientific studies can now physically discuss subjectivity and objectivity with more precision. In any case, however, as the definition of humanity exceeds traditional notions of humans as rational speaking animals, there are emerging implications for liberalism, which is rooted in the valuing of human rights. As the parameters for defining humans are modified, so must the conception of human rights be modified. Awaiting further research in the hard sciences, I present a study of psychedelic aesthetics because I believe they implicitly point the way to notions of metempsychosis by creating works and experiences as incarnations of the psychedelic or "mind-manifested" state. In doing so, psychedelic aesthetics present a way of moving beyond twentieth-century philosophy's concern with

time and being-toward-death and open up deliberative potential for discussing international human rights as soft law.<sup>5</sup>

In order to articulate how psychedelic aesthetics do this, I draw on the terms Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari express in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, particularly the notions of “deterritorialization” and “assemblage.” Deterritorialization in my reading refers to any process disrupting a sense of place, home, natural environment, or species identification; while an assemblage manifests as an orientation, or more properly a re-orientation, from that deterritorialized space:

Deterritorialization, “I was disoriented...” (a perception of things, thoughts, desires in which desire, thought, and the thing have invaded all of perception: the imperceptible finally perceived. Nothing left but the world of speeds and slownesses without form, without subject, without a face. Nothing left but the zigzag of a line, like “the lash of the whip of an enraged cart driver” shredding faces and landscapes. A whole rhizomatic labor of perception, the moment when desire and perception meld. (283)

Importantly, an assemblage is not merely a result of the imposed will of a subject. It is not “in the eye of the beholder,” but rather determined by multiple social forces acting simultaneously on the subject:

There is no doubt that an assemblage never contains a causal infrastructure. It does have, however, and to the highest degree, an abstract line of creative or specific causality, its *line of flight or deterritorialization*; this line can be effectuated only in connection with general causalities of another nature, but is in no way explained by them.

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<sup>5</sup> See the final chapter for a more in-depth discussion of soft law.



Through an assemblage then, a subject locates his or her ‘self’ while simultaneously knowing that self to be “unoriginal.” Drugs, in this context “appear to be an agent of becoming.”

The psychedelic experience always includes a deterritorialized assemblage, but also the articulation of the assemblage through the process of re-territorialization, of orienting and grounding. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari, writing in the recent aftermath of the psychedelic movement, are understandably suspicious of drugs. They do claim, however, that “drugs give the unconscious the immanence and plane that psychoanalysis botched” (284). The mistake drug addicts make, Deleuze and Guattari suggest, is always to “start over again from ground zero, either going on the drug again or quitting, when what they should do is make it a stopover, to start from the middle.” They conclude with a sense that drug use is “over”: “Drugs are too unwieldy to grasp the imperceptible and becomings-imperceptible; drug users believed that drugs would grant them the plane, when in fact the plane must distill its own drugs, remaining master of speeds and proximities” (286). Deleuze and Guattari are perhaps overly concerned with addictive drugs rather than psychedelics, but in Ken Kesey’s terms, this amounts to the need to “graduate” from the famous Acid Tests in the mid 1960s. For Deleuze and Guattari (and again we can get a sense of the kinds of drugs they are critiquing here), drugs speed things up and slow things down, but the process of becoming is something different.

Starting from the form one has, the subject one is, the organs one has, or the functions one fulfills, becoming is to extract particles between which one

establishes the relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness that are *closest* to what one is becoming, and through which one becomes. This is the sense in which becoming is the process of desire. (272)

The fulfillment of “the process of desire,” with respect to psychedelics, has remained in a state of cultural limbo due to legal restrictions preventing research, but as more recent studies have suggested, there is more to the picture with regard to psychedelics than what Deleuze and Guattari have to say about drugs in general. Even so, their terminology is useful.

In his recent ethnography of psychedelics, *Neuropsychodelia*, New School anthropologist and M.D. Nicolas Langlitz points out that psychedelics like LSD are generally on the wane in terms of street use due to their non-addictive qualities, which makes them less lucrative to sell and maintain a consistent customer base. Yet a resurgence of psychedelic testing in “the decade of the brain” has proved fruitful both for scientific and religious perspectives. His fieldwork in laboratories in the United States and Switzerland suggests

that the current resurgence of psychedelic science is not just another story of disenchantment (from magic mushrooms to 5-HT<sub>2A</sub> receptor agonists) but has produced a form of laboratory life that continues to be suffused with the peculiar kind of mysticism that emerged from the psychedelic culture of the 1950s and 1960s. (Kindle Locations 118-121)

These scientific studies, he claims, do not result in a presentation of “bare life,” and he ends up arguing that “perennial might be a more suitable term” as a way to address “theological questions and spiritual experiences [which] continue to serve as a moral

motor of the ongoing revival of scientific studies of hallucinogenic compounds” (Kindle Locations 432-433). The perennial (among other uses in this context) resounds as a reference to Aldous Huxley’s *Perennial Philosophy*.

Bringing together Langlitz’s view with Deleuze and Guattari’s affective terms, we can claim that psychedelic aesthetics are not *one* aesthetic, but a collection of affective tendencies that move backward in time while also being future-oriented. A strict period study alone will not capture the different temporal gestures within the aesthetics. They are philosophical in the sense that they gesture toward humans in general rather than “man in the particular,” and in doing so they constantly attempt to exceed the form of one life. These aesthetics gesture then, toward the ‘spiritual,’ toward a communion and return from something beyond self, and as they incarnate in critiques of citizenship, they introduce (or re-introduce) a kind of spiritual enchantment to spheres once thought to be entirely secular and historicized. Because of these spiritual aspects, I have chosen Political Theology as a discursive frame rather than pure affect theory or any one discipline.

### *Political Theology*

Political Theology, as I use the term, relates to an interdisciplinary scholarly discussion developing out of the journal *Telos* in the late 1980s. Traditionally aligned with a radical leftist critique of culture, *Telos* later came to be suspicious of attempts to take a position “outside” of culture. In the late 1980s, the journal began to publish a

number of articles studying the German legal theorist, Carl Schmitt. As Scott G. McNall writes, because of Schmitt's Nazism, "the very fact that the journal reviewed and discussed his work was deeply suspect, [and] Schmitt predicted the decline of federations and nation states, seeing them as inherently unstable, while *Telos* celebrated loose affiliations" (110). *Telos* founder, Paul Piccone was a leftist critic who rejected "managerial liberalism" and sought a turn "to authors outside the Left and on the edge of liberalism as sources. Carl Schmitt was the most prominent of these" (Turner 117). Schmitt's 1922 book, *Political Theology*, famously opens by defining the sovereign as "the one who makes the decision in a state of exception" (Schmitt 5). While the book has been important for growing concerns over the place of religion in the religious sphere, it has also been of interest because of the famous aesthete, Walter Benjamin.

In his habilitation, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Benjamin writes that "whereas the modern concept of sovereignty amounts to a supreme executive power on the part of the prince, the baroque concept emerges from a discussion of the state of emergency, and makes it the most important function of the prince to avoid this" (65). He then claims that "the theological-juridical mode of thought, which is so characteristic of the [seventeenth] century, is an expression of the retarding effect of the over-strained transcendental impulse, which underlies all of the provocatively worldly accents of the baroque" (65-66). The focus on the prince as the continued site of community holds the physical world and the theological world together for Benjamin. The more worldly the State, the more transcendent the leaders must be. Benjamin's notes to this section cite

Schmitt's *Political Theology*, and as Samuel Weber has noted, Benjamin personally wrote Schmitt, sending a copy of *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, and thanking Schmitt for thought crucial to his aesthetic theory:

You will very quickly recognize how much my book is indebted to you for its presentation of the doctrine of sovereignty in the seventeenth century. Perhaps I may also say, in addition, that I have also derived from your later works, especially the "Diktatur," a confirmation of my modes of research in the philosophy of art from yours in the philosophy of the state. (In Weber 5)

Benjamin, one of the most important aesthetes in the twentieth century was, through Schmitt, able to use Political Theological ideas for the basis of aesthetic criticism, and the subtext of Benjamin's book is the liberal crisis in the Weimar Republic during the late 1920s. To some, it is fascinating that Benjamin would so openly align his thinking with Schmitt, who was already a conservative and went on to become a member of the Nazi party and an outspoken anti-Semite. The renewed interest in Schmitt in journals like *Telos* and *diacritics* in the late 1980s and early 1990s marks a moment when thinking which had originally aligned itself closely with Benjamin and the Frankfurt School's leftist politics, had come to be suspicious of their Critical Theory. But even earlier in the century, Schmitt's influence is apparent. Michael Hoelzl and Graham Ward, translator's of Schmitt's *Political Theology II*, note in their introduction that in post-1968 Germany, the rabbi and theologian, Jacob Taubes, invited Alexandre Kojève to lecture in Germany – a political move to inspire Leftists with French thought – Kojève's response was that the eighty-year-old Carl Schmitt was "the only person in Germany worth speaking to"

(19). When this drew obvious concern among German intellectuals, Taubes used Benjamin's correspondence with Schmitt as conciliatory evidence (20).

Inherent in the revived discussion of Political Theology is a critique of the secularization narratives that historically parallel the development of modern nation states. Since I am claiming that psychedelic aesthetics employ spiritual or religious affectation to critique modern subjectivity, Political Theology seems an apt, even if at first-glance surprising, discourse to pair with the psychedelic. Or, perhaps the political convergence with drug legislation and social protests is relatively obvious while the theological aspects are more oblique.

While Political Theology has different and more specific variants as a term in Christian discourse, the rise of its interest among scholars since the late 1980s has also accompanied questions concerning the nature of religious discourse in the public sphere, particularly in the post 9/11 era. The Italian philosopher of aesthetics, Giorgio Agamben, builds on Carl Schmitt's *Political Theology*, calling the post 9/11 era an extended state of exception. Accompanying this is the disappearance of a certain European notion of transcendence in favor of more immanent views, especially in relation to bulky legal apparatuses that cannot function in states of exception. These "leaderless" states imply an "absent throne" (or perhaps a puppet-throne) and a return to nature, the pre-political, or the perennial. Agamben names this, building from Schmitt, explicitly in the book *State of Exception*:

The immediately biopolitical significance of the state of exception as the original structure in which law encompasses living beings by means of its own suspension

emerges clearly in the “military order” issued by the president of the United States on November 13, 2001, which authorized the “indefinite detention” and trial “by means of military commissions” (not to be confused with military tribunals provided for by the law of war) of non-citizens suspected of involvement in terrorist activities. (3)

Essentially, Agamben argues that since 9/11 the United States has been in a state of exception where legal apparatuses are constantly suspended because the deliberative process is too slow to react to states of emergency.

In specific connection to the discourse of Political Theology, Agamben and other intellectuals have been taking a scrutinizing look at the foundations of liberal nation states in attempts to make sense of economic collapses and large-scale humanitarian problems. The place of religion in relation to politics and the public sphere is central to the discourse. Many, like philosopher Jurgen Habermas, feel that what liberal democracies need is an “awareness of what is missing” with regard to shifting views about secularization. Along with Habermas, philosophers such as Richard Rorty, Jacques Derrida, as well as a younger generation – Judith Butler, Giorgio Agamben, Simon Critchley, and Paul Kahn – have in the past decade engaged increasingly with the role of religion and ethics in the public sphere. In general, this amounts to a willingness to engage with religious thinkers in public forums. Habermas’s discussions with Joseph Ratzinger (before he became Pope) evidence this when he says, “Indeed, a liberal political culture can expect that the secularized citizens play their part in the endeavors to translate relevant contributions from the religious language into a language that is accessible to the public as a whole” (*Dialectics* 51-2). I believe that by looking at how

psychedelic aesthetics critique notions of liberal subjectivity we can not only take up the “task to translate” that Habermas calls for, but we can also see that this task has been ongoing in aesthetic works since at least the 1950s and 1960s yet ignored because of a now outdated secularist frame. Let me begin by grounding this with a discussion of liberal subjectivity and then move into the historical relationship between that subjectivity, the nation state, and religion. Along the way, I will track how psychedelic aesthetics critique this subjectivity.

### *Subjectivity*

What do I mean by “this subjectivity”? While at times I may use the terms “subjectivity,” “self” and “ego” synonymously, I generally use the term subjectivity to get at the forces that shape and discipline an ‘I’ over time. The term subjectivity de-emphasizes individual agency in order to get at social aspects of self. While each individual person may have an ego, groups of people may be ‘subjects’ in the sense that they are subject to legal discipline, social norms, and religious traditions that move over many generations. Subjectivity itself is an historical category. ‘Modern’ subjectivity, then, is a philosophical term to express a worldview turned inward over the Early Modern period. Concerning “this” European subjectivity, Robert C. Solomon’s *Continental Philosophy Since 1750: The Rise and Fall of the Self* is a useful introduction. A broader and more aesthetic exploration occurs in Richard Sennett’s work, which tracks aesthetic perspective in *The Conscience of the Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities*. Sennett



explicates the emergence of privacy through architecture and public space by way of the Enlightenment and critiques a version of Christian transcendence he feels is internalized and secularized in Western modes of life. Subjectivity can be historicized, but subjectivity also works in aesthetic enquiry. As in lyrical poetry or drama, the 'I' is not so much an author but an intertextual poetic figure containing traces of past works. The subjective 'I' critiqued by these aesthetics is a socio-cultural inheritance that moves and develops through time in various different incarnations acting as a binding force for individuals.

Subjectivity, as I use the term, performs 'habitus,' which I take from the work of Pierre Bourdieu (who in turn took it from the Scholastics). The term is useful mainly in that it allows for individual subjectivity to be shaped and contribute to something larger than itself in a reciprocal relationship with culture. As Randal Johnson summarizes, Bourdieu

defines habitus [as] the system of 'durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them.' (5)

What is especially useful with regard to Bourdieu's concept of habitus is that it is dynamic, and it can track motivational practices without being seduced into oversimplified arguments based on linear causality. It also helps to legitimate cultural study that is inter-subjective. The concept of habitus allows us to view the Enlightenment social construction of the autonomous subject as historically situated and as continuing to

have behavioral influence amidst more recent critiques of it. While one might be tempted to simply claim that any such notion of ‘subjectivity’ is merely atavistic in a rhizomatic world of coming insurrections – a world of what Kathleen Stewart describes as “Ordinary Affects” or Jane Bennett calls “Vibrant Matter” in their respective books on those subjects – it is important to note such critiques’ reliance on an initial frame of autonomous subjectivity as a buffer for thinking and publishing. In other words, I am not presenting subjectivity as something to “get over” but rather as a heuristic that was developed by socio-historical factors, performing a kind of habitus verifiable in artistic works. What makes psychedelic works so interesting is the ways they attempt to deliberately reshape that heuristic. They are essentially fictive in that regard. They deal with the self as a model to be remade, but in doing so they inherit and critique a social version of ‘Self’ through habitus. It is ultimately for me a question of poetics.

Historically, a particular strain of European subjectivity has ideologically accompanied a variety of versions of liberalism in the sense that liberal economies have traditionally relied on *some* version of subjectivity. This reliance has been in the form of citizenship, an ancient idea that developed in particular ways during the Enlightenment with the emergence of modern nation states. Liberalism itself is not static, but rather shaped in various ways over time, especially in the early twentieth century, when legal theorists like Carl Schmitt saw economic forces as depoliticizing. As David Forsythe writes in *Human Rights in International Relations*:

While there are many varieties of liberalism and liberals, the classical idea of liberalism remains centered on respect for personal moral rights, based above all

on the equal worth of the individual, whose preferences should be followed in the public domain. Classical liberals emphasize above all legal rights derived from political morality, independent court judgments, and peaceful policy making. (42)

Schmitt's critique of liberalism is founded in his early concept of the political, which requires states to have clear decision-makers. Liberal democracy, for Schmitt, tends to disperse authority too widely, making decisions slow and ineffective. This is evidenced in his praise of Hitler taking action during the state of exception that ended the Weimar Republic. The idea of popular sovereignty, on the other hand, makes it less possible for there to be *one* sovereign who decides in the state of exception and thus, in his or her ability to break from the norm, establish what norms are; but of course this is a matter of faith in the representational status of leaders.

Schmitt's argument concerning depoliticization is itself historicized (and indeed his historical interest in literature led his methods to anticipate new historical criticism). In *The Concept of the Political*, Schmitt frames the political as arising from an implicit historical trajectory shaping European culture throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: a trajectory from the moral, with its emphasis on good and evil (1700s); aesthetic, with its emphasis on beauty and ugliness (late 1700s / early 1800s); economic, with its emphasis on profitable and unprofitable (1800s); and finally, in the political, with its emphasis on the State's ability to distinguish between friend and enemy (1900s). Embedded in the friend-enemy distinction as "the political" is morality, aesthetics, and economics. The sovereign protects culture as well as territory. The question of the friend-enemy distinction is, for Schmitt, to be determined internationally, that is, between

States; and the reterritorializing of Europe after the First World War provides his context.

Schmitt says,

The distinction of friend and enemy denotes the utmost degree of intensity of a union or separation, an association or dissociation. It can exist theoretically and practically, without having simultaneously to draw upon all those moral, aesthetic, economic, or other distinctions. The political enemy need not be morally evil or aesthetically ugly; he need not appear as an economic competitor, and it may even be advantageous to engage with him in business transactions. But he is, nevertheless, the other, the stranger; and it is sufficient for his nature that he is, in a specially intense way, existentially different and alien, so that in extreme cases conflicts with him are possible. (26-7)

It is important to see that Schmitt implicitly historicizes his concept of the political in terms of “progress” away from *morality*. Politics relies on a subject capable of deciding who the enemy is, not out of dislike or hatred, but as a way to position action through totalization – to give a conception of political identity (Strong xvi). Depoliticization, for Schmitt, without clear friend-enemy distinction, creates the conditions for a leaderless State and the most inhumane of wars because of either the necessity to vilify the enemy or simply let “nature” take its course. It is relatively easy to see from this perspective why National Socialism may have seemed appealing as an identity category for Schmitt. Living in the ineffective liberal democracy of the Weimar Republic was an economic disaster, and the conservative Schmitt longed for a decider to maintain stability.

States rely on subjectivity but also on the special subjectivity of the Sovereign capable of making a decision. We can see in Schmitt’s importance to recent scholars the growing questions concerning cosmopolitanism and the changing relationship between the individual subject, the State, and citizenship or national identity. States and

economies in the 1920s could no longer be theorized in isolation, as the Great War had shown. Questions about the control of markets are intimately connected to the conception and role of the Western nation state, which in turn is intimately connected with ideas about subjectivity.

Liberalism also relies on subjectivity, and in more recent times when liberalism falters or changes, I believe it is partly due to a reliance on subjectivity that has become increasingly archaic. In the late 1960s, when Schmitt wrote the more theological *Political Theologie II*, he claimed, “today we can no longer define politics in terms of the State; on the contrary what we can still call the State today must inversely be defined and understood from the political” (in Strong xv). As Tracy B. Strong summarizes in his introduction to the first *Political Theology*, for Schmitt:

Underlying the state is a community of people – necessarily not universal – a “we” that, as it defines itself necessarily in opposition to that which it is not, presupposes and is defined by this conflict. It derives its definition from the friend / enemy distinction. That distinction, however, is an us / them distinction, in which the “us” is of primary and necessary importance.

Schmitt’s concerns about liberal democracy are fueled partly by the tendency for the public and the State to blur, instigating what would be for him the impossibility of politics. They are also fueled by democratic proceduralism that makes of law a technical apparatus, forgetting the necessity of juristic decision-making that is necessarily interpretive. He would rather know who exactly is making the decisions. This requires a fairly stable view of both subjectivity and sovereignty.

Psychedelic aesthetics, which emerged during an economic boom for liberalism during the post World War II years, especially in the United States and the United Kingdom, attempt to reform European subjectivity while preserving liberal values by discarding a certain sense of ‘self’ or ‘individuality’. They also accompany a broadened friend / enemy distinction brought about by the Cold War. The world became the political stage after the use of atomic weapons, with the main friend-enemy distinction being between the liberal west and the communist east. The aesthetics of the period sought to point toward a new kind of citizenship that created conceptual problems for citizenship defined strictly by territory. This “new” citizenship did not happen as a complete historical event; it continues to be affectively shaped today, while older perhaps more archaic ones, continue as well. It is my goal to trace that reforming of European subjectivity with this project.

### *Psychedelic Aesthetics and Political Theology*

People react to the psychedelic in different ways, but nevertheless they *react*. When one mentions the term ‘psychedelic,’ it likely conjures up a myriad of associations. Most likely the first associations have something to do with drug usage and are followed with a knee-jerk affectation of “far-out-ness.” Someone in the room will likely affect a stupor and speak like Tommy Chong, but even this gesture toward comedy only evidences an unresolved issue. Concerning the psychedelic, we may also think of bright dripping colors, light shows and guitar-based rock and roll with prosaic song-structures,

of festival culture. The term conjures the 1960s political protests, counterculture, and a liberation of social mores. A secondary reaction to these might evoke New Ageism, hippies and gurus. Whether it is shrugged off as a more ‘innocent’ time, idealized as the time-that-never-was-and-never-will-be-again, or blamed as the decade of decline, the period operates under its own aura. From the outset then, the psychedelic is already an affective category for most Americans, and one’s relation to psychedelics has traditionally and perhaps too quickly situated one’s politics.

The term ‘psychedelic’ itself nicely performs the same oversaturation of associative meaning that it seeks to describe. ‘Psychedelia,’ as the phenomenon came to be known, was undoubtedly a product of the spread of liberalism all over the world as Europe lost colonial control and America attempted to preserve liberal values against communism. From hindsight, psychedelia looks like a particularly effective form of consumer culture. Across media, stylistic reverberations synthesize an explosion of color and texture – a celebration of “free-flowing” naturalness that is nevertheless highly crafted. Nowhere is this more apparent than in popular music.

Indeed, an easy way to evidence the commercial spread of liberalism through psychedelic affectation is in music. Iain Anderson in *This is Our Music* tracks how the United States used jazz music and musicians such as Louis Armstrong and Dizzy Gillespie as cultural ambassadors to help spread its political agenda as well as respond to Soviet criticisms of gross racial inequality in the U.S. However, with the emergence of rock and roll and its psychedelic variants quickly following, we can now hear the transfer

of liberal values in the stylistic codifying that came to be psychedelic music. Numerous musical anthologies, such as the *Psychedelic States* series put out by Gear Fab records, which collects the 1960s recordings of lesser-known psychedelic bands from each state in the union, attests to the resurgence, not just of psychedelia itself, but also to the nostalgic quality of the reception of psychedelia around the world. The *Psych Bites* series does the same for Australia; EMI's *Psychedelia at Abbey Road* and *Mojo Presents: Acid Drops Spacedust and Flying Saucers* both compile sounds in the UK. *The Trashbox* (originally *Pebbles*) and *Nuggets: Original Artyfacts from the First Psychedelic Era* are both classic collections. Now Again records' *Those Shocking, Shaking Days* tracks psychedelic rock in Indonesia. World Psychedelic records has put out compilations tracking the sound in Brazil, and a bit later in Africa, with their *World Psychedelic Classics 3*. The list goes on.

A more recent and specific compilation, such as *The Shadow Music of Thailand*, released by the small record label, Sublime Frequencies, documents the reception in Thailand of the surf-rock sounds of Cliff Richards and The Shadows. The Thai bands continue to perform regional folk music, but stylize it with the new aesthetic, just as skiffle groups and rock groups in the United Kingdom and United States drew on rural music as content for their stylistic experimentations. It is helpful to hear the consistency in the way psychedelic style spreads globally. While rock and roll music had already been advertising liberalism and deterritorializing political boundaries, psychedelic music brought with it a subset of evangelical aesthetic values, *most notably the idea that space,*



*both musical and political, could be manufactured and manipulated, and that boundaries – whether geographic or mental – were fluid and virtual.* The aesthetics cannot be divorced from the technological space in which they emerge, but what is so interesting is the ways the works themselves point to a kind of timeless perennial.

Psychedelic aesthetics are potentially *generative and poetic* because they develop spaces from which one might construct a self as something new. Undoubtedly, an expanded sense of self, mind-manifestation, and a blurring of subject-object relationships is at the root of the psychedelic. This sensibility aligns with the liberal push toward a more porous self that ideologically opens, especially in attempts to advertise it against the perceived threat of communism in the Cold War. Although transgression may have been a theme for much of the youth movement, ideologically the youth were also selling (and being sold) the idea of ‘lifestyle’ itself to the rest of the world. This very process of a constructed, liberal self was an ideological weapon in the Cold War used to transfer values aesthetically. Yet even despite CIA projects like MK-ULTRA, it seems wrong to consider the psychedelic movement as itself “engineered” by some sort of liberal democratic consumerist masterminds. Something like an affective wave seems more appropriate. The way the aesthetics code this is through various kinds of enchantment – and psychedelic drugs are just one way to access enchantment.

It should be noted, of course, that democratic liberal subjects are not the first humans to use psychedelic substances, but the growing interest in the 1950s and 1960s in indigenous and ancient religion is itself a manifestation of deterritorialized nostalgia that

seeks to return to the pre-political. In Western politics, however, a longstanding intimacy exists between the idea of the State and the idea of self, and a very similar affinity obviously occurs between the idea of self and religion, especially in its binding sense as *religio*. In the discourse of Political Theology, the question of the public role of religion and religious affectivity has become central to discourse of liberal democracies and globalization. This has prompted a political exigency for theories of the religious. By looking at psychedelic aesthetics and their use of enchantment, I am hoping to contribute to how we think of the relationship between art, spirituality and citizenship.

Much scholarship in Political Theology today comes in the form of large tomes that cover large swaths of human history. As a result they often rely on structural and post-structural readings. Marcel Gauchet's *The Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion*, for example, argues that the idea of transcendent religion arises in Mesopotamia and Egypt 3000 years ago with the first states, that the state is more formalized with emergent monotheism, and culminates with the more recent "rational religion" that presents itself as the very overcoming of religion. He writes:

the fundamental paradox of religion is both to gain self-possession by consenting to dispossession, by turning away from the goal of dominating nature and to legislate on our own behalf in favor of another goal, namely that of securing an identity defined and controlled at every step. (7)

The "dispossession" we consent to, according to Gauchet, comes in the form of an acknowledgement of inheritance and ancestry. The ancient world's large projects such as

Stonehenge and the Egyptian pyramids are partially accounted for here. Gauchet goes on:

Religion in its pure state is drawn into a temporal division that puts the present into a position of absolute dependence on the mythical past, and guarantees the irrevocable allegiance of all human activities to their inaugural truth. At the same time it ratifies the non-appeasable dispossession of human actors from what gives substance and meaning to their actions and gestures. The key to inter-relationship between religion and society, as well as the secret of the nature of the religious, lies in its radical conservation which structurally combines co-presence to the origin with disjunction from the originary moment, combining unstinting conformity to what has been definitively founded with a separated foundation. (25)

Both the self and the State here are figured within a founding violence that preserves through conservation (*religio*) while enacting dispossession through the setting aside (sacred). During the Enlightenment, rational religion's attempts to overcome religion itself amounted to attempts to separate the founding act of the nation-state from past myths. This accounts for the emerging figure of the irrational enthusiast, extremist or *schwärmerei* on the one hand, and the patriot on the other hand – and the terrorist somewhere in between.

Religion in the context of a construction of “the secular” risks an inherent fanatical violence that William T. Cavanaugh has challenged. In *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict*, Cavanaugh hypothesizes

that religion-and-violence arguments serve a particular need for their consumers in the West. These arguments are part of a broader Enlightenment narrative that has invented a dichotomy between the religious and the secular and constructed the former as an irrational and dangerous impulse that must give way in public to rational, secular forms of power. In the West, revulsion toward killing and dying in the name of one's religion is one of the principal means by which we become convinced that killing and dying in the name of the nation-state is laudable and

proper. The myth of religious violence also provides secular social orders with a stock character, the religious fanatic, to serve as enemy. (Kindle Locations 78-82).

The more porous liberal self that is presented by psychedelic aesthetics operates as a hybrid between a secular fanatic evangelizing liberal values and a religious fanatic evangelizing an ecstatic and mystical experience. This self as an ideological weapon enacts a kind of violence in the wiping away of and re-inscription of ego on the one hand; it performs another sacrifice on the political institution of the state on the other hand, by seeking to return to the pre-political. We come to see that one *cannot* simply divorce the spiritual from the secular in the psychedelic context; rather, the psychedelic subject becomes *enchanted* and *re-enchants*. Denying such enchantment in terms of a secularist frame is not only inaccurate in terms of people's varied daily religiosity; such a view perpetuates a frame where religious violence is the most potent action against archaically transcendent political entities. The psychedelic subject performs or re-performs the founding possession-dispossession that Gauchet writes of during a particular moment with particular historical exigency – the 1960s. In the process, the psychedelic subject challenges the foundational myth of secularism.

### *The Question of Citizenship*

Much recent scholarship, mostly under the name of Political Theology, has pointed out flaws of secularization as a grand narrative. This project attempts to contribute to that conversation by showing the ways self and self-transcendence is

represented in psychedelic aesthetics. It is an attempt, therefore, to theorize liberal subjectivity, to map how that subjectivity changes and how that change affects – and is reflected in – politics and notions of citizenship. The project therefore hovers at a boundary between material history and aesthetic questions around transcendence. My focus on aesthetics is meant to allow for connections to be made across mediums and to question the ethical presentation of tangible works that occur in material, historical circumstances. My descriptive goal is therefore more heuristic than nominalist.

Psychedelic aesthetics are both evangelical and politically deliberative. They point toward a future of possibility: lifestyle and art collapse intentionally, process becomes its own performance, and the audience-performer relationship fuses, overcoming dramatic irony or doubling and producing a “new” sense of consciousness. In order to get at the deliberative aspects of psychedelic aesthetics, I employ the discourse of Political Theology, which looks at attitudes and possibilities in political life as *praxis* in relation to belief patterns and metaphysical comportment; it then tries to establish how such belief patterns have influenced governance and “governmentality” over time. For this reason, the method moves toward conceptual history, political science, and philosophy rather than a material analysis of *realpolitik*.

Instead of focusing on institutions of government or religion, as has been the tendency in Political-Theological discourse, my aesthetic focus on philosophical, literary and occasionally musical texts allows insight into more mundane practices, especially those relating to a broader sense of “spirituality” by using literary and musical material as

a focus. I track the mundane mainly through literary and musical cultural products because I wish to *get at* the affective qualities of aesthetic works that frame engagement with the political *in terms of* ultimately religious concepts like sacrifice, neighborliness and performance of faith – the qualities that cannot be parsed out as spiritual or secular, but all of which relate to citizenship. The concept of the psychedelic allows me to draw on the poetic (in the sense of making or *poesis*) aspects of liberal self and citizenship, so there is an implicit argument that interpreting aesthetic works is a deeply politically deliberative act, and in a sense, the making of this text enacts the content it discusses through an intentional kind of polysemous seepage.

My use of the saturated term ‘psychedelic’ acts poetically to get at aspects of liberal selfhood. It qualifies the aesthetics that create the affective motivation for a change in the idea of self; indeed, even a philosophical change in the idea of the category of ‘human.’ What psychedelic aesthetics amount to is a massive attempt at behavioral modification at the level of culture through a reframing of the metaphor of ‘self,’ which cannot be confined simply to the 1960s. Really, it thematizes a large shift in Western thought during the twentieth century.

Let me once again situate this in disciplinary terms: such reframing of self is mirrored across much academic discourse of the late twentieth century. Cognitive scientists like George Lakoff have shown the ways metaphors do not merely structure language and signs, but thought and behavior itself. Well-used neuropaths create the interstate highways of the mind and thus establish positions that anchor vantage points

and frame reality. Similarly, semioticians like Gunther Kress have extended both Ferdinand de Saussure's and Charles Sanders Peirce's conceptions of signs, referents and language into affective and multimodal studies. In philosophy, the late work of Jacques Derrida and the recent work of Giorgio Agamben, building out of Martin Heidegger's concept that language "speaks us" and Emmanuel Levinas's ethical work, has sought to more rigorously examine conceptions of the "human," moving beyond the traditional western notion of rational speaking animal,<sup>6</sup> which of course is derived from Aristotle's conception of the 'political' animal made possible by speech.<sup>7</sup> Again, at the limits of language and speech (logos), the question arises: is philosophy or theory possible? And the recent answer has been: yes, but only through engagement with infinity, the spiritual, and the uncontainable.

Psychological literature in the twentieth century, from which many early psychedelic theories arose, of course also questions the nature of subjectivity and the sources of motivation as well; but it comes out of a larger tradition examining faculties of "mind" and so historically has dealt with humans in their particularity as opposed to philosophy's interest in humans in general. The great twentieth-century psychological thinkers all push toward a greater social account and in their own ways transcend subjectivity, as well as presenting theories of the State; and it is out of their work that

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<sup>6</sup> See Derrida's *The Animal Therefore that I am* and Agamben's *The Open* on this point.

<sup>7</sup> Kenneth Burke, who expands on Aristotle calling "man" the symbol-using animal, still implies a *techne* for the *use* of symbol, thereby adhering more to the subject's ability to manipulate signs than the ways signs, symbols and metaphors *use us*.

much psychedelic theory was explored and refined. Much of their work is thinly masked political theology and theory of the State.

Social accounts that transcend individual subjectivity may be performed in one of two ways: 1) by radicalizing subjectivity, isolating it and negating it; or 2) through dissemination into a social consciousness of some sort. In all cases, the trend across humanistic disciplines has been to move “outside” of the subject, the very thing that I am claiming psychedelic aesthetics try to do. Much of the 1960s sociological work, following Riesman’s *The Lonely Crowd*, however, emphasized the “inner-directed” turn as anodyne.

I believe that twentieth century politics underwrites this move “outside the subject,” because it appears that no matter how the metaphorical figures congruent with liberalism – the figure of humans separate from nature, for example – came to shape subjectivity, humans always seem to be *more than that* subjectivity. And so what I mean by ‘politics’ here is the *deliberative discourse concerning how to negotiate human affairs*. This entails an intention toward a future, a forward-looking imagination based on forensic and epideictic exigencies. My conception also differs from Carl Schmitt’s conception of politics as being determined by friend-enemy distinction in that, following thinkers like Emmanuel Levinas and Simon Critchley, I believe politics must be situated in some way or another with the question of infinity. I am interested in the psychedelic experience and representations of that experience as attempts to create positive research on this question.



In the West, liberalism has provided the most influential model by which politics are performed; but of course recently liberalism, even in its more recent incarnations, has faced significant challenges. These challenges are evidenced by the philosophical exigency to overcome subjectivity as liberalism has traditionally shaped it and visible in the material production of culture as aesthetically sensible. The challenge to subjectivity exhibited by psychedelic aesthetics shakes the foundations assumed by liberalism. How for example, can politics deliberate toward a future where humans are no longer separate from, but rather a *part of nature*? If we accept that we cannot deliberate from a position outside the world – that to even attempt to do so would perhaps be fundamentally unethical to begin with – how is political action in the form of decisions to be determined, even outside of the notion of progress itself? This remains the task of theory.

Because of these difficult questions, and because it is not sufficient to focus on institutional religion and politics alone, I believe affective tendencies must be accounted for in individuals, so I have chosen to focus on aesthetic products. This is *not* in order to save the individual subject's "freedom" from the powers that be, but rather because the process of engaging with the corporate entity is not simply top-down, but rather an ongoing poetic action. It is not a matter of resistance to discipline in the abstract so much as it is a matter of faith. The position of faith occupies both being disciplined and willing or intending toward at the level of subjective decision-making, as the citations of Gauchet allude to above. How does faith "power" poetry and make action in the world? If Gauchet is correct that civilization is about ancestral memory, then have we not been

walking among the dead for some time now? Have we not been blurring this world and the other since the beginning of poetry?

‘Psychedelic aesthetics’ is a way to articulate an operation figuring a dynamically disseminating subjectivity, a collapse of subject-object relationships often aligned with mysticism, and a reassembly into a broadened, de-territorialized consciousness. This process of dissemination *has been* implicitly discussed in the discourse of Political-Theological discourse, mostly by looking at *traces* and lineage and incarnations of power, partly in the tradition of Ernst Kantorowicz’s *The King’s Two Bodies* and partly in the tradition of scholars analyzing the German legal theorist and critic of liberalism, Carl Schmitt, whose 1922 book, *Political Theology*, contains the oft-quoted passage:

All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized religious concepts not only because of their historical development – in which they were transferred from theology to the theory of the state, whereby, for example, the omnipotent God became the omnipotent lawgiver – but also because of their systematic structure, the recognition of which is necessary for a sociological consideration of these concepts. The exception in jurisprudence is analogous to the miracle in theology. Only by being aware of this analogy can we appreciate the manner in which the philosophical ideas of the state developed in the last centuries. (36)

There is an intersection between structuralism and history in this passage that manifests what might be characterized as *the problem* of the twentieth-century: a tension between vertical, sacred time (being and essence), and horizontal, secular time – the tension brilliantly, even if over-simplistically, pointed to by Mircea Eliade in *The Sacred and the Profane*. Eliade argued that ‘modern man’ is out of touch with “sacred” space, living in the world of the profane and forgetting the centering potential of “primitive” religious

thought. He claimed, “the sacred reveals absolute reality and at the same time makes orientation possible; hence it founds the world in the sense that it fixes the limits and establishes the order of the world” (30). While such binaries oversimplify the matter, Eliade’s claim articulates the European nostalgia for the pre-political and poses the very problem of positioning that my method of *tracing* tries to anchor. Eliade’s assertion also points to the political space of the sacred in public spheres. If the spiritual is invoked in politics, it is with a view to orienting and futurity.

Rather than a focus on States or “major” religion, this study attempts to show how psychedelic aesthetics operate through religious acts of substitution, release and integration that fundamentally relate to the “spiritual.” In post-1960s America, one often hears people claim, “I’m spiritual but not religious.” While the term “spirituality” may seem quite general, I am in agreement with Peter van der Veer that a “vague term like *spirituality* has been adopted precisely to make peaceful communication between different conceptual universes possible” (793). The difficulty arises in determining what kinds of meaningful contributions – as either a term or as a practice – spirituality may have. The fact that with regard to the psychedelic, spirituality is superficial, that new ageism is often trite, is helpful here. It evidences a breakdown between friend-enemy distinctions and a re-orientation toward the infinite, even if it does so in limited and seemingly empty or diluted ways; it is always a question of limits.

*Psychedelic Aesthetics and Spirituality*

How do we measure superficiality? What is “above the face”? Above seeing? These questions are at the heart of both aesthetics and belief. Insofar as it implies the invisible by claiming a surface, the superficial gives dimension to hidden forces – not always necessarily supernatural ones – that might best be described as occult. When compared to everyday usage of the word superficial, the dilemma is clear – it is a problem, metaphorical in nature, of “surface” versus “depth.” Poetic figures inevitably bring up questions relating to the nature of the body and embodiment, of what constitutes an aesthetic form or composition. This often occurs in psychedelic works; for example, in *Precipitations: Contemporary American Poetry as Occult Practice*, Devin Johnston argues that in the mid twentieth century

poets have engaged the occult in order to rethink agency and subjectivity. For poets such as H.D., Robert Duncan, and James Merrill, the appeal of occultism lay not so much in the answers it offered, or the dialectic it sketched, but rather in its resistance to systemization and closure. (128)

It is in this resistance to closure through a turn toward the occult or the “enchanted” that something as vague as “spirituality” may be aesthetically tracked. The aesthetics of openness have been explored by Umberto Eco in *The Open Work* and Marjorie Perloff in *The Poetics of Indeterminacy*, but neither explicitly addresses the matter in terms of the psychedelic or in a broader historical and political conception (although there is certainly much overlap in terms of the aesthetic ideas and implicit argument). And while there is vast discourse about mysticism and poetry, less has been said about works of fiction and

prose in this regard. In all genres and mediums, however, the rethinking of subjectivity and agency implied by an aesthetic of openness is entrenched in reevaluation of liberal political life, as well as in general critique of modernity that characterizes many psychedelic works.

Critiques of the limits of ‘self’ have been central to discussions of modernity and post-modernity over the past century (at least), and most discussions within the discourse of Political Theology hearken back to the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, to the roots of modern government. It is useful to note that along with the formation of modern forms of government there also arises a kind of mythical-spiritualism. This can be seen in orders such as the Rosicrucians, founded by a quasi-historical personages like Christian Rosenkreuz (an early example of a westerner receiving esoteric knowledge from the east). Occultism and mysticism create counter-narratives to political foundations that intentionally obfuscate meaning, and secret societies build elaborate esoteric systems to preserve identities in lineages well into the twentieth century with Aleister Crowley, who undoubtedly influences psychedelic aesthetics.

There are many less occult-like examples of mystics over the years, and a broad spectrum of practice emerges, from the divination of the early tarot decks of Italy to the more austere “inner light” of George Fox and the Quakers: as above, so below. While such traditions quickly move beyond the scope of this project, I bring these figures up to suggest and remind first, that the true roots of the psychedelic tradition in the west must be historically aligned within such traditions; and second, that in thinking of mysticism as

practice, it is first of all necessary to note its emphasis on *individual* hermetic and divinatory abilities. This is because the focus on individualism is what makes these practices work so well with emerging concepts of liberalism – no matter how superficial.

In other words, the psychedelic is not merely an amplification of Romanticism; its roots are older than that, and probably manifest in early religion itself, even if people like William Blake and Emanuel Swedenborg exert profound and lasting influences and commonly get referred to in foundational ways. This only evidences the philosophical tendency for the psychedelic aesthetics to deal with conceptions of “humanity.” Such a tendency performs the transcendence of subjectivity.

At the same time, historical forces cannot be denied. Political Theological discourse has had much to say about “institutional” religions that were once claimed to be nullified through “secularization,” by the advent of modern states and privatized with the emergence of bourgeois culture and the public sphere. This is perhaps because it is simply easier to see direct relationships to the political by way of institutions than in everyday religiosity. Thus, the discourse has had less to say about more mystical or “enchanted” religions, and I believe that this lack is carried-over from the narratives aligned with Max Weber’s term, “disenchantment,” a parallel to secularization that the discourse so often critiques.

On the flipside of narratives of disenchantment, mystical and enthusiastic religious tendencies have had their share of political influences, both historically and contemporarily in the United States, especially with regard to civil rights movements.

There is in liberalism an avowal of inherent and ongoing interest in care for the individual as an intrinsically precious entity, an entity whose limit-potential is undefined, but also an individual who must be made into a political “subject.” But discursive trends have led too quickly to establish the post-1960s trends toward “the spiritual” as simply vacant “New Ageism.” If psychedelic aesthetics track a move away from transcendent nation-state authority, one would likely assume that a move away from transcendent religion would accompany it. To lament such a move is really irrelevant except in the case that there is an ongoing tendency for deterritorialized subjects to become the most violent advocates of a religious enchantment based on affective and anti-rational identity affirmation. The intensity of the violence accompanies a friend-enemy conflict where religious fanaticism and citizenship cannot be distinguished in what many thinkers are now calling the ‘post-secular world.’

Claude Lefort has argued regarding “the political” that “the very notion of ‘limits’ in fact derives from a desire for an ‘objective’ definition – a desire that lies at the origin of the political theory . . . that has developed in the course of our century” (151). In political terms and governance, laws presuppose both subjectivity and objectivity. The subject must be able to be located as citizen or alien within the “objective” space of public reality. And despite much critique of modern subjectivity’s drawbacks, even

recently our most prominent liberal thinkers essentially claim the same thing.<sup>8</sup> What remains necessary, then, is a re-articulation of subjectivity with regard to personhood.

Again, it is not out of sentiment for the individual; it is because the theoretical view that posits the objective is a product of modernism, and it is because modernism assumes a subjectivity nurtured by that objective space that individuality must be accounted for in a more temporalized way with regard to history. We know that we do not ever truly have access to an objective view, yet we experience as subjects, and it is from there that it is practical to start. To speak of theory in respect to psychedelic aesthetics is to assume a collapse between subjectivity and objectivity, transcendence and immanence, and a re-articulation of a position after that collapse. There is no stepping outside. It is more a matter of already being exposed.

Giorgio Agamben's aesthetic genealogies and his work on *Homo sacer* have called into question the articulation of subjectivity as citizenship, with important implications for political prisoners whose subjectivity is denied in terms of rights and democratic process, at least partly because of the "stateless-ness" of international

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<sup>8</sup> What I mean here is the common tendency in liberal thinkers to oversimplify the concept of a "public space" for discursive purposes. This is especially endemic to political discourse: a figure of a neutral space is invoked in which political decisions get made. We argue about what makes a citizen, about who gets to belong to and represented within that neutral space, but it is the figure of neutral space itself that wrongfully warrants this. So, for example, in Jurgen Habermas's dialogue with Joseph Ratzinger, he continually refers to what liberal citizens ought to do in translating and allowing religious discourse to enter a public space, all the time rhetorically within the frame of neutral, public and "secular" space, ignoring the fact that by either historical or spiritual accounts, there is nothing neutral about it. Habermas undoubtedly knows this is a choice and a necessity of dialogue, and he points to this in *An Awareness of What it Missing*, but reductions are nevertheless costly.



terrorism. As Agamben summarizes, some version of the liberal subject remains necessary for democracy. He cites Jurgen Habermas:

Habermas opposes the thesis of a popular sovereignty that is entirely emancipated from a substantial subject-people (constituted by “members of a collectivity who are physically present, participating, and involved”) and fully resolved in the communicative forms without subject that, according to his idea of publicity “regulate the flow of the political formation of public opinion and will.” (*The Kingdom and the Glory* 257)

Here, the post Cold War crises in liberal democratic government reveal a connection to continuing problems of dynamically conceiving of subjectivity, citizenship and ‘self,’ even if such subjectivity merely instrumentally “regulates the flow” of information. At the same time, Hent de Vries and Lawrence E. Sullivan write in their introduction to the massive collection of essays, *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World*:

Strictly speaking, neither the locus of ‘self’ (often implying self-identity and self-determination) nor that of ‘understanding’ (with its now cognitive, then historicist, culturalist, and hermeneutic overtones) can be of much help where religion and the theological are concerned. (3)

The tension between self as political subjectivity and “religion and the theological” remains an ongoing problem, solved implicitly by transcendence of self and subjectivity. It is no wonder with regard to this that psychedelic aesthetics often refer to practical mysticism. Insofar as mysticism has in its own traditions helped to at least cope – if not to solve – problems of subject-object distinction, when coupled with liberal subjectivity, mysticism has provided various methods of *praxis* for maintaining some sort of composure in the face of mystery. It is this praxis that is evidenced in psychedelic

aesthetics. But difficulty arises in avoiding an overly reductive and therefore ineffective appeal to mysticism.

Perhaps the most well-known and philosophically legitimate example of practical mysticism can be found within strains of American pragmatism, a philosophy with its own ties to Spiritualism in the nineteenth century. In *The Interruption of Eternity: Modern Gnosticism and the Origins of the New Religious Consciousness*, Carl Raschke provides a sobering analysis of American spiritualism in the 1960s and duly notes its heritage in the positive thinking of New Thought and Christian Science that was the backdrop for William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience*. Writing in the early twentieth century, James claimed that "the advance of liberalism, during the past fifty years, may fairly be called a victory of healthy-mindedness within the church over the morbidity with which the old hell-fire theology was more harmoniously related" (in Raschke 205). As Raschke points out, Gnosticism worked well with American liberalism, but what changed in the middle of the twentieth century during the postwar years was a generation that had to "come to terms with apocalyptic monsters" (207). The threat of nuclear annihilation, combined with an already limited sense of history, helped to create the "now generation." The "spiritual" turn of the Beat Generation, with its fascination with its own formulations of Eastern religion, really looks like a hodge-podge of hedonistic impulses directing a eudaimonia of the moment. Raschke's book is ultimately a warning against the de-historicizing inherent in Gnosticism. My theory of

psychedelic aesthetics takes this into account by providing an in-depth tracing of the European thinking that led up to the ‘psychedelic movement.’

But one can also see a different turn toward historicity in later pragmatism. In Richard Rorty’s neo-pragmatic terms, following Benedict Spinoza’s call in his *Theological-Political Treatise* for an intellectual elite to help determine scriptural meaning – an authority Spinoza thought should not be privatized but protected by the government – Rorty develops the idea of the “ironist” intellectual – one who, like Spinoza, knows he or she must be capable of a kind of double-speak but also protected from people whose lesser interpretive skills will not be able to grasp the perspective required by irony. Freedom of speech again becomes a central political value here, especially because conversation determines meaning-context rather than an abstract notion such as History. The right to speech enables and preserves human freedom, but even this requires a distinct subject. It also, according to Rorty (similar to Habermas here), necessitates a distinction between public and private if liberalism is to prosper. As Neil Gascoigne summarizes, the danger that Rorty’s ironist presents to society is to be “seduced by the idea of a single vision, they allow their ‘search for sacred wisdom’ to take ‘precedence over common moral consciousness’ and thus feel no solidarity with their ‘fellow humans’” (150).<sup>9</sup> The danger is in the production of the enthusiast or fanatic, whether religious, patriotic, or some mix of the two. One must essentially

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<sup>9</sup> Mitchell Aboulafia finds that G. H. Mead is worth looking at in relation to Rorty because Mead “makes novelty more mundane than [...] Rorty and relates it to the development of reflection and our self-concepts” (123).

separate one's search for the sacred by privatizing it. Committed, liberal ironists would then, building off of "the sense 'that persons and cultures...are incarnated vocabularies' [also recognize] that 'incarnation' implies the shared capacity to feel pain and suffer humiliation" (151). The result of such a world would be the creation of a "liberal utopia" where cultural critics become moral advisers, where philosophy serves practical, democratic ends by maintaining a distinction between public private, and "reweaving our vocabulary of moral deliberation in order to accommodate new beliefs" (in Gascoigne 151). Is it not implied that in "beliefs" here is the ability to accommodate new "sacred privacies"? What would these look like? Is there any way that this process can account for the superficiality and danger of Gnosticism that Raschke sees above? Rorty's thinking allows for both a continued necessity for articulating the interests of a self that benefits more than the individual through social commitment; this commitment becomes an act of faith and faith becomes a necessary element to be discussed in public spheres.

Another possible implication of Rorty's thinking (at least in his earlier work) is that public spheres, in being able to keep the "sacred" private, have accomplished the best part of Weberian secularization: an ordered and relatively peaceful method of cohabitating with people of varying belief systems. Not only that, the vision includes a deeper awareness of diversity of belief accomplished by a broadening of concepts of "human," along with the public-will to end suffering that was previously eclipsed by ethnocentrism and limited world-views. This sounds great, and it is definitely utopic. Is secularism itself utopic?

I set Rorty up a bit here, because, like Fox Mulder, the metaphysical detective from *The X-Files*, “I want to believe.” And yet, in 2013 the distinction between public and private is blurry at best; to think in terms of one public is overly reductive and inaccurate. We are warned of affective waves in The Invisible Committee’s *The Coming Insurrection* and ongoing figuring of terrorists as infinite others. In short, I do not think it is merely an act of commitment by the ironist elites to maintain a division between public and private that will maintain effective political deliberation. Rather, as much discourse in Political Theology attests, the affective and cognitive needs provided by “spirituality” require not only private but also public accommodations, not just in the sense of freedom of religion, but in the practical sense that an individual does not easily distinguish ethos separated from its more rooted meaning as definition as “custom, manner, place, habit or dwelling” because, as subjects, we are more than individuals – even with, as Antonio Gramsci would say, “an infinity of traces.” Nor can humans simply and authentically collect their angst in a being-toward-death, if we are, as Rorty suggests, “incarnated vocabularies,” or if we are, as Emmanuel Levinas would argue, situated prior to consciousness or the ability to make a decision or avowal by an infinite metaphysical Other. Clearly, subject-object distinctions do not really work, and the playing out of the failure to make such distinctions characterizes much of the twentieth century cultural practices in the West.

The failure of such distinctions creates a more recent worldview where the gap between the ironist elite and the “literal mass” is ambiguous. As Rorty suggests,

liberalism potentially effects a broadened awareness of what humans are and with that a social commitment to end human suffering in an ongoing commitment to “freedom.” The broadening movement itself dissolves the claims to ironist elitism. With regard to psychedelic aesthetics, “freedom” here is a kind of transcendence to aspire to, a “liberation” or *moksha*, the Sanskrit term for liberation that Aldous Huxley uses as the drug of choice for his psychedelic republic in the liberal-utopic novel, *Island*. Hent de Vries and Lawrence Sullivan suggest that navigating this problem necessitates

[r]ewriting a certain idea of transcendence (the notions, dimensions, or experiences with which “religion” and the “theologico-political” are most often identified) in the language of immanence, associated with the history of atomism, materialism, naturalism, and pantheism. The latter traverses the history of thought as a heretical countercurrent, of sorts. Yet this rewriting also implies interrogating the historical and systematic pertinence of the very distinction and opposition between transcendence and immanence as well. (25)

This task of rewriting transcendence is something I think overlaps the task of much current theory, a task I suggest psychedelic aesthetics takes on, and what this project seeks to do as well.

### *A Note on Method*

The method of this work performs part of my argument: By looking at psychedelic works, largely from the late fifties to the early seventies, we can track a broadening of liberal commitment and critique of subjectivity and citizenship that will be useful in current political deliberation while simultaneously participating in a cultural recovery process valued by liberal political theologians. My aim is to show that a

commitment to spirituality manifests itself in psychedelic works and thoughts, that this commitment extends the idea of subjectivity beyond not only the human body but beyond one human's lifespan. Such broadened conceptions attempt to develop a working definition of human life that is both bodied and disembodied at various points, a version of life that can be seen in eschatological notions of culture as metempsychosis and "reincarnation."

Let me stress that reincarnation as a concept here is used mostly as a metaphor, but a practical one at that. Its fictive and poetic qualities afford conversational openings for practical deliberation. The metaphor is indeed in keeping with ego death and dying in the psychedelic experience. In other words, the concept should effect more than a particular theological doctrine or belief system. By developing an aesthetic use of reincarnation through the study of concrete works, I aim to aid an open-ended, liberal political discourse concerning the possibilities of dynamic selfhood and subjectivity, opening up discursive channels between bio-politics and belief. Aesthetically, treating works as incarnations performs what Richard Sennett in *The Conscience of the Eye* suggests as necessity – to have a God who ages or is capable of change. What would this mean?

Superficiality, as I have said, is especially pervasive in the study of anything psychedelic. Any depth of subjective experience, no matter how earnestly felt, easily becomes cliché. Therefore, incorporating such subjective experience into public discourse requires navigating what may seem to be immature, surface arguments. In this

work I am particularly concerned with showing how psychedelic artistic works, mainly literary and musical, perform a kind of *habitus* that significantly contributes to dynamic conceptions selfhood. When looked at as a broad cultural style along with the theoretical perspectives of psychedelic luminaries such as Aldous Huxley, psychedelic aesthetics imply a set of liberal values that critique and re-imagine a kind of subjectivity fashioned by Enlightenment thought. It is not enough to simply call this critique ‘post-modern’ or to jump into definitions by historical period. Aligning my argument with the discursive trend of Political Theology is a way to show that the critique of subjectivity in psychedelic aesthetics gets right to the heart of problems relating to citizenship and governmentality that scholars have recently taken interest in as a reaction to perceived crises in liberalism. These discussions have tried to understand liberalism’s problems as the result of Enlightenment ideals that did not adequately attend to cognitive and affective needs of people with regard to metaphysics and religion. Instead, a pervasive narrative of secularization, coupled with a progressive sense of the unfolding of history, took hold institutionally and in-turn modified and shaped people’s behavior – indeed, such narratives continue to do so, conditioning *habitus* over time. Insofar as these practices are developed culturally through habits over-time, they manifest an environment for receiving and transmitting ideas and practices that transcend both individuals and generations. For this reason, I claim that this process works like traditional conceptions of metempsychosis or “transmigration of souls.”



How do we talk of social “selves”? What does “American” mean in “American Literature”? How engaged with his or her ethnic and cultural roots ought the “cosmopolitan” be? When we look at an individual like Aldous Huxley as a grand theorist for the psychedelic movement, there are definite points of contact where Huxley seems to causally shape history. This is true, for example, in his influence on Timothy Leary’s adaptation of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* reformulated as a manual for self-discovery in *The Psychedelic Experience*. Current scholars too easily write off Huxley’s influences because there is not enough serious attention given to aesthetics. He is read as a “science-fiction” author and public intellectual. In the United States, *Brave New World* is often assigned as high-school reading material, thus shaping a population that regards the writer’s work as immature (if they read him at all, it is likely when they themselves were immature). Occasionally scholars have written concerning bio-politics and *Brave New World*, but with no account of his later psychedelic work. He is thus often regarded as an “armchair” intellectual from a simpler time when being a generalist was acceptable. In literary study, Huxley has been artistically outshined by his high-modernist peers like Eliot and Joyce, whose attention to language and philology Huxley satirized as archaic and limited. As an attempt to rethink Huxley’s influence, I cast him as not only a theorist of the psychedelic but as a political theologian.

In a way, this work could easily be a monograph on Huxley himself, but it would do little to illuminate the disciplinary oversights mentioned above. My focus on Huxley in later chapters will be to show a writer whose work reveals an inter-textual reworking

and development of a social philosopher who built his theories, not through armchair speculation, but through truly erudite readings of European and Asian religious and political histories. If his later work is written off as too contrived or merely as “self-help,” it is because his audience lacks the scope worthy of seeing what research he based his opinions on. Huxley is ahead of the discussion with regard to Political Theology and a re-imagining of Enlightenment subjectivity, the same way he was ahead of the game with regard to the notion of human standardization and pharmaceutically-enhanced social-norming and bio-politics in *Brave New World*.

It should go without saying that theories are distorted and must be rethought in practice. Huxley’s theories – like those of his contemporaries such as Herbert Marcuse – were not always understood by the people they influenced. In casting my glance back at the psychedelic movement in terms of Political Theology, I am less concerned with tracking specific deviations or fulfillments of such theories themselves and more interested in showing through philosophical, literary and musical examples the social implementation and dispersion of ideas that moved through luminary thinkers. In this sense, there may not be a lot that is historically ‘new’ in this study. While Kuhn’s idea of “paradigm shift” or C. Wright Mills’ early use of “post-modern” are interesting, they are so in the context of an entire cultural texture. I am more interested in examining the ethical deliberations and questions aesthetically present in affective works as the instantiation of vibrant matter than in a traditional ideological critique that would “adopt” a view from the outside. With this, I turn to the layout of the book.

### *What is to Follow*

Chapter Two traces the idea of subjectivity through what I call the European imaginary and demonstrates emerging critiques of subjectivity with thinkers Antonin Artaud, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Blanchot, and Herbert Marcuse. I then relate these thinkers directly to psychedelic aesthetics in Abbie Hoffman's activism. In Chapter Three, I address the ongoing theme of a return to nature and the perennial. I also discuss its relationship to conceptions of childhood innocence in the nostalgic "state" of nature that permeates so many psychedelic works. I continue to develop the critiques of the European imaginary through a discussion of failure present in avant-garde art. I then ground the saturated, multivalent quality expressed by psychedelic aesthetics with analysis of material by The Fugs, a psychedelic folk group led by poet Ed Sanders. Chapter Four looks at literary criticism and theoretical models of the psychedelic experience. Chapter Five then begins looking at how psychedelic literary works move toward a broadened sense of citizenship. After an in-depth analysis of key novels of the era, I come to the conclusion that even after more extreme performances of psychedelic aesthetics in the literature of the 1960s, Aldous Huxley remains the psychedelic theorist *par excellence*. Chapter Six then looks at a large portion of Huxley's work, both fiction and non-fiction, to establish Huxley as a forgotten Political Theologian. I then conclude in Chapter Seven with more contemporary issues in law and Political Theology implied by my descriptions of psychedelic aesthetics.

## CHAPTER TWO: EUROPEAN INFLUENCES

*If it is enough to pronounce the words **religious** or **mystic** to be taken for a churchwarden or an illiterate priest outside a Buddhist temple, at best only good for turning prayer wheels, this merely signifies and condemns our incapacity to derive the full import from our words and our profound ignorance of the spirit of synthesis and analogy. (47)*

-Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*

The European influences on psychedelic aesthetics are rooted in critiques of modern European culture and politics, as well as in commerce and complex interactions with the East. The use of entheogens in religious rituals is as ancient as the *Rig Veda*, and scholars like Paul Devereux in *The Long Trip: A Prehistory of Psychedelia* make compelling use for entheogens in ancient European and English anthropological sites. Many scholars and “specialist” writers trace drug use in both sacred and profane forms to ancient societies around the world. In *High Society: The Central Role of Mind-Altering Drugs in History, Science and Culture*, Mike Jay notes that animals used plants for “the deliberate use of intoxication” (11-12) before humans existed. More recently, Tom Froese et al. have argued that in early humans

altered states could have significantly influenced the operation of the nervous system, especially by temporarily decoupling the autonomous activity of the brain from the usual environmental influences. This switch from immediate sensorimotor sense-making, which is normally directed toward the external here and now, to a more internally mediated, decoupled sense-making of mental and bodily structures could thereby have facilitated the creation and diversification of abstract cognition and symbolic practices. (210)

But in terms of psychedelia, it is really in the nineteenth and early twentieth-century social science research that a widespread awareness of those ancient practices became available to Europeans. This occurred alongside deep cultural critique and nostalgia for pre-political and pre-alienated human life. It is thus a received body of knowledge that shapes the cultural explosions related to psychedelia in the 1960s. We can begin looking at these influences by tracing the political power of psychedelic aesthetics present in the activist literature of the period.

While much civil rights activism during the 1950s and 1960s was organized by religious leaders and therefore embodies political-theological themes, not all activism in the 1960s can be called “psychedelic.” Abbie Hoffman’s brand of theatrical activism is certainly exemplary of the latter. And while Hoffman is indeed a central figure in the 1960s, it would be an oversimplification to think of him as an architect of the aesthetics; his role was more mercurial and his voice was louder because he was tapping into something larger. His work draws on European aesthetic and social philosophy while also using tropes already existing in psychedelic literature. This chapter traces some direct influences of European thought on Hoffman.

In *Woodstock Nation: A Talk-Rock Album*, written just after the Woodstock festival in August 1969, Hoffman recounts his role through the narrative trope of an acid trip. The “trip” trope had been popularized by Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* in the late 1950s, inspiring the performed “electric” trips of Ken Kesey and his Merry Pranksters in the 1960s, immortalized in Tom Wolfe’s *Electric Kool-Aid Acid Tests* (1968). The metaphor of a trip – not just “travel” – became a life-performance for the youth during the 1960s. The runaway phenomenon was a public issue, even present in the Beatles’ “She’s Leaving Home.” In *The Making of a Counter Culture* (1968), Theodor Roszak referred to FBI reports of “over ninety thousand runaways in 1966,” mostly from middle class backgrounds (33). Many of these youths from advanced industrial countries fled to the Far East, resulting in a sense of deterritorialization beyond nation-states. In this lineage, the Woodstock festival in August of 1969 became a destination point for a trip, a

pilgrimage for a “spiritual” journey where the journey is as much a part of the process as the destination. Abbie Hoffman’s memoir draws on these existing deterritorialized themes, coding the event as a “heavy trip” (5), and setting up a dichotomy between PIG NATION and WOODSTOCK NATION.

Hoffman wrote the book at least partly as a public relations move to support his indictment in the Chicago Seven trial, which was to begin a little more than a month after Woodstock. In *Woodstock Nation*, Hoffman affects the personal tone of an insider, directly addressing the reader, as if he is letting the reader in on something, yet the book is entirely personal narrative and self-centered. He presents himself stylistically through rhetoric of personal continuity that is deliberately constructed: the more egocentric and particular he is, the more ‘real’ he seems. As Phil Auslander has noticed, continuity is a trait among psychedelic rock musicians through their presenting “personae that [sic] was not dramatically different from the people one could see on the streets” (14). No matter how elaborately attired one might be, the convention was for there to be continuity between who one was both on stage and off stage. Auslander also notes that

Psychedelic music, often fueled by LSD and other hallucinogenic drugs, was intended primarily as an internal, individualized experience for both musicians and audience. All references to psychedelic rock as theatrical and Dionysian aside, psychedelic rock musicians appeared quite introspective on stage. They generally focused their attention on each other or their instruments, especially while playing a solo, and did not play to the audience extensively. (16)

Given Auslander’s remarks, it may seem odd at first that Hoffman would call his book a “talk-rock album” and have Vintage books, his publisher, stylize the book as if it were an

album with liner notes. But like his fellow Chicago Seven defendant, Jerry Rubin, Hoffman was deliberately presenting media theorist Marshall McLuhan's idea that "the medium is the message."<sup>10</sup> Hoffman tells his readers what music he has been listening to and says, "If I hear anything good, I'll get it in somehow, but, dig, it's hard quotin words from records" because of publishing laws (6). Hoffman's attention to the demands of the publishing business is hardly anarchic, and he seems willing to play the game to get the audience he wants.

Consumption of certain aesthetic products operates as audience-identification for Hoffman, and dissemination of cultural knowledge about that material constructs the virtual space of the "Woodstock Nation." Similarly, Hoffman's consumption of LSD, which frames the book's narrative, codes him as an insider; and the reader is expected to understand the narrative structure itself as insider knowledge in the lineage of the "counter" cultural tradition. Through this process, Hoffman politicizes the event and the discursive space around the festival through a friend-enemy distinction, at times calling for all out war against PIG NATION, at other times proposing steps toward a truce that includes a redrawing of political boundaries and sovereignty. He attempts to "construct the map" (4) through a virtual and cultural awareness (though at times localized in different parts of various cities – Haight Ashbury, the East Village, etc.), eventually coding this new "nation" by identification with aesthetic products and sensibilities,

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<sup>10</sup> Rubin teamed up with, Quentin Fiore, the designer of McLuhan's *The Medium is the Massage*, for his books *Just Do It* and *We Are Everywhere*. No designer is given credit in the first edition of Hoffman's book.



calling his book a “non-book” and a “talk-rock album.” He sets up the chapter titles as “song titles” – at every point making the book itself a staged cultural performance.

According to Auslander’s comments about psychedelic rockers, such a performance was not hypocritical so long as Hoffman was the same person both on and off stage.

Hoffman’s book culminates onstage with a battle between Hoffman and The Who at Woodstock. In doing so he disrupts the “internal performance” of the psychedelic rockers by making an overt political message. Pete Townsend of The Who hits Hoffman over the head with his guitar because Hoffman had seized the microphone to spread the message to the audience to “free John Sinclair,” a man who had been sentenced to ten years in prison for being in possession of two joints of marijuana and thus become a political prisoner (143). Earlier in the festival, Hoffman had apparently succeeded in getting the microphone long enough to say something like this:

The Politics of the event is Pot. Dig it! John Sinclair’s in fuckin prison for ten years for two fuckin joints. We ought to bust John or all this peace and music don’t mean...CLICK

Well I didn’t give a shit if they cut the mike off. I got it out anyway. (142)

Despite getting knocked on the head by Townsend, Hoffman claims to love The Who’s music:

This battle symbolizes my amity-enmity attitude toward that particular rock group and the whole rock world in general. Clearly I love their music and sense in it the energy to liberate millions of minds. On the other hand, I feel compelled to challenge their role in the community, to try and crack their plastic dome. (5)

Hoffman’s antics were intentional and planned, despite the narrative frame of his story as being fueled by a drug-induced frenzy and a “bad trip.” The trip is a rhetorical device for

audience identification, allowing for a deterritorialized sense of both space and time.

Hoffman writes:

Mark Twain once wrote that the only people that should use the word “we” are editors, kings, and persons with tapeworms. Yet there is a way of integrating your own ego trip with a sense of community, with a concept of “we.” I feel a sense of this most strongly in these massive events, in what [Antonin] Artaud refers to as the “festival in the streets.” (7)

Hoffman also opens his book with a quotation from “Repressive Tolerance” by Herbert Marcuse, whom Hoffman had studied under at Brandeis University. Artaud and Marcuse are two direct influences of European continental aesthetic philosophy on psychedelic aesthetics. Both should be treated in detail.

Marcuse’s 1965 essay, “Repressive Tolerance,” dedicated to his students at Brandeis, opens as an examination of tolerance in advanced industrial society with the claim that

the realization of the objective of tolerance would call for tolerance toward prevailing policies, attitudes, opinions, and the extension of tolerance to policies, attitudes, and opinions which are outlawed or suppressed. In other words, today tolerance appears again as what it was in its origins, at the beginning of the modern period -- a partisan goal, a subversive liberating notion and practice. Conversely, what is proclaimed and practiced as tolerance today, is in many of its most effective manifestations serving the cause of oppression.

Two forms of tolerance exist: one subversive, the other oppressive. Marcuse is then quick to assert that

The author is fully aware that, at present [the mid 1960s], no power, no authority, no government exists which would translate liberating tolerance into practice, but he believes that it is the task and duty of the intellectual to recall and preserve historical possibilities which seem to have become utopian possibilities--that it is

his task to break the concreteness of oppression in order to open the mental space in which this society can be recognized as what it is and does.

Abbie Hoffman clearly takes it upon himself to carry on Marcuse's intellectual task and duty, but he attempts it as an *aesthetic* task. The Marcuse quotation that opens *Woodstock Nation* comes from a point in the essay where Marcuse is laying out the aesthetic "origins of the modern period," – with reference to Baudelaire in particular – and the dialectical idea that a "benevolent neutrality" in consumer culture dilutes the revolutionary potential of Art in the same way that tolerance<sup>11</sup> as a liberal ideal becomes a dogmatic mode and, ceasing to resist oppression becomes the tool of oppression.

Art stands against history, withstands history which has been the history of oppression, for art subjects reality to laws other than the established ones: to the laws of the Form which creates a different reality--negation of the established one even where art depicts the established reality. But in its struggle with history, art subjects itself to history: history enters the definition of art and enters into the distinction between art and pseudo-art. Thus it happens that what was once art becomes pseudo-art. Previous forms, styles, and qualities, previous modes of protest and refusal cannot be recaptured in or against a different society.

By invoking Marcuse and setting up his book as an aesthetic object, Hoffman is attempting to present a work that resists becoming "pseudo art" through a banal appropriation by both the PIG NATION and the ROCK EMPIRE (Hoffman 5). He reacts to Marcuse's view of tolerance as serving oppression and performs 'being obnoxious'

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<sup>11</sup> Marcuse's discussion here is particularly relevant to Spinoza's desire for tolerance in the *Theologico-Political Treatise*. Cf. also Hobbes in *Leviathan* on the State's interpretive right to scriptural authority. My point being that there is a discussion lurking behind Marcuse pertaining to the role of religion in the public sphere.

and is at times violently intolerant<sup>12</sup> as a new aesthetic. What is easily masked here is the element of history, especially as it relates to European notions of modern subjectivity informing Marcuse's thinking. Hoffman indeed adopts a European avant-garde aesthetic that has a militant tradition of trying to make something new, but his deterritorialized aesthetics also allow him to synthesize European thinking (Marcuse and Artaud) with a nineteenth-century American liberal tradition (Twain). Art and culture become embodied in the *performance* of living authentically. This leads Hoffman by the end of his book to the conclusion that many "lefties" took off from the Woodstock after it began raining, "still thinking it was a festival, or worse, a concentration camp. Those that stayed are better for it, including me" (133). He goes on:

When you learn to survive in a hostile environment, be it in the tear gas parks of Chicago or the mud slopes of WOODSTOCK NATION, you learn a little more of the universal puzzle, you learn a little more about yourself, and you learn about the absurdity of any analysis at all. It's only when you get to the End of Reason can you begin to enter WOODSTOCK NATION. It's only when you cease to have any motives at all can you comprehend the magnitude of the event . . . nobody knew where the fuck anything was, not even WOODSTOCK NATION. Like Pete Seeger said, "If you were gonna join it, you had to join it by yourself." Figuring out how to get in and out of the whole thing was a problem as old as Western Civilization and as modern as traffic jam scenes in Jean-Luc Godard's "Weekend." You entered the End of Reason to be sure. (133)

Hoffman's early attempt to construct a map delineating between PIG NATION and WOODSTOCK NATION fails as the concept of WOODSTOCK NATION is deterritorialized throughout the book. The avant-gardist aesthetic of newness performs

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<sup>12</sup> I would include here also Hoffman's conflicted relationship with identity-based civil rights groups like the Women's Movement and the Black Panthers.

this failure as a theme by itself exploding beyond a history of the Enlightenment or modernity and reaching back to the beginning of Western Civilization. American folk musicians like Seeger collide with French New Wave auteurs. Comprehension requires an initial letting go of analysis, a porous opening to enchantment, and re-entry after the “heavy trip” that leaves one with much to process.

This tension between expansive notions of history and the perennial, present in Marcuse’s thinking above with relation to art and history, are made acute in psychedelic aesthetics. In attempts to recover what “happened” in the 1960s, it is easy to forget that the ideas inspiring well-known figures like Hoffman were coming from continental philosophers, and that in the “End of Reason” there is a return to enchantment. In his 1995 “Introduction” to the 1960s classic, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, Theodore Roszak writes,

In the sixties, psychedelic experience was intended to cleanse the doors of perception so that everything might be seen as holy in a culture where it seemed that nothing about the human soul or the natural world was any longer sacred. This is not a Reality Principle that supports the official objectives of modern life. (xxvi)

In his preface to the original edition, Roszak precedes Hoffman, saying that “the interests of our college-age and adolescent young in the psychology of alienation, oriental mysticism, psychedelic drugs, and communitarian experiments” belong in a tradition of radicalism going back to the seventeenth century. Roszak is “quite aware that this constellation has much maturing to do before its priorities fall into place and before any well-developed social cohesion grows up around it” (xl). The aspects of enchantment as

they relate to political theology need more attention than has been given in a frame of secularization as pushing away from and diluting religiosity.

By looking at some enchanted aspects of that tradition here, I am seeking to recover a discourse of enchantment in order to see how that enchantment plays a role in psychedelic aesthetics' sense of deterritorialized citizenship and reconfiguring of the Nation State in an emerging 'post-secular' world. In order to understand where Hoffman and the massive youth movement orient toward deterritorialized enchantment, it is necessary to look at some European influences. In what follows, I situate some of the European philosophical and aesthetic roots important to psychedelic aesthetics in the thinking of Antonin Artaud and Herbert Marcuse. Beginning with Artaud, I develop a description of the European phantasy structure that helps to construct the modern idea of subjectivity and self.

### *Earlier European Roots*

The European roots of psychedelic aesthetics occur in critiques of what philosophers call the "subjective turn," which has been broadly historicized as a turn toward accounting for individualism and emerging discussions of human rights and liberal nation states. While tracing such roots is in itself a huge task, my framing falls in line with Jerome B. Schneewind's history of moral philosophy, *The Invention of Autonomy*, and Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*. Schneewind traces the emergence of the concept of self-governance and particularly Immanuel Kant's original concept of

autonomy. I agree with Schneewind's claim that "conceptions of morality as self-governance . . . often thought to result from a major effort by Enlightenment thinkers to bring about a secularized society" are highly suspect and overly reductive (8). I also agree with Charles Taylor's tracing of the development of an "Immanent Frame" as characteristic of modernity and his implication that just because God has become for humans in post-industrial society merely "one choice among many" does not mean that people have given up religious enchantment or are in the process of leaving it behind. Religion remains a powerful rhetorical force to be dealt with publicly willy-nilly. Secularist frames superimpose an Enlightenment notion of progress, itself informed by Christian Protestantism, a fracturing of that culture. Even in secularist attempts to negate religion, they therefore inherently frame it in terms of European religious strife, but strictly speaking, enchantment never disappears completely with the advent of modernism, despite goals and claims of secularization. Psychedelic aesthetics purge the desire for "enchantment" repressed by narratives of modernization and secularization by publicly accounting for excessive aspects of spirituality.

Despite enchantment's ongoing critique of modernization, however, and because psychedelic works like Hoffman's above are conscious of cultural history, it *does* make sense sometimes to refer to "re-enchantment," but only in a 'post-secular' frame. The works informed by history reveal a nostalgic "looking-back" to a time before things went terribly wrong, but as I will argue, nostalgia is itself a product of modernity. The purpose

of my discussion of European roots here, and the necessity for such broad historical coverage, then, is to highlight longstanding versions of enchantment as social critique.

What emerged as psychedelic aesthetics in the 1960s was not completely new in thought; it was just disseminated more widely and with less orthodoxy and austerity. Even so, it was still the product of twentieth-century politics. The two World Wars that destabilized European Empires were, as Aldous Huxley theorized in *The Grey Eminence*, the product of political-theological battles in Europe during the Thirty Years War. Fascist aesthetics, such as futurism and what Walter Benjamin called National Socialism's "aestheticization of politics," attempted to overcome history. Along with destruction of political regimes all over Europe, longstanding critiques of modernism and autonomous subjectivity came to a foreground as alternative ways to exist socially. As the critique of this largely European social construction moved across the Atlantic, it became radicalized in the United States, partly because, despite its status as a modern nation state, the United States were never as "disenchanted" as European thinkers like Max Weber had claimed.<sup>13</sup> The European nostalgia for the pre-political state of nature, for a return to un-alienated and un-modern, which characterizes so much of Romantic thought, works differently in the United States, where religion and modern subjectivity

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<sup>13</sup> Mark Twain, invoked by Hoffman above, is an excellent example. Even if *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is taken in isolation, enchantment figures into all strata of society in absurd ways, and Tom's mastery of enchantment, his ability to spoof others, is exactly what constructs him as the ideal liberal subject. One need only look to church scenes in *The Simpsons* to see this social parody alive and well in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Parody of enchantment means enchantment is still there.



developed a different sort of “Self.” Aesthetically, however, the forms largely derived from Europe, such as the novel, transferred the sociology of Europe to the States.

As Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of habitus suggests, the representation of Self figures a “life lived,” as in a developmental progression; this is aesthetically articulated in nineteenth-century literature as the *Bildungsroman* or experience novel.<sup>14</sup> Nineteenth century aesthetics had worked to present the image of a “life lived” that culminated in a disciplinary model. In tension with this aesthetic was the ecstatic disruption of that linear progression. The well-known Romantic era aesthetic term for this is of course the ‘sublime,’ which can be characterized as a particular way of understanding human potentiality. As the ecstatic sublime became hypostasized in the *Bildungsroman* the European ‘self’ became its own subject.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, the nineteenth century European social science of Durkheim sought to explain the ‘life-lived’ of man from ancient to modern times. It was in accounting for the early part of “man’s life” that the ancients became associated with childhood, superstition, and nature whereas civilized, modern man became characterized as alienated from it.

Combined with the development of the autonomous subjectivity, a ‘life lived’ could be abstracted and quantified. In this frame, for example, we could put Sigmund Freud into a cultural context where his relegation of the ecstatic to the unconscious

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<sup>14</sup> Bourdieu’s lectures on Flaubert in *The Field of Cultural Production* exemplify his method in relation to literature from this period.

<sup>15</sup> For the sake of brevity here I will include England as part of “Europe,” but it should be noted that the tradition of Empiricism and Darwin’s impact changed the way enchantment was figured in English Literature. This distinction will be more apparent in later chapters dealing with Aldous Huxley.

amounts to the social repression of enchantment in favor of a disciplined ‘self.’ Everything gets internalized in favor of positing a social construction of ‘self’ and its essential features. Psychedelic aesthetics, then, ultimately articulate revised notions of subjectivity against this European phantasy structure by drawing on alternate traditions of enchantment. If psychedelic aesthetics are truly “mind-manifesting,” it is the cultural perception of internal subject, of the “prison house of the mind”<sup>16</sup> that is manifested along with an individual’s temporarily disintegrated ego. To concretize this, I will show how two Europeans: Artaud and Marcuse come to shape the aesthetics in Abbie Hoffman’s activism.

### *Artaud and Enchantment*

Writing in the late 1930s, Antonin Artaud demands in *The Theater and Its Double* that “the modern humanistic and psychological theater” be abandoned, “in order to recover the religious and mystic preference of which our theater has completely lost the sense” (46). For him, this “true” mystic preference has been diluted by modern religious institutions (as in the quotation at the beginning of this chapter). In the same way, bourgeois culture and modernity has, for him, anaesthetized feeling in Europe. This has resulted in a “plague” which can only be answered by a “theater of cruelty.” Artaud’s

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<sup>16</sup> David Lovekin, in *Technique, Discourse and Consciousness*, has pointed out that the well-worn term ‘prison house’ was a rather poetic translation by Erich Heller of Nietzsche’s concept of the constraint of language. It was picked up by Frederic Jameson and widely disseminated as a meme among scholars (209). I have obviously broadened the term to apply to not just language but the mind to get at the affective and extra-linguistic aspects of the aesthetics. For an updating of language theory in relationship to this, see Gunther Kress’s *Multimodality*.

“cruelty” attempts to present a materialized notion of aesthetics as a critique of European “culture,” which he sees as overly transcendent, abstract and autonomous. He writes, “What is most important, it seems to me, is not so much to defend a culture whose existence has never kept a man from going hungry, as to extract, from what is called culture, ideas whose compelling force is identical with that hunger” (7). In a way, Artaud’s is a cultural recovery project that extends pre-culturally, to primordial human society. He has built a narrative of human history upon the sociological solutions that a thinker like Emile Durkheim had proposed in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* to categorical “apriorism” and positivistic empiricism (21). Social science, like the *Bildungsroman*, narrates a development of social construction, but anti-modernists like Artaud take the idea of essence not as a point of “pure” data on which to build a scientific discipline to investigate human life. Rather, Artaud, takes the “essence” of the “primitive” as more original and less diluted human practice. He turns the idea of development on its head. Although primitivism as an aesthetic sensibility informed the surrealists with whom Artaud was briefly involved in the 1920s, Artaud left the group partly because of his inability to combine art and communist politics, which was becoming increasingly more present among other surrealists like Andre Breton. Another reason for the break was due to an issue of *La Revolution Surrealiste* that Artaud wrote most of himself and themed *The End of the Christian Era*. The issue openly attacked the Pope and praised the Dalai Lama (though later he was just as critical of Buddhists), calling them “filthy Europeans” (Barber 33-34). But Artaud’s call to return to primordial

religion is best captured by his writings about Tarahumara Indians in Mexico, with whom he was exposed to peyote rites in the late 1930s, collected under the title *The Peyote Dance*. According to Artaud's account of the Tarahumara, under the influence of peyote, one meets *Ciguri*, who helps one to determine his or her true self distinct from God. He says the Tarahumara discuss *Ciguri* reverence and terror: "the word awakens in them that sense of the sacred which European consciousness has lost, and this is the root of all our misfortunes, for here people no longer respect anything" (*Peyote* 22). Later in the work, Artaud associates the ritual with Christ:

And it would appear that the purpose of the Peyote Dance, originally a Rite designed to reveal the teachings of the Plant given to man by Jesus Christ, was to invite the human creature to arrive at consciousness. For without help he cannot make up his mind to it. (77)

He associates the ritual with Plato's discussion of Atlantis and goes on to say, "man today is unclean and impure. He cannot distinguish between the base and the Sublime, between eroticism and Poetry." From these experiences, and from his experiences with Cambodian and Balinese dancers discussed in *The Theater and Its Double*, Artaud develops his aesthetic idea of the Theatre of Cruelty, which would according to him perform true poetry. In order to accomplish his task, Artaud's theatre must incorporate *all senses, gestures, and actions*. It must, like the psychedelic aesthetics that emerge later, be a theatre *saturated* with meaning.

The theatre for Artaud is meant to ward off the "plague" of European culture. There is also something almost bio-political in Artaud's conception of the plague. It is

passed like a disease, but it is constructed by humans. Moreover, the cure is not found in something new. Rather, Artaud insists on “the idea of culture-in-action, of culture growing within us like a new organ, a sort of second breath; and on civilization as an applied culture controlling our subtlest actions, a *presence of mind*” (*The Theater* 8). It is a matter of something deep in genetic transference, but Artaud collapses biological evolution with resurrection. This ‘second breath’ alludes to a cultural metempsychosis, to a return to a more primeval state recovered through an emerging awareness. The primeval state includes one’s spiritual double, which Europeans have lost according to Artaud:

There exists among the Tarahumara Indians the tradition of metempsychosis; and it is the loss of their Double which they dread above all. Not to be aware of what one’s Double is, is to risk losing it. It is to risk a kind of abstract fall, beyond physical space, a wandering through the high planetary regions of the disembodied human principle. (*Peyote Dance* 10)

Artaud writes in *The Theater and Its Double* that in its current incarnation, “a cultivated ‘civilized’ man is regarded as a person instructed in systems, a person who thinks in forms, signs, representations – a monster whose faculty of deriving thoughts from acts, instead of identifying acts with thoughts, is developed to an absurdity.” It is the *constructed* nature of current civilization that Artaud aligns with a distance from the divine and from authentic behavior. Culture is “an exclusively human” faculty that has infected and contaminated that which should have remained divine in humans: “far from believing that man invented the supernatural and the divine, I think it is man’s age-old

intervention which has ultimately corrupted the divine within him.” For Artaud, re-enchantment and doubling is *necessary*.

At least part of the intervention that Artaud writes of is an apparatus of autonomous subjectivity characteristic of Kantian morality and simultaneously Kantian aesthetics. As J. B. Schneewind points out, Kant claims that humans self-impose morality, constructing a motive to obey:

Kant speaks of agents who are morally self-governed. He took this term from political thought of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in which it was used in discussions of the idea of states as self-governing entities. (483)

While Schneewind points out that self-governance conceptually can be traced back as far as St. Paul, he also argues that Kant’s take in applying it to an autonomous subject is entirely new and original for the late 1700s.<sup>17</sup> At the heart of Artaud’s critique of bourgeois culture is a critique of an aesthetics of subjectivity whereby an autonomous subject acts as microcosm for the self-governed State. State and autonomous subject, by being intimately tied together, occupy the same territory, and it is this ability to imagine one’s self as within a State that gives rise to national identity. Artaud’s critique of modern subjectivity is simultaneously a critique of modern political States.

While this sentiment in Artaud may seem strictly in line with the tradition of liberal and Romantic thought – with its emphasis on humans being born in a state of nature inherently more innocent and closer to the divine, with the alienation from that

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<sup>17</sup> Thus, in Political-Theological discourse there has been a massive return to examinations of St. Paul’s writing.

state of nature by industrial progress – it is important to see that Artaud’s critique is not simply Marxist or Romantic. His is a lament for a perceived loss of *enchantment*, due to an economic and instrumental replacing of enchantment by a version of “culture” abstracted from life’s motivational force, which he aligns with magic. “No matter how loudly we clamor for magic in our lives,” he writes: “we are really afraid of pursuing an existence entirely under its sign” (9). For Karl Marx, the often misquoted line about religion being “the opiate of the masses” refers not to the masses being duped by religion, but seeking a true solace in it because of their destitute material conditions. Artaud, however, following thinkers like Emile Durkheim, is after something more distant than a history of materiality and economic struggle. Artaud is not getting at something *humanistic*. He calls for a re-enchantment in the face of the religious “disenchantment” and skepticism of the twentieth century, what had been introduced by a twentieth-century strain of Marxism in Max Weber’s work as instrumental reason.

### *Weber and Heidegger*

Basing much of his thinking on a fairly short trip to New England, Weber, in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905) had argued that a Protestant, and particularly Puritan, mode of being, “favored the development of a rational bourgeois economic life; [and] it was the most important part, and above all the only consistent influence in the development of that life. It stood at the cradle of the modern economic man” (117). From this he argued that one of the *most fundamental* aspects of “the spirit

of modern capitalism” and modern culture is “rational conduct on the basis of the idea of the calling, [which] was born . . . from the spirit of Christian asceticism” (122-123). He ends his book lamenting “the tremendous cosmos of the modern economic order,” saying,

this order is now bound to the technical and economic conditions of machine production which to-day determine the lives of all the individuals who are born in this mechanism, not only those directly concerned with economic acquisition, with irresistible force. Perhaps it will so determine them until the last ton of fossilized coal is burnt. (123)

The technical rationality, or to use the term of his critical theorist descendants, *instrumental reason*, out-reasons the modern rational subject. Instrumental reason as a concept develops out of the disciplinary “solutions” provided in the development of the social sciences. As Durkheim had written in his introduction to *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*:

The point is to know why experience is not enough but presupposes conditions that are external and prior to it, and how it is that these conditions emerge in the proper time and manner. To answer these questions, people have sometimes imagined, beyond the reason of individuals, a superior and perfect reason from which individual reason could emanate and, through a sort of mystic participation, derive its marvelous faculty. This is what we call divine reason. (16)

Instrumental reason is the secularized form of divine reason developed through Weber’s less optimistic view of religion in comparison with Durkheim.

With Weber we see a concern for resources and environment born with the German Romantic tradition’s concern with nature, something echoed later in Martin Heidegger’s “The Question Concerning Technology” (1954) and in his students, most notably Hannah Arendt and Herbert Marcuse, both of whom were widely influential in



the United States. Like Abbie Hoffman's return to the origins of Western Civilization at entry into WOODSTOCK NATION and the "End of Reason," Heidegger's existential phenomenology articulated earlier in the century in *Being and Time*, had sought a return to the question of being or ontology in pre-Socratic thought. While certainly not as reactionary as Artaud's return to the primordial as social critique, Heidegger's return combined with Weber's focus on technology was monumental for continental thought influencing aesthetics in the 1960s.

"The Question Concerning Technology" performs Heidegger's attempt to "get at" the essence of technology by overcoming its instrumental use: "So long as we represent technology as an instrument, we remain transfixed in the will to master it" (337). And yet this 'will' masks the process by which things come into presence, which Heidegger traces through an explication of Aristotle's four causes, leading him back to Plato's *Symposium*, where Diotima explains to Socrates: "Every occasion for whatever passes beyond the nonpresent and goes forward into presencing is *poiesis*, bringing-forth" (in Heidegger 317). Poetry, then, is the bringing-forth into presencing, but once this is formalized, according to Heidegger, it is destined by enframing; and this is the case with history.

History is neither simply the object of written chronicle nor merely the process of human activity. That activity first becomes history as something destined. And it is only the destining into objectifying representation that makes the historical accessible as an object for historiography, i.e., for a science, and on this basis makes possible the current equating of the historical with that which is chronicled. (329)

But *poetry is the process by which something is brought into objectivity, into presence.*

And the danger in treating technology as something to be mastered, for Heidegger, is that technology is “no mere means. Technology is a way of revealing” and “*Techne* belongs to *poiesis*; it is something poetic” (318). But importantly, for Heidegger, “the unconcealment itself, within which ordering [history] unfolds, is never human handiwork, any more than is the realm man traverses every time as a subject he relates to an object” (324). Humans are called into being through the process of unconcealment: “Wherever man opens his eyes and ears, unlocks his heart, and gives himself over to meditating and striving, shaping and working, entreating and thanking, he finds himself everywhere already brought into the unconcealed.” He adds, “When man, in his way, from within unconcealment reveals that which presences, he merely responds to the call of unconcealment, even when he contradicts it.” This call, which appears to echo Weber’s call of the Christian ascetic, has already “claimed” man in his process of engagement with nature, into the process of objectification “until even the object disappears into the objectlessness of standing-reserve.” Technology is not an instrument in essence but a ‘standing-reserve’:

Modern technology, as a revealing that orders, is thus no mere human doing. Therefore, we must take the challenging that sets upon man to order the actual as standing-reserve in accordance with the way it shows itself. The challenging gathers man into the ordering. The gathering concentrates man upon ordering the actual standing-reserve. (324)

A rather beautiful shift occurs in Heidegger’s essay at this point, as he breaks to the image of “gathering” by which mountain ranges are formed, then into the gathering “in

which we have feelings of one kind or another we name *Gemut* [disposition].” In this sentence, Heidegger has subtly passed from speaking of “man” in the third-person to speaking in the first-person. And from this, Heidegger names “the challenging claim that gathers man with a view to ordering the self-revealing as a standing-reserve.” Again, from whence does the challenging call come? To think this is to automatically recede into the thinking of subjects and objects. Nevertheless, Heidegger, like Artaud, hearkens *back* to something primordial, even if it is by way of ancient philosophy, and his answer is in poetry as an aesthetic process by which “presencing” occurs. Process art, performance and poetry that explode in the 1960s in the United States, have sources in continental thought. The primordial in Heidegger is subtly enchanted, and precedes Kant’s autonomous subject. It is also for that reason, as in Artaud, essentially nostalgic.

While Artaud’s thinking is in line with Weber’s analysis, *his nostalgia* for the enchanted makes him unique. He turns to Cambodian and Balinese theatre as models for his own, and while one might write this off as pure European “Orientalism” in its search “essence,” this turn itself must be characterized as critiquing the phantasy structure of a European self – indeed as that self turned upon itself, not necessarily in a universal move to take over the world, but in an enormous state of modern melancholy. Furthermore, as with my analysis of Heidegger, the motivation toward the primal is spiritual and enchanted, and in that sense, as we shall see with respect to childhood below, it is not simply an objectifying gaze with an eye toward domination, although one can see why

those with such agendas might find ways to rationalize their actions by appeals to philosophy, especially a philosophy that overcomes “History.”

In the years before publishing *The Theatre and Its Double*, Artaud had traveled to Mexico and experimented with peyote. His interest in other cultures, as well as his interest in psychedelics, was to critique modern subjectivity. To put this in Heidegger’s terms, Artaud critiques an enframing (*Gestell*) produced by European culture of the subject. Artaud’s answer, like Abbie Hoffman’s, was an aesthetic one; and in a similar way, the poetic and aesthetic turns of German thinkers like Heidegger (and Carl Schmitt) were cultural recovery projects in the face of depoliticization after the Second World War that attempted to reorient the deterritorialized the State by means of poetry.<sup>18</sup>

Heidegger’s poetic re-enchantment, via a return to mystical traditions in German Romantic poetry, attempted in a literary way to accomplish what Artaud was after in theatre. Heidegger and Artaud in particular challenged both instrumental rationality and the “normed” behavior that bourgeois culture exhibited and social sciences coded. But inherently within the challenge is the question of religious enchantment, of accounting for a loss of divine reason.

Artaud, who spent much of his life in and out of asylums, had a special distaste for psychology, and his call for re-enchantment is also in tension both with scientific positivism and with the rationality of Sigmund Freud. In *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), Freud had argued that the “oceanic” feeling present in religion is something

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<sup>18</sup> We shall also see this with Hermann Hesse’s influence on psychedelic aesthetics in a later chapter.

atavistic in modern humans. This performs in science the same thing the *Bildungsroman* did for literature. For Freud, progress will continue to move away from religious enchantment and humans will no longer need religion. The healthy and rational man (himself being the supreme model) is able to overcome the childish need for superstition. For Artaud, it is exactly this idea of “civilized man” that must be overcome. Stephen Barber, Artaud’s biographer, notes that although there is similarity between Artaud’s thinking and that of Jacques Lacan, the two men were hostile toward one another, and Lacan misdiagnosed Artaud’s case as being “fixed” in the late 1930s, that he would never write again (14-15). Artaud employs madness as critique for a society gone wrong:

He presents his asylum internment as part of a malicious chain of suppressions which extends back from the police, doctors and administrative bodies who were directly involved in his arrest, to the theological, familial and political bodies which upheld it, and through which the concept of madness had its origin. (Barber 13)

On the other hand, for Artaud the unconscious was not to be celebrated or given free reign, as it was in surrealism’s automatic writing, and Art should not be politicized. As Barber notes, “for Artaud, the unconscious mind could never be applied to political and social arenas without, firstly, a drastic anatomical transformation” (17). For Artaud, “the body comes before the word, and before the world.” Growing beyond both Marxist materialism and the unconscious, Artaud critiques the inheritance of this “European imaginary,” by looking for mind-expanding possibilities both geographically and chemically. His avant-gardism, however, must be grounded in a general European

nostalgia for an enchanted self and a call for its return to replace autonomous subjectivity present in a European imaginary.

I have sought thus far to articulate in detail some major aesthetic ideas coming from continental Europe and their influence on psychedelic aesthetics. What is essential to my argument is not just the historical lineage but the mode of thinking by which the developmental presentation of “life-lived” became aesthetically and sociologically abstracted in the twentieth century, making possible the plasticity of an aestheticized “lifestyle.” It is this abstract and conceptualized shift that affords an a-historic conception of being that can transcend modernity through a return to the perennial, that psychedelic aesthetics emerge.

### *The European Social Imaginary*

The European social imaginary, constructed and reified by habitus, is performed by many thinkers; and indeed it may be thought of, as Theodor Roszak suggests in *The Making of the Counter Culture*, as part of a larger Romantic tradition. What is essential to this imaginary with regard to psychedelic aesthetics, however, is that the critique manifests *in an aesthetic answer* accomplished by a turn to enchanted poetics. In the Romantic tradition there is a narrative of modern humans developing away from “nature” through an estrangement from nature and automation characteristic of much continental thought. That tradition had informed even the scientific positivists and thinkers like Freud, who mapped notions of progress onto the narrative of rationality moving away

from “nature.” For those critiquing subjectivity, the return became essential and at its root balanced on the problem of representation itself. As the philosopher and literary critic, Maurice Blanchot, another student of Heidegger, puts it in the late 1950s,

Once the gods, once God, helped us not to belong to the earth where everything passes away, and helped us, our eyes fixed upon the unperishing that is the superterrestrial, to organize meanwhile this earth as a dwelling place. Today, lacking gods, we turn still more from passing presence in order to affirm ourselves in a universe constructed according to the measure of knowledge and free from the randomness that always frightens us because it conceals an obscure decision. There is, however, defeat in this victory; in this truth of forms, of notions and of names, there is a lie, and in this hope that commits us to an illusory bond, to a future without death or to a logic without chance, there is, perhaps, the betrayal of a more profound hope that poetry (writing) must teach us to affirm. (33-34)

These words come from Blanchot’s essay, “The Great Refusal,” which the sociologist Herbert Marcuse quotes at length at the end of his enormously influential *One Dimensional Man* (1964). One must look to Blanchot, Marcuse and other students of Heidegger in order to get a sense of the shaping that European theories had on the coming psychedelic era.<sup>19</sup>

### *One Dimensional Man*

Herbert Marcuse emigrated to the United States in 1934 to escape the Third Reich, became a U. S. citizen in 1940, and worked for the Office of Strategic Services during the Second World War. As a member of the Frankfurt School, Marcuse (and

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<sup>19</sup> It is also within these theories that the psychedelic movement owes much to ways National Socialism was critiqued in the postwar years.

many other students of Martin Heidegger) helped shape countercultural thought in the 1960s. Though their thought was in many ways misinterpreted by the youth movement in the 1960s, this does not diminish the importance of their influence on psychedelic aesthetics. As Marcuse points out in relation to dialectical processes in “Repressive Tolerance,” much “pseudo-art” becomes the instrument of oppression. It is important to understand, nevertheless, that the critique of consumer culture presented by these thinkers *does not mean* that aesthetics and poetics were not seen as valuable to political deliberation. Even the work of Theodor Adorno, Marcuse’s companion from the Frankfurt School, which casts an entirely bleak view on consumerism, still longs to find an aesthetic answer. In *Minima Moralia* (1951), Adorno claims, responding to the emerging nuclear age and the holocaust,

what is decisive is the absorption of biological destruction by conscious social will. Only a humanity to whom death has become as indifferent as its members, that has itself died, can inflict it administratively on innumerable people. Rilke’s prayer for ‘one’s own death’ is a piteous attempt to conceal the fact that nowadays people merely snuff out. (233)

Death itself has no meaning, and Adorno radically critiques subjectivity and poetry in a Romantic tradition that would look to a subject for the potential to find liberation. That subject has, for these twentieth-century critical theorists, ceased to matter, despite the fact that they are still informed by that Romantic tradition. There is a critique of liberalism, a liberalism that relies on a certain version of subjectivity. But critical theory itself, in its attempt to look at dialectical processes and to claim the ability to theorize at all, risks continued reliance on subject-object relations. What one must keep in mind is that their



critique is a critique, and not an erasure, of subjectivity itself. It is a critique of historically constructed subjectivity. It is within this complex process of critique that psychedelic aesthetics informed by critical theory does its work.

In *One Dimensional Man* (1964), perhaps his most famous work, Marcuse theorizes that, originally, rights and liberties were defined in opposition to existing political structures during the Early Modern era. He seems at first, then, to adhere to a Weberian secularization narrative. Over the course of history, however, Marcuse says those rights and liberties lost their revolutionary power because they became institutionalized. As a result, advocating for freedom, which was once considered critical, has, by the early 1960s, become purely dogmatic. The possibility of freedom from basic needs that modern industrialized society enables creates the need for a different more realized freedom. But because independent thought has been stripped of its critical position, society becomes complacent and accepts the status quo. In this system, non-conformity seems useless and irrational. Marcuse goes on to claim that the ‘freedom’ prized for individuals to become actors in a market that thrives on business has not necessarily always been good:

If the individual were no longer compelled to prove himself on the market, as a free economic subject, the disappearance of this kind of freedom would be one of the greatest achievements of civilization. The technological processes of mechanization and standardization might release individual energy into a yet uncharted realm of freedom beyond necessity. (2)

Such freedom beyond necessity would, for Marcuse, truly liberate autonomous subjectivity, and it is for him well within the possibilities of modern society. But he says

that rather than liberation occurring, the opposite happens because of increasing demands on material and intellectual culture. He argues, “Contemporary industrial society tends to be totalitarian. For ‘totalitarian’ is not only a terroristic political coordination of society, but also a non-terroristic economic-technical coordination which operates through the manipulation of needs by vested interests” (3). Bleak as this may seem, Marcuse believes that the situation can be reversed and that *machines are merely stored human potential*. Here he is directly echoing Heidegger in “The Question Concerning Technology.” Following Heidegger’s view of enframing and human engagement with nature as standing reserve, the presence of mind necessary must be one of the processes of poetics as bringing forth. This is a mode of being in a process and not necessarily concerned with product; *however*, Marcuse’s attention to Heidegger’s enframing [*Ge-stell*] implies a future-orientation that would take environmental and resource concerns into account. The aesthetics necessary would be inherently politically deliberative.

What becomes necessary for Marcuse are new modes to realize liberation, modes beyond the economic, the political, and the intellectual. This is not the older liberation necessary for the growth of the liberal subject articulated by Kantian aesthetics, which inherently rely on a subject – not because Kant was wrong but because that kind of freedom is no longer revolutionary; it no longer liberates. There must be a new kind of liberation that moves beyond the autonomous subject. According to Marcuse, these modes must be realized in “negative” ways:

Economic freedom would mean freedom from the economy – from being controlled by economic forces and relationships; freedom from the daily struggle

for existence, from earning a living. Political freedom would mean liberation of the individuals from politics over which they have no control. (4)

He is quick to point out that “the most effective and enduring warfare against liberation is the implanting of material and intellectual needs that perpetuate obsolete forms of the struggle for existence.” For Marcuse, human needs are historical and shaped by society, and we must learn to distinguish between “true” and “false” needs: “Most of the prevailing needs to relax, to have fun, to behave and consume in accordance with the advertisements, to love and hate what others love and hate, belong to the category of false needs” (5). True needs, on the other hand, consist of nourishment, clothing, lodging at the attainable level of the culture. Beyond these needs, no tribunal can judge what freedom is or how it can be satisfied; it’s up to the individual. In modern industrial society, “the social controls exact the overwhelming need for the production and consumption of waste” (7). The social controls manifest in a “one-dimensional” society. Marcuse implies that one must think beyond juridical decisions concerning subjectivity. This would also imply a movement beyond a conception of the nation-state based on sovereignty and decision-making, or at least a re-oriented view as to what subjectivity would look like outside of the subjectivity determined by liberal society.

It is also not a matter of liberalism versus communism or economic enframing. Marcuse wants something beyond that altogether, and that is what eventually leads him to end his book with the passage from Blanchot quoted above. Marcuse says with regard to Blanchot’s “Great Refusal,”

The struggle for the solution has outgrown the traditional forms. The totalitarian tendencies of the one-dimensional society render the traditional means of protest ineffective – perhaps even dangerous because they preserve the illusion of popular sovereignty. This illusion contains some truth: “the people,” previously the ferment of social change, have “moved up” to become the ferment of social cohesion. Here rather than the distribution of wealth and equalization of classes is the new stratification characteristic of advanced industrial society. (256)

Marcuse is saying, with the same expression of negativity discussed above, that the concept of a “people” must be transcended as much as a concept of economics or state.

Again: “Political freedom would mean liberation of the individuals from politics over which they have no control” (4). Implicit here is an overcoming of European subjectivity and an overcoming of the liberal nation-state that relies on that subjectivity. But Marcuse points to Blanchot’s “Great Refusal,” and for Blanchot that task is accomplished by a return to “poetics” or “writing”; thus, it is an aesthetics informed by Heidegger’s return to ancient philosophy pre-Kant. In the same way Artaud has called for an acknowledgment of the motivating forces beneath culture, “growing within us like a new organ, a sort of second breath” (*The Theater* 8): both are nostalgic returns to enchantment through an overcoming of subject-object relationships.

If one misses this deep critique of European subjectivity in these works, as many people who read Marcuse superficially in the 1960s did, they are likely to have a very different take on Marcuse’s closing words with regard to “The Great Refusal.” Consider how the following words might read to such a person:

Underneath the conservative popular base is a substratum of the outcasts and outsiders, the exploited and persecuted of other races and other colors, the unemployed and the unemployable. They exist outside of the democratic process; their life is the most immediate and the most real need for ending intolerable

conditions and institutions. Thus their opposition is revolutionary even if their consciousness is not. Their opposition hits the system from without and is therefore not deflected by the system; it is an elementary force which violates the rules of the game and, in doing so, reveals that it is a rigged game. When they get together and go out into the streets, without arms, without protection, in order to ask for the most primitive of civil rights, they know that they face dogs, stones and bombs, jail, concentration camps, even death. Their force is behind every political demonstration for the victims of law and order. The fact that they start refusing to play the game may be the fact which marks the beginning of the end of a period. (256-57)

One could superficially believe that Marcuse here is speaking to the civil rights protests occurring in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and he *is* certainly speaking to that, but with a much longer historical critique in mind. It is helpful to see how he is drawing on the same criticism as Artaud.

Marcuse takes Artaud's criticism of plague-infested, bourgeois European culture and applies it to American consumerism. He claims, "Free election of masters does not abolish the masters and slaves. Free choice among a variety of goods and services does not signify freedom if these goods and services sustain cultural controls over a life of fear and toil" (8). The illusion of choice is a manifestation of false needs. Such illusions mask class differences and nullify class struggle.

If the worker and his boss enjoy the same television program and visit the same resort places, if the typist is as attractively made up as the daughter of her employer, if the Negro owns a Cadillac, if they all read the same newspaper, then this assimilation indicates not the disappearance of classes, but the extent to which the needs and satisfactions that serve the preservation of the Establishment are shared by the underlying population. (8)

In modern industrial society, people "find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split level home, kitchen equipment" (9). American consumerism for Marcuse becomes the

ultimate manifestation of Weber's instrumental rationality: "In the contemporary period, the technological controls appear to be the very embodiment of Reason for the benefit of all groups and interests – to such an extent that all contradiction seems irrational and all counteraction impossible." Preceding Pierre Bourdieu's conception of habitus, Marcuse believes that historical-social forces shape the subject in a way that denies the existence of the individual self, and the result of this is an immediate identification with society. Identities are shaped to "buy in" to a particular notion of progress. This identification is not an illusion; it actually shapes perceptions of reality, even if the form is false. The numbing qualities of one-dimensional society can feel good:

It is a good way of life – much better than before – and as a good way of life it militates against qualitative change. Thus emerges a pattern of one-dimensional thought and behavior in which ideas, aspirations, and behaviors that, by their content transcend the established universe of discourse and actions are either repelled or reduced to terms of this universe. (12)

This is quite similar to Marx's conception of religion as the "opiate of the masses." Such an opiate for Marx numbs the pain of class inequality. Marcuse sees these trends in particular with the growth of positivism and "operational" conduct, and even religion – traditional or bohemian – serves the status quo as just another codified behaviorism. He says this is true both in capitalism and in communism. In both cases, progress is determined by the powers that be. So, "the industrial society which makes technology and science its own is organized for the ever-more-effective utilization of its resources" (17). Where is there room for enchantment in Marcuse's bleak outlook?

Marcuse clearly builds his theory out of the German tradition, and particularly his *habilitation* on Hegel and his master-slave dialectic, which he wrote under Martin Heidegger. In the dialectic, the master, by enslaving his subject, creates a relationship based on need. The master (or the master's children) forgets how to perform deeds for himself, creating dependency on the slave. Eventually, the slave realizes this and becomes the new master. Similarly, over time (not instantly) people lose sight of their ability to perceive their own freedom as human potential. They begin to see freedom in terms of something like money, which is contractually earned but ultimately invisible. Money is a real thing, but it exists invisibly and through a social agreement that that's the way things are going to be. Even though this system is very real in the sense that it controls people's actions, it is a false consciousness. It is false in the sense that it exists in the imaginary and is maintained by a social belief system built *over time*. It is real but false. The image of this system is ideology. An ideology, in Marcuse and the Marxist tradition, is a social concept, and one does not simply "break free" from the social concept by simply "thinking outside the box."

Marxist thinking implies that the belief in an ideology is tacit and unconscious. It is not something people think about on a daily basis. People's actions and deeds, nevertheless, contribute to the social manifestation of the ideology. Like a religion, an ideology shapes a perspective for the way the world naturally exists. But it is the very *idea* of nature that is in question here. One's "natural" view becomes shaped by ideological forces that get replayed and *socially construct* reality. This process of making

the imaginary real is called reification. Marcuse builds on Hegel's dialectic and Marx's idea that in capitalist society there exists something between the ruling class (master) and the working class (slave): the middle class or bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie is made up of people who have benefited from the capitalistic society. In the United States in the early 1960s, Marcuse implies that individualism is so seamlessly built into the cultural ideology that people are fed by an economic machine which sells them their very identity and sense of meaning. To not have buying power is to not exist or be whole. At the same time, the idea of a middle class with a limited version of buying power supported by a belief in false needs essentially slows down Hegel's dialectic, preventing both synthesis and progress. The result is an ahistorical and ever "present" society perpetuated by false needs. It is with this idea that I now want to return to Marcuse's turn to Maurice Blanchot's "Great Refusal" at the end of his book to find what may be left of enchantment.

One-dimensional society is based on the crisis of imagination which cannot think its way out of that very system. Given Marcuse's suspicion of consumerism, what may seem surprising is that, as in Artaud, the basis for Blanchot's argument is aesthetic, and Marcuse *had* to have been aware of this. For Blanchot, it is about poetry, not just as something merely "made" or constructed, but poetry as a possibility for a different *way* of being. Blanchot's sentiment is strikingly similar to that which Artaud articulates – that it is not so much about a move toward transcendence, but a return to the materiality of presence and "presence of mind," occupied by an aesthetic practice. Both Artaud and



Blanchot acknowledge the function of poetry as a presence that understands writing not as the creation of immortality and memory but as the death that refuses immortality in favor of life punctuated and ended and formed. It is a double refusal: a refusal of life in death and also a refusal of immortality after death – a favoring and acknowledgement of the form. *This* is the heritage inherited by psychedelic aesthetics from European thought. It is the “great refusal” re-characterized by Leary’s famous phrase, “tune-in, turn-on, drop-out.” And while it is easy to see the refusal in “drop-out,” the enigmatic and aesthetic qualities of the first two imperatives are hazier without this background.

Artaud writes with respect to the poetry performed by the theater of cruelty that language must cover every sense and gesture:

To give objective examples of this poetry that follows upon the way gesture, a sonority, an intonation presses with more or less insistence upon this or that segment of space at such and such a time appears to me as difficult as to communicate in words the feeling of a particular sound or the degree and quality of a physical pain. It depends upon the production and can be determined only on the stage. (46)

For Artaud, such poetry must be embodied in performance. Like Blanchot’s “Great Refusal,” however, and informed by his peyote experiences, such performances invoke primeval states and put the performer in touch with his or her spiritual “double.” It is not in the physical performance alone, but in the performance’s gesture toward a re-enchanted spirit.

### *Manifestations in the 1960s*

Even though Artaud's book was not translated into English until the early 1960s, it had been a major influence on younger thinkers. Judith Malina and Julien Beck, founders of The Living Theatre in New York, had received these ideas and other European avant-garde training at the New School for Social Research under Erwin Piscator, before he was forced to return to his native Germany under pressure from the McCarthy era. Piscator trained many other activist actors, such as Marlon Brando, who attended, along with a young Abbie Hoffman, a protest vigil in 1960 against the death penalty at Caryl Chessman's execution (Sanders 267). Abbie Hoffman intentionally combined Artaud's theory and The Living Theatre's public presentation in his activism.

Artaud and Marcuse's influence on psychedelic aesthetics was synthesized when Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin formed the Youth International Party (Yippies) and used avant-garde theatre as protest throughout 1967. Most notably, they tossed money from the balcony to the floor of the New York Stock Exchange and then burnt money in front of the building; later in the year they staged an attempt to "levitate" the Pentagon. During the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago, which erupted in violent protest, Hoffman, Rubin and others were arrested and charged with conspiracy to incite riot, more famously known as the Chicago Seven trial. Hoffman wrote *Woodstock Nation* in an attempt to raise funds for his upcoming trial. During the trial, Hoffman and his fellow defendants constantly employed theatrical tactics to undermine the sanctity of the court proceedings. In interviews with *The East Village Other*, Hoffman attributes

much of his inspiration to Artaud's *The Theater and Its Double* (Duree 55). While it would be a mistake to confuse the entire protest movement of the 1960s with psychedelic aesthetics, the European avant-garde is one root that cannot be denied.

What is under-recognized in this root is the attention that the European thinkers gave to a sense of *enchantment*. Because of this, it has been easy to write off the sixties activists' psychedelic tactics as crude mockery without spiritual attributes. To the extent that ludic qualities are expressed in psychedelic aesthetics, they must also take on qualities of enchantment, even when the actual performers may have viewed themselves as entirely secular. Another factor in disregarding the importance of enchantment comes from the autonomous subject in the European imaginary, which Artaud and Marcuse had been critiquing. From a twenty-first century vantage point, as we shall see, we can employ terms like 're-enchantment' and 'postsecularism,' which were unavailable to these thinkers.

Hoffman, being an avid student of Marcuse and Artaud, tried to generate a theatrical kind of activism that would not perform a dogmatically liberal version of tolerance that had lost its revolutionary potential. It was therefore a more active rather than passive resistance, and he used the aesthetics of rock and roll as a platform. In doing so he risked falling into the consumerist traps that Marcuse had warned against with regard to the relegation of Art to banal 'pseudo-art.' And indeed, many have seen the 1960s as having become *just that* – another demonstration of the success of one-dimensional consumerism expressed by an uncritical mass of youth. Marcuse himself

was at times critical of this, and remained skeptical about whether or not a “world revolution” was even possible. Revolution was not, for Marcuse, inevitable.

In trying to bring about a revolution, Hoffman’s activism turned toward psychedelic aesthetics. He drew on figures such as Ken Kesey and in *Woodstock Nation*, stylistically mimics Tom Wolfe’s *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Tests*. In the book, Wolfe clearly distinguishes between the psychedelic activism inspired by Kesey at the Vietnam Day rally in 1965 and that of the earlier civil rights movement. Wolfe notes that Kesey’s message (which did not go over well at the event) was to say “*everybody just take a look at it, look at the war, and turn your backs and say...fuck it!*” (224). Wolfe also notes that in the New Left at that time, to call someone ‘Martin Luther King’ was about the worst thing you could call anybody” because people felt King had “turned back at the critical moment on the bridge at Selma” (225). Hoffman, in *Woodstock Nation* writes a list of points of agreement to start “peace talks” with PIG NATION saying that the pigs must understand that they must have separate negotiations with the BLACK NATION (111). So, while there are points of overlap, psychedelic aesthetics should not be too easily conflated with 1960s civil rights activism in terms of tactics, although the goals may be very similar. Nor should psychedelic aesthetics be overly conflated with hipsters or “new bohemians.” As Hunter S. Thompson pointed out in 1965,

Social radicals tend to be "arty." Their gigs are poetry and folk music, rather than politics, although many are fervently committed to the civil rights movement. Their political bent is Left, but their real interests are writing, painting, good sex, good sounds, and free marijuana. The realities of politics put them off, although they don't mind lending their talents to a demonstration here and there, or even getting arrested for a good cause. They have quit one system and they don't want

to be organized into another; they feel they have more important things to do.  
(qtd. in Lee and Shlain)

But what exactly are these “more important things”? It is here that the missing connection falls into the realm of *enchantment*.

The inability to see psychedelic aesthetics as motivated by enchantment is due to multiple factors. In this chapter I have attempted to trace historically the abstract secularization of instrumental reason from the earlier divine reason. This may of course also be articulated as part of a large disaffection with metaphysics in general during the early twentieth-century. In this frame, the alignment of a secular narrative is a “natural move” away from “superstition.” This amounts to more than the rather banal claims that positivism or science or liberalism are their own “religions” or that they replace religion with a different belief system. Enchantment maintains presence through an excess of symbolic material that cannot be accounted for in binaries between rational and irrational. Nor can the term “culture” account for such excess. The concept of technology as a “standing reserve,” as something that exceeds intentional utility, couches within it the idea that poetry as making (*poiesis*) occurs as *divination within enframing*. It is with this sentiment that Heidegger wrote his famous late essay, “Only a God Can Save Us,” and in this context, to study aesthetics would be to study the *possibility* of the generation of the sacred. This very possibility is undermined by a secular frame that on the one hand defines religion in terms of large European and American institutions which are implicitly atavistic according to the narrative; on the other, the consumer critique that

American commodity culture co-opted the “true” potential of social and spiritual experimentation in the 1960s. Possibility remains just that. That aspects of enchantment reveal themselves in Heidegger’s philosophy or Hoffman (and others’) plans to levitate the pentagon is not to say that they are secretly “religious.”

But a problem remains: In the secularist view, the work of poets and activists like Allen Ginsberg, Gary Snyder, Anne Waldman, the San Francisco Diggers and the New York Motherfuckers can be easily dismissed as “counterculture,” as “New Agey” or political performance art. Simultaneously, more mainstream religious enchantment such as the Martin Luther King, the American Friends Service Committee, Dorothy Day and the Catholic Workers (not to mention Vatican II) that motivates much of the 1960s civil rights movement can maintain an austere and respectable place in public memory. As James J. Farrell has written in *The Spirit of the Sixties*, the major religious activists “appropriated the religious languages of the churches and the democratic language of the civil society – including language about the sacredness of persons – and articulated its radical implications” (18). Farrell also points to scholarship such as Robert S. Ellwood’s *The Sixties Spiritual Awakening* and Robert Wuthnow’s *The Restructuring of American Religion*, citing their claims that the 1960s offered “the restructuring of American religion” through a “spiritual awakening.” But Farrell’s analysis goes on to describe American Personalism and its fusion with these developments. What is de-emphasized with Farrell but present in the European influences on psychedelic aesthetics are the intersubjective aspects present in symbolic excess. It is not enough to stress antinomian

individualism in psychedelic aesthetics. There may indeed be an inward retreat but there is a merge with a timeless perennial space that becomes the place from which poetic comportment is formed and made politically viable. As Raschke has argued in *The Interruption of Eternity*, the perennial created a generation of ahistorical superficial emptiness. In terms of “strong” religion, Raschke is correct. In terms of poetics and aesthetics, however, there is more to be said about what was being made during the psychedelic era.

### CHAPTER THREE: THE RETURN TO ‘NATURE’ AND THE PROBLEM OF THE PERENNIAL

*I think I'm goin' back to the things I knew so well in my youth.  
I think I'm returning to the times when I was young enough to know the truth.*

- Carole King and Gerry Goffin, “Goin’ Back”

*When I was a child, I had a fever. My hands felt just like two balloons. Now I've got that feeling once again. I can't explain; you would not understand...this isn't how I am...I have become...*

- Roger Waters, “Comfortably Numb”

In the last chapter, I focused on a European cultural imaginary out of which a certain construction of subjectivity arises, along with the philosophical and aesthetic critiques of that subjectivity. I attempted to show how such critiques informed the psychedelic aesthetics in the 1960s activism of Abbie Hoffman through elements of enchantment. Rather than seeing psychedelic aesthetics as something completely new, I argued that the aesthetics tap into deep-seated critiques of modernity. For this reason, I have intentionally strayed from distinctions between modernity and postmodernity in order to focus on modern subjectivity as a poetic figure or a social construct. Constructs exist and change over time; they are dynamic and hazy, but they necessarily impact social thought and political decisions over time. The inherent critiques of modernity inherent in psychedelic aesthetics challenge the notion of temporality. At a certain point, then, to get at the aesthetic study one must have a flexible approach to historical periods. Even if we could track material history precisely, we would have a hard time integrating the way imaginative figures work generatively and as affective inspiration for political decisions past and present. The “1960s” exist as a cultural texture from which new myths and lore arose in the later half of the twentieth century. They are still recent in cultural memory, and witnessing the 1960s becomes its own lore. “If you remembered them, you weren’t there” becomes a mantra, and for those who repeat such phrases, there is an element of pride, of insider status. Similarly, psychedelic aesthetics are evangelical in this regard. They also present as having transcended temporality, and if one is “experienced” one is



an insider, just as the affective claims about the 1960s invoke an insider status of witnessing.

Psychedelic aesthetics draw on a narrative of displaced, modern subjectivity. They take the figure seriously no matter the historical accuracy of it, and they pulse between the human being in particular and the human being in general. The associative qualities accompanying a psychedelic experience – the ‘interconnectedness’ of all things – deterritorializes the self by framing the ‘self’ in a cultural trajectory of alienation. In the European imaginary I have been describing, modern humans are separated from nature, and thinkers like Artaud seek to get back to a more essential or natural state through a process of re-enchantment. It is rather easy to critique this essentialism that disseminates so easily into “human in general” as a byproduct of European culture, but it is not enough to only say that it is a byproduct of arrogance, privilege or power. For Artaud, European society is sick, having strayed too far from the divine; the return to nature is therapeutic. His answer arises as aesthetics in his emphasis on poetics in his theater of cruelty, but it is nevertheless a political-theological answer in its attempt to undermine European society itself.

In order to see the political-theological nature of Artaud’s work and the psychedelic aesthetics that follow it, however, one must take enchantment seriously. Artaud’s poetics do not call for a poetics of transcendence. Because of this, Jacques Derrida argues in “The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation,”

The theater of cruelty expulses God from the stage. It does not put a new atheist discourse on stage, or give atheism a platform, or give over theatrical space to a

philosophizing logic that would once more, to our great lassitude, proclaim the death of God. The theatrical practice of cruelty, in its action and structure inhabits or rather *produces* a nontheological space . . . The stage is theological for as long as it is dominated by speech, by a will to speech, by the layout of a primary logos which does not belong to the theatrical site and governs it from a distance. (235)

Derrida is not wrong here, but he is overly monotheistic and a narrative of secularization informs his idea of the nontheological. In Artaud's account of the Tarahumara people, a man explains to Artaud the "precise elucidations of the way in which Peyote revives throughout the nervous system the memory of certain supreme truths of which human consciousness does not lose but on the contrary regains its perception of the infinite" (*Peyote Dance* 21). The man tells Artaud, under the influence of Ciguri in the peyote rite,

'The nature of these truths,' this man told me, 'it is not my business to show you. But it is my business to reawaken them in the mind of your human existence. The mind of man is tired of God, because it is bad and sick, and it is up to us to make it hungry for Him. But as you see, Time itself refuses the means.'

Derrida, writing in 1966, points out that Artaud's theater of cruelty "is still to be born" (232). But it is not born originally; rather, it is reborn: "Rebirth doubtless occurs through – Artaud recalls this often – a kind of reeducation of the organs. But this reeducation permits the access to a life before birth and after death . . . and not to a death before birth and after life" ("The Theater" 233). Artaud's work points to a reeducation through re-enchantment that informs psychedelic aesthetics. This involves a return to the primordial that moves beyond time – not just the linear time of history and witnessing, but beyond the concept of a human life as 'life lived,' as a totality that can be figured, and as a being-

toward-death. Psychedelic aesthetics informed by Artaud imply a concept of human life based on metempsychosis; the poetics accomplish this through a return to nature, a trip of disseminated ego, and a re-entry. In the process, the concept of citizenship and the relationship with the state and sacrifice are redefined, and in this the implied critique of psychedelic aesthetics is a political-theological one rather than being anarchic or nihilistic.

In the European imaginary, a return to nature – to the more primordial state – is also a return to childhood. In a complex interweaving, the return mixes with the aesthetic sense of the ‘life lived,’ which operates as a metaphor for progress of the self. These concepts fuse in the Romantic concept of childhood as innocent. This concept is constructed during the same period as western nation states. Citizens are fashioned and made from the empty potential of the child. As scholars of children’s literature have noted, the Romantic conception of childhood works as a social construct in distinction to earlier ‘Christian’ constructs of humans being born in sin, inherently evil, and in need of being saved. The idea of autonomous subjectivity, accompanied by John Locke’s idea of *tabula rasa* and Jean Jacques Rousseau’s descriptions of how to make a citizen, helped to construct the English and European image of humans apart from nature. Importantly for Rousseau, a man and a citizen are not the same thing. The “natural” man is sacrificed in order to make a citizen:

The natural man lives for himself; he is the unit, the whole, dependent only on himself and on his like. The citizen is but the numerator of a fraction, whose value depends on its denominator; his value depends upon the whole, that is, on the community. Good social institutions are those best fitted to make a man unnatural,

to exchange his independence for dependence, to merge the unit in the group, so that he no longer regards himself as one, but as a part of the whole, and is only conscious of the common life. (*Emile* 4)

A secularization narrative combines the idea of the blank slate with the move away from religious “primitivism,” which is essentially childlike. To approach essence in Artaud’s fashion was a deeply critical act at the time, which, over time perhaps lost its revolutionary potential or its critical edge. But when enchantment, taken seriously, is added to what may be called Artaud’s primitivism, the critical edge reappears, challenging the secularization narrative.

In a narrative of secularization, enchantment is left behind by the notion of progress. Progress is necessary in order for the citizen to be constructed. The citizen must be “developed” as the nation is territorialized. It makes sense, then, in times of political crisis for liberal nation states that youth, nature and religious enchantment are potential sites for the incendiary. The psychedelic experience in the 1960s was an easy way to bundle up all of the critique in one act. With this in mind, it is not hard to see connections between psychedelic drug-use and citizenship, nor is it difficult to imagine why CIA had projects of behavior modification like MK-ULTRA. The real question consists in asking what comes *after* the behavior modification: What were the protesting youth making themselves into? What happens at the end of the trip, at re-entry? The illegalization of LSD was partly due to a threat to citizenship. How could a nation function with a generation of youth more interested in tripping than working? These are questions with emerging scholarly answers as the period is historicized.

During the 1960s, as citizenship was questioned at the level of one's biology through legislation of controlled substances, the particularized act of protest became a politicized friend-enemy distinction with the State, as we saw explicitly in Hoffman's rhetoric. What began as legislation to protect citizens from bad pharmaceutical practices became a question of individual rights (Langlitz). In this sense, movement, travel and uprooted-ness accompany the psychedelic experience as the acting out of freedom of the body. They also act to deterritorialize the Self, and one particular result of this is nostalgia.

Nostalgia, as Robert Hemmings has written, was first coined as a disease by Johannes Hofer in 1688 as literally "homesickness" for one's native land. It accompanies the depression suffered by European colonialists and diasporas. Nostalgia accompanies deterritorialization. Hemmings writes,

At its very roots, nostalgia is linked with the trauma of deprivation and loss. By the late eighteenth century, [Jean] Starobinski argues, the nostalgic yearns not so poignantly to return to the place of one's childhood – a treatment favored by Hofer – but to childhood itself . . . In other words, nostalgia is a function of the imagination, steeped in temporal and spatial longing, and the illusive object of that longing is childhood. (55)

At the cultural level, the European imaginary that accompanied modern subjectivity provokes a sense of nostalgia for the spiritual. Nostalgia relies on a past at the same time it feeds on what is lost. A symbolic displacement occurs as the desired homeland one is sick for transfers into a textured state. As Hemmings argues above, the loss of the places of one's personal childhood becomes a desire for the *texture* of childhood itself. The poetics at work in this transfer exist in psychedelic aesthetics as an attention to texture

itself. Texture or webbing is virtual and made (*poiesis*). To the extent that nostalgia is an “imaginary” disease, like that of melancholia, it does not that make it any less real. The “temporal and spatial longing” that accompanies nostalgia appears with vehement force in psychedelic aesthetics as a shift toward the perennial, a disruption of narrative, what Maurice Blanchot called the disaster.<sup>20</sup>

### *The Problem of the Perennial*

Psychedelic works constantly point toward the perennial, disrupting citizenship through a return “to nature” that is prehistoric and pre-political. These appeals transcend those directed toward maintaining “childlike innocence.” Appeals to the perennial can seem anti-intellectual, overly-naïve and reductionist. Critics suspect the perennial because it is always there, and to invoke it seems overly essentialist. The perennial also disrupts attempts to account for development, adding a kind of dementia or amnesia. It therefore disrupts cultivation and citizenship. During the 1960s, a “culture” of the perennial emerged; the psychedelic or “mind-manifesting” became psychedelia, a recognizable style and attitude. In doing so, it perhaps lost its revolutionary potential and became reduced to one-dimensionality, to use Marcuse’s terms. Yet even this frame of critiquing the perennial implies progressive linearity and dialectic, a narration of ordered accretion. The eye that historicizes the narration reduces to the particularity of its own testimony, and ethics underwrite the criticism. The ideal in psychedelic aesthetics is to

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<sup>20</sup> I will return to this concept in connection with Carl Schmitt later.



The absence of verbs collapses subject and object while affording a list of fragmentary images. To the extent that the reader imagines a subject he or she implicitly identifies with the absent present 'I.' This sets up the shift to the imperative: "Lie with her." This merge with 'life' personified as 'her' accomplishes the death and rebirth of the 'I am' but as completely new and primordial.

Narrative in psychedelic aesthetics must overcome its own temporality, just as narrative in experimental fiction during the late-modern or postmodern period is concerned with the boundaries of narrative itself as opposed to the nineteenth century novel's dependence on the 'life lived' aesthetic. The figure of the trip in fiction and the element of process in much 1960s poetry are both devices employed to overcome temporality through appeal to the perennial through textural dissemination. But because of this, the perennial constantly risks superficiality on the one hand and ignorance of material historical forces on the other. It is frustratingly shapeless for criticism relying on a theory of the eye, on an unsaturated poetic sense.

Poetics in the perennial can be superficially represented structurally with an axis: vertical, mythological time and horizontal, the horizontal being linear, historical time. Such a figure is reminiscent of Mircea Eliade's *The Sacred and the Profane*. While Eliade has been criticized for the tendency his sacred-profane binary had to oversimplify and fetishize exotic "otherness" in search of "essential" meaning, in this context the



thinking exemplifies the same critique of modernity that Artaud employed.<sup>21</sup> Eliade contributes to the European imaginary that has had real-world consequences both good and bad. In *The Sacred and the Profane*, Eliade writes:

Above all, we understand this: the man of primitive societies has sought to conquer death by transforming it into a *rite of passage*. In other words, for the primitives, men die to something *that was not essential*; men die to the profane life. In short, death comes to be regarded as the supreme initiation, that is, as the beginning of a new spiritual existence. (196)

This of course is similar to Artaud's idea of rebirth and theater. Turning away from the transcendent theology of the stage while simultaneously calling for a poetics where every gesture is saturated with meaning enacts a *process* that redraws the distinction between same and other, ego and id, and also sacred and profane. Desiring to escape the confines of modern colonial thought and its alienating conditions, thinkers like Artaud and Eliade point toward "primitivism" as a way to move toward the perennial.

In the last section of *The Sacred and the Profane*, Eliade gives a brief survey of the history of religion and adds an important element to the move away from the transcendent. First off, Eliade claims that over western history there has been a long process of desacralization. In modern Europe, since the time of the subjective turn, this

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<sup>21</sup> If I do not delve deeply into criticism of Eliade here, it is to preserve some semblance of the thinking of the period. Structuralism and what became post-structuralism is historically simultaneous to and congruent with psychedelic aesthetics. Poststructuralism as I will argue in later chapters, is psychedelic. Like postmodernism, however, it should not be thought of temporally, but in a dialectical process with structuralism. That is: structure undoes itself, as Derrida's work famously synthesized in the term Deconstruction. I use the term poetics and *poesis* as making to get at both the generative and the re-constructed involved in this process. The reason why I feel it necessary to gesture toward psychedelic aesthetics is because of the potential inherent in them to expand the use of poetics beyond the linguistic. Affective decision-making does not work in a strictly sequential logic, and if we are to understand the political implications of psychedelic aesthetics, I must reroute traditional discourse here.

has been characterized by narratives of secularization. Even so, Eliade points out that even in the mid twentieth-century, clear distinctions between *homo religiosus* and “modern nonreligious man” are rarely occupied fully in either category by individual people (203). It is hard to find one who is completely one or the other. Nevertheless, in Eliade’s view, modern nonreligious man “descends” from religious man. This is indeed a shift from the more ethnocentric views Durkheim expressed a half century before. But there is more: “After the first ‘fall,’ the religious sense descended to the level of the ‘divided consciousness’; now, after the second [the advent of the modern era], it has fallen even further, into the depths of the unconscious; it has been ‘forgotten’” (212). In this double state of amnesia, the external forgotten religious past is intensified by the internal repression of spiritual longing, and the desire to return to the state of nature and the perennial emerges. And so the imagined landscape of the perennial is an historical event shaped by a narrative of secularization itself. I have tried to address this narrative in figural form with the concept of the “European imaginary.” The difficulty is partially resolved by aesthetic study over socio-historical methods. As I argued in the previous chapter, the European imaginary has long been critiqued throughout the modern era, and many philosophers and artists in the mid twentieth century sought poetics as a place for movement. It is best to look here with regard to the problem of the perennial.

To focus only on the perennial distorts temporality and either removes causality altogether in favor of some sort of divine channeling, or it places responsibility for causes on departed deities or prime movers. More recent scientific research on psychedelic

drugs suggests that DMT, and to a lesser extent closely related molecules like psilocybin and LSD, literally turn the human brain into an antenna to receive massive amounts of information beyond the consciousness. This would be similar to divine channeling. The prime mover or the designer of the experience of the source is then relegated to conceptual reflection after the fact. It is here that concepts of gods appear, and depending on one's perspective, it is either extremely fatalistic or completely relativistic.

In twentieth century European philosophy, human lives are determined by a necessary being-toward-death. This projection toward the unknown situates the subjectivity of a human. Mortality provides a context for what Heidegger called *care*, because mortality gives us a sense of loss, lack or want. Linear, causal time is constitutive of a being distinguished from the world, experiencing self as different from Other, creating an experience of life as desire, need or lack, in both a material and an emotional sense. The human is traumatically flawed. Differing answers to this problem of desire and human motivation arise in the twentieth century, attempting to give meaning to a being-toward-death, some finding authenticity in the taking up arms against life's sea of troubles. But that authenticity would be an overcoming of self-consciousness, a return to a more 'animalistic' state of being, of pureness of experience so characteristic of early twentieth-century literature (D. H. Lawrence especially so), or something with rationale features as well, like Nietzsche's Overman. This would be the Romantic push toward the perennial and accounts for much recreational drug use, where

the 'experience' itself is fulfilling because of an overcoming of bad faith and a lack of false consciousness.

But, as I have been arguing, this "Romantic" thinking exists in the productive space of the European imaginary, where, accompanied by a narrative of secularization that sees a move away from religion as socially progressive, it operates on a being-toward-death as a life model. A 'being-toward-animal' here creates an inversion of secular progress while also asserting another kind of progress. The difference between nineteenth century 'life-lived' aesthetics and twentieth century aesthetics would be the central question of the unknown but inevitable end, made only more inevitable by the development of humanity's ability to destroy itself. Paul Kahn calls this the ticking time-clock trope in television and film ("Torture and the Dream of Reason"). For him, the ticking time-clock that protagonists are constantly trying to stop is always ultimately the nuclear countdown. The desire becomes to stop the inevitable march of time.

In psychedelic aesthetics, which are informed by critiques of Romantic subjectivity, the turn toward the perennial is this desire informed by the doubleness of Blanchot's characterization in "The Great Refusal" and Artaud's return to enchantment. For Blanchot, after moving away from the gods, humans replaced them with Reason. Again, he writes in the 1950s: "Today, lacking gods, we turn still more from passing presence in order to affirm ourselves in a universe constructed according to the measure of knowledge and free from the randomness that always frightens us because it conceals an obscure decision" (33). We replace one form of faith with another when the gods

retreat, and for that reason there is “defeat in this victory; in this truth of forms, of notions and of names, there is a lie.” This lie is in a kind of human godlike immortality of instrumental reason that simultaneously stores our supernatural power. Moreover, “in this hope that commits us to an illusory bond, to a future without death or to a logic without chance, there is, perhaps, the betrayal of a more profound hope that poetry (writing) must teach us to affirm” (34). What poetry must affirm in regard to this is the double-refusal of the inability to accept death on the one hand and the apotheosizing of human reason on the other hand. The “hope” is in a return to enchantment that poetry can help to bring about. ‘Writing’ in 1960s French thought becomes the site of death, and of working out this hope. This writing turns toward the enchantment of mysticism as accessed through the perennial. But it is a writing that must overcome representation and form itself; and so, like Artaud the work dies and overcomes death simultaneously through the process of the performance itself. Or, like the American composer and writer John Cage’s work, poetry becomes aleatoric or chance-based, which comes from his interest in eastern religion and the *I-Ching*.

While differing in their use of enchantment, Cage and Artaud were on the same wavelength regarding performance. Teaching at Black Mountain College in the early fifties, Cage found that his interest in Zen led him to a general interest in eastern philosophy, which greatly affected his aesthetics. He arranged one theater performance at Black Mountain as follows:

Nobody wore costumes; everybody played themselves. Cage had an idea of what each performer had decided to do. He never made specific

assignments because he didn't want to be a traditional western composer, "someone who tells other people what to do." He used *I Ching* coin tosses to determine when each person would perform, and how long they would do it. He was trying, he later explained, to find a way "to let sounds be themselves rather than vehicles for man-made theories or expressions of human sentiments." (MacAdams 164)

Cage makes by negating poetry as "making," or at least making with intention. Thus, the loss of inner and outer, of subject-object, was one aspiration of his aesthetic that sought to make the very being of the performer an individual site of artistic transcendence. The result then is a loss of self. There are obviously resonances with Hoffman's psychedelic activism here as well in terms of performance, and like Hoffman, Cage saw a collapse of aesthetic medium and personal being as helping to bring about something new. *This* newness was a model for the new poetry and characteristic of psychedelic aesthetics and mysticism.

In his August 1959 lecture-poem, "Lecture On Nothing," Cage exemplifies more clearly the collapse between being and the aesthetic work. The body becomes a formal quality of the work, but this happens in the temporal space of the perennial. In section five of the lecture Cage states:

What I am calling poetry is often called content. – I myself have called it form. Is is the conti – nuity of a piece of music. Continuity today, - when it is necessary, is a demonstration of dis – interestedness. That is, it is proof that our delight – lies in not pos-essing anything. Each moment – presents what happens. How different – this form sense is from that which is bound up with – memory: themes and secondary themes; their struggle; – their development; the climax; the recapitulation (which is the belief – that one may own one's own home). But actually, – unlike the snail, we carry our homes within us, – which enables us to fly or to stay –, -- to enjoy each. (829)

The poem exemplifies the emerging psychedelic aesthetic with form becoming localized in the body, but also in the reversal of form and content, suggesting the subject-object collapse associated with mystical experience. Continuity in the musical sense is thus likened to a continuity of being. Cage's description of poetry and its relation to existence is similar to Artaud but less overtly interested in an enchanted return to something primordial.

In his collapse of subject-object distinction, Cage also presents his art and his criticism as the same, just as he collapses mediums of writing and music through performance. By existing in a temporality like music, which must unfold in a time of constant presence, Cage emphasizes performance to push toward the perennial, where repetition can repeat, but never be the same and never be original. Derrida, in his essay on Artaud, points to the same: "Because it has always already begun, representation therefore has no end. But one can conceive of the closure of that which is without end. Closure is the circular limit within which the repetition of difference infinitely repeats itself" ("The Theater" 250). This kind of thinking is of course characteristic of Derrida's thinking in the 1960s.

*Writing and Difference* and *Of Grammatology*, Derrida's most influential texts of the late 1960s, firmly established him as a leader in French thought, but the work he does is in the tradition set-up by earlier continental thinkers. Derrida takes Blanchot's "Great Refusal" seriously and connects it with Artaud's thought. Derrida's argument in *Of Grammatology* is that grammatology, or writing, should replace speech if one is to

understand the essence of language (164). The implication reverses the idea that writing mimics or re-presents speech. Embedded here is a critique of transcendent western religion similar to Derrida's account of the non-theological stage in Artaud's theater of cruelty. Secularist liberal thinkers like Jurgen Habermas praise Derrida's expulsion of the theological without paying significant enough attention to Derrida's mystical overtones or poetic enchantment. In *The Philosophical Discourse on Modernity*, Habermas writes,

Derrida passes beyond Heidegger's inverted foundationalism, but remains in its path. As a result, the temporalized *Ursprungphilosophie* takes on clearer contours. The remembrance of the messianism of Jewish mysticism and the abandoned but well-circumscribed place once assumed by the God of the Old Testament preserves Derrida, so to speak, from the political-moral insensitivity and aesthetic tastelessness of a New Paganism spiced up with Holderlin. (166-7)

Habermas claims that a messianic relationship informs Derrida's hermeneutics, not because he is religious (and Derrida himself asserts that that is not his interest here), but because of the metaphor of "the book of nature or the book of the world, which points to the hard-to-read, painstakingly to be deciphered handwriting of God." Derrida claims that we never have God's original text, only fragments of it, which have been lost. Habermas concludes,

Modernity is in search of the traces of a writing that no longer holds out the prospect of a meaningful whole as the book of nature or Holy Scripture had done. . . . the signification remains upon even unintelligible texts, the signs last – matter survives as the trace of a spirit that has vanished. (165)

What this amounts to, for Derrida, is a critique of western logocentrism. It is not simply that the sign differs from the signified, that the word (logos) is different than the sound,



but that the word inscribes and preserves signification. This is a preservation of a process, not of an isolated or fixed artifact, and so while difference must be noted, the connection should never be forgotten or extinguished, hence Derrida's famous neologism *differance* – a difference which maintains and performs its instantiation of deferring over time. But despite Habermas's praising of Derrida in contrast to Heidegger, *it is enchantment which powers this deferring*. Derrida remains optimistic about the potential for writing to preserve the trace:

Because writing mortifies the living connections proper to the spoken word, it promises salvation for its semantic content even beyond the day on which all who can speak and listen have fallen prey to the holocaust. (166)

Writing affirms life *because it mortifies*. It is not just that writing is death, but the “salvation” of meaning transcends all individual hermeneutic ability. Derrida's gesture is ethically informed not because, as Habermas claims, it one-ups neo-pagan accounts of Romantic poetry, but in the sense that it imagines writing as potential for later meaning, later deciphering, and later communication. Rather than returning to nature or the pre-political, Derrida points to the post-political of the inescapable futurity of death, not just of the individual, but of the community. And yet, there is apparently someone to do the deciphering after. The writer's subjectivity is lost in that deciphering – he or she only remains through a trace of a signifying process, but it is not relocated into a reader. It stands in reserve for future political deliberation, as if archived as soft law. This requires a view toward futurity, and deliberation is inherent in the action of writing. Writing is deliberation slipping away while storing potential of standing reserve. This is the

ultimate critique of the European imaginary's reliance on subjectivity – a deliberate aesthetic attempt to produce what is both pre and post-political, that which, in Artaud's terms goes beyond life as coming from death and returning to it; it is the presence of mind of human subjectivity capable of metempsychosis through a return to the perennial.

In light of this thought, where enchantment does not give itself over to a secularization narrative, psychedelic aesthetics suggest that what must be accomplished on the return from the political in terms of writing is a redefinition of human subjectivity that transcends being-toward-death, that *writes into human law* – a law that transcends nation states – the human subject as capable of reincarnation. The difficulty of this task of writing is to exceed representation itself. As Derrida closes his essay on Artaud: “it is to think why it is *fatal* that, in its closure, representation continues” (250). The difficulty of describing psychedelic aesthetics is metonymic of the legal problems inherent in representation, subjectivity and citizenship, and analyzing them in terms of political theology becomes a question of human rights. If a writing that escapes being-toward-death is to become law, it would be something akin to soft law in terms of international human rights. This is a law without the ability to be enforced but nevertheless that by which political decisions are made “with regard to.” Unassumingly, psychedelic aesthetics point to this.

### *Analyzing Psychedelic Literature*

The perennial is the space of poetic transfer in the psychedelic experience, but contrary to superficial accounts of the psychedelic experience, it does not end there. Within the perennial, Heidegger's 'care' as being-toward-death is diminished in favor of an ongoing hum; it is expanded into a greater "love" in its non-distinction between things, a love that transcends *eros* as defined by lack. To the extent that one remains embodied as a subject in the perennial, there is ongoing presence in the moment as cypher between past and future. The body becomes the cypher just as writing becomes both death and stored potential. 'Care' gives way to what some Buddhists call mindfulness. In psychedelic literature, Aldous Huxley's last novel, *Island* (1962), makes this clear as the birds – nature itself – of mythical island Pala continually call out the command, "Attention!" reminding people of the importance of mindfulness. Huxley, whose literature I will return to in later chapters, performs psychedelic aesthetics as he theorizes them.

Psychedelic experiences give one the sense of encountering the perennial, but the trouble in trying to account for any "experience" exists in temporality's necessity to separate a person from what he or she tries to convey. Aesthetically then, nostalgia becomes one method of addressing the perennial and a trip becomes a metaphor for what cannot be conveyed in time: 'I am in some way the same being I was as a child, and also not the same being.' Accounting for such an experience is what the conventional body of psychedelic literature attempts to track by representing ecstatic experience and inviting

audience participation in that experience. In its appeal to the ecstatic, the rhetoric of the psychedelic maintains an *evangelical* appeal to mystery, to accounting for the unknown. The opened self exists in an “expanded” state where the boundaries of self become porous and capable of merging with other entities, physical or not. The world is all at once saturated with intensified meaning. One can think *into* things; objects drip into you. It is harder to tell where the light ends than where the world begins. But importantly, one also *returns* to a temporality of lack: history, and that return is where psychedelic aesthetics and Political Theology meet – in the history of the founding event that binds people together. Similar to Blanchot’s account of poetry, the psychedelic return is a ‘presence that is at once a refusal.’

Many of the features of psychedelic aesthetics precede the psychedelic “era.” In the Early Modern era, as Aldous Huxley frequently accounts, towns were temporarily taken over by the hysteria of St. Anthony’s Fire through ergot poisoning, leaving their inhabitants to encounter horrible images. In the sixteenth century, witches are burned. Within Romantic aesthetics, as a Coleridge poem tells us, an old man stops us on our way to a wedding, holding us in rapture. The reader is changed by the experience. Thomas Jefferson encounters a ‘natural’ land bridge. Romantic aesthetics are full of the sub-luminous, of what cannot be adequate to ideation and formal beauty. What accompanies Romantic conceptions of nostalgia and the sublime is profound spatial and temporal displacement.

Because of this non-adequacy, to interact with the sublime is always an aesthetic of *failure*. But there is something in the spectacle of the failure as a concrete matter-of-fact-ness – “You failed!” – that presents a moment of witnessing and re-orientation, a kind of sacred cleansing. And of course in the Christian tradition, the failure of life accomplishes the transcendence – through the dying body, but also through betrayal – the failure to recognize the divine that constitutes the human in need of salvation.

Often, psychedelic works perform a more extreme version of the drama of failure through an awareness of their own performance, like tragic actors. The works perform an awareness, as Artaud says, that “the actor has taken a form that negates itself to just the degree it frees itself and dissolves into universality” (*Theater and Its Double* 25). That universality is the perennial. But simultaneously, psychedelic works often also display an awareness of history that strategically grounds the immersion into the perennial as a reaction to history. Vertical and horizontal times are both simultaneously present. The engagement with history disseminates into an encultured past, relying heavily on the imagination of the person doing the figuring.

Take an excerpt from the song, “Homage to Catherine and William Blake” by the psychedelic folk group, The Fugs. The song begins with images of Blake and his wife playing out the Genesis story naked in their garden:

William Blake, won't you come into our brain, brain, brain, brain, brain apertures.  
Tell us, tell us about a nation gone nuts with nuts-nuts, //  
with the eating blood, Egyptian priests gaze the harvest by watching a stick in the  
river Nile, while galaxies are spinning in the sullen quasar spew.  
Demeter wants to tell her lovers all the Eleusinian secrets.  
Ooh William Blake lay down in the Rosicrucian coffin.

The apostrophe invokes Blake, channeling him into the present situation (the Vietnam War protest, to which there are other references in the song). The channeling occurs as a homophonic ambiguity between the organ of the “brain” with the aperture of the seventh chakra at the top of the skull and ‘brane,’ short for membrane which in physics can embody any number of dimensions. The vocals occur over the harmonic structure of a blues progression with a heavily cadenced ‘turnaround’ (which even a listener with no musical background can recognize). A break in the music at the turn in the blues form establishes a new cycle through the form, but the vocal phrasing carries over the two cycles, thus suturing the harmonic form and effecting enjambment of the line (signified above by //). The enjambment and the break accompany the shift to imagery of ancient Egypt and specifically to the Demeter myth. As the musical form builds in tension toward another turn, Blake is addressed in the imperative: “lay down in the Rosicrucian coffin.” This coffin invokes the mythological, occult and masonic tradition of the resurrection of the king. According to images in Alexander Roob’s *Hermetic Museum of Alchemy and Mysticism*, the image of the coffin doubles as a floor plan for masonic orders and maps the path of an initiate from the foot of the coffin up to the head or position of Grand Master, symbolized by a throne (222). In an allegorical piece entitled *Work-table for the 3<sup>rd</sup> degree (master)* c.1780, the throne is replaced with a budding palm freshly sprouting, with the coffin / floor plan under the earth (223). In this context, we can return to the song’s reference to Demeter wishing to release her secrets. Blake, being told to “lay down in the coffin,” disseminates with the help of Demeter into the mysteries

and infuses the aperture of the speaker's brain / brane with the answer to the nation's crisis. The psychedelic aesthetics here obscure temporality by invoking mythological tropes and contextualizing them in a given historical situation in an epideictic fashion of the ceremonious moment of the channeling.

The psychedelic aspects of "Homage to Catherine and William Blake" perform something similar to Artaud's "theater of cruelty" – Artaud's answer to the "plague" in European culture:

This very difficult and complex poetry assumes many aspects: especially the aspects of all the means of expression utilizable on the stage, such as music, dance, plastic art, pantomime, mimicry, gesticulation, intonation, architecture, lighting, and scenery. (39)

As the break in the music (marked by // above) that establishes the enjambment of the line also takes on the transcendence into mythological time above, polysemus gestures are layered on top of each other, creating a saturated metaphor. This is characteristic of psychedelic aesthetics in both themes of death and resurrection, as well as gestural punning. Jestng, invoking the occult or the mysterious obfuscates and de-temporalizes meaning, invoking the perennial and ultimately creating a space where ironic distance overcomes itself. This jestng, however, is enchanted, and exists in the representation of closure: "The movement is the movement of the world as play," as Derrida says ("The Theater" 250).

Now, I want to suggest that it is in the ludic presentation of irony overcoming itself that that psychedelic aesthetics has something to offer more current critiques of subjectivity and liberal citizenship. To get at this, I will use another example by the

Fugs, this time accompanied by Allen Ginsberg, as they perform an “Exorcism on the Grave of Senator Joseph McCarthy.”

The exorcism has about eight parts: mixed parts of Tibetan and Zen chants to clear the air, a channeling of the senator’s spirit, a woman who has offered to have sex with the spirit followed by a performance of “My Country ‘tis of Thee.” All of this seems quite tongue-in-cheek, and on the recording one can hear giggles from people in the group. The giggles interrupt Ginsberg as he begins the ceremony, and he stops to say, “Can we have quiet, like formal, religious, ceremonial thing? For seriousness it will work.” The posturing is completely self-aware, but at the same time, this is more than a joke. It takes a certain degree of dedication to do it, and the recording of the event makes the gesture a performance for a broad and unknown audience. Over and over in psychedelic works, the elaborate jesting performs exhaustion and saturation. Moreover, the profane humor is overcome by cleansing the deeds of the Senator who persecuted leftists in the 1950s (including Erwin Piscator, who was responsible for introducing Artaud’s theories of performance in America). As the performers overcome time, they invoke the perennial so as to have access to the spirit. Invoking the spiritual here has implications for the historical moment of the performance.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> An oddly similar “forgiveness” occurred later between Timothy Leary and Gordon Liddy. Liddy had persecuted Leary at the Millbrook estate in the late 1960s only to find himself later the subject of public scorn with his involvement in the Watergate scandal. The two men gave public appearances that were a kind of shoulder-shrugging about morality and law during the late sixties and early seventies.



The saturated psychedelic aesthetic overcoming irony performs a critique of modern subjectivity as derived from European culture. Access to this critique involves some sort of initiation into an *experience*. This notion of experience is deeply rooted in the European Romantic tradition, and it offers both justifications and critiques of liberalism upon return from the experience itself. Such a tradition is of course not static. It depends on what information an individual has and with which to figure he or she invokes the tradition. It operates as a cultural imaginary and individuals' levels of engagement will differ in accuracy according to their respective performances. Nevertheless, the ability to recognize the shared experience of "the Romantic tradition" or to William Blake points to a site of cultural binding. A ritualized experience of Blake reinforces that bond. Being critical does not come at the expense of traditional culture.

The return from the ecstatic experience produces the "truth" and the inclination to tell others about it. The one who is properly 'experienced' becomes a special individual, not only because of participation in the ritual act, but because the experience affords access to a special truth, to a commitment that is capable of binding. These themes occur over a broad swath of aesthetic material and mediums during the 1960s. Many popular psychedelic works – from Timothy Leary's manual, *The Psychedelic Experience*, to Jimi Hendrix's *Are You Experienced?* and The Jefferson Airplane's *Volunteers of America*, to Ken Kesey's acid tests – overtly perform such initiations. In their early account, *Psychedelic Art* (1968), Robert E. L. Masters and Jean Houston write of the broad range of psychedelic works,

These different works of art do have a unity, common meanings and intentions that keep them within the framework of psychedelic art. However, the unity may not in every case be apparent to the viewer who has no first-hand experience of altered states of consciousness and who is not otherwise knowledgeable about psychedelics. (87)

The first-hand experience offers exclusivity here, and the rhetoric is alluring. Again, the aesthetics are evangelical. Psychedelic experience here gives access, not just to a special understanding, but the ability to differentiate critically among a variety of works, to see connections where others cannot, essentially to have gnosis following initiation.

Part of that gnosis critiques an existing social European imaginary (and politically of course its American descendants). With regard to the psychedelic era, the fantasy structure of psychedelic experience must be situated historically as a critique of the European Enlightenment and the notion that immersion into “nature” and a return from it not only brings truth but a kind of purification. The hope or expectation for such purification is present in psychedelic works, and ideologically those works attempt to reform liberalism. Representationally, this reform took place through refiguring subjectivity and governance. In order to articulate, let me provide a brief historical gloss with some important features of liberalism and its relationship to subjectivity.

### *Liberalism and Subjectivity*

In the great political thinkers of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries – Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau – humans are born “in a state of nature.” Civilization, especially for Rousseau, corrupts this initially innocent state, and in *Emile: Treatise on Education*, Rousseau

suggests that the best way to raise a child is to allow him or her “to experience,” not just haphazardly but through the tutor’s unseen hand setting up learning situations. In this fantasy structure, women and children are inherently closer to nature, more innocent, and less capable of rational decision-making, while men are more corrupt by the evils of civilization and the manufacturing of morality and justice. Any desire for a man to return to a state of nature is an inherent critique of civilization, to become childish and effeminate.

To the extent that Romantic men immersed themselves in “nature” was both a social critique and an advancement of liberalism. On the one hand, one would experience immersion into the sublime as a way to broaden subjectivity and then conquer it through re-integration. Freedom allows for this growth, so freedom is an important value as a motivational force. On the other hand, a kind of Freudianism is at work (if I may be a bit ahistorical here) in the desire to merge with effeminate constructions of nature and childhood. One is tempted to “go native.” As colonization began to flourish, and nostalgia along with it, a perceived lack of civilized political structures by European colonists made indigenous people who tended to live in “natural” environments seem to be “primitive people” for Europeans. In the confusing metaphor of the European imaginary, autochthonous “others” were generally seen by Europeans as childish, necessitating the moral responsibility for colonization.

Land, women, children and “primitives” then become commodities in this structure, not just as property but also as a perceived moral responsibility in a cultured

lineage. For example, the desire for the pastoral setting, the country house, which English men of the Enlightenment inherited from their own nostalgia for the Roman Empire, acquired part of its relaxed status from its ability to reconcile control with comfort. Interestingly, as Quentin Skinner has argued in *Liberty Before Liberalism*, the Roman pastoral balance is disrupted by commercialism and growing liberal markets:

With the extension of the manners of the court to the bourgeoisie in the early eighteenth century, the virtues of the independent gentleman began to look irrelevant and even inimical to a polite and commercial age. The hero of the neo-roman writers came to be viewed not as plain-hearted but as rude and boorish; not as uptight but as obstinate and quarrelsome; not as a man of fortitude but one of mere insensibility. (97)

It is possible to see two later literary examples of this figure in the ineffective landlord, Arthur Brooke, from George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, and in the more lovingly portrayed Mr. Toad in *Wind in the Willows*. The "insensibility" that Skinner refers to aligns with the emergence of moral "sensibility" pervasive in the nineteenth century, largely explored in the bulky novels of the period. More recent critics like Michel Foucault and Alasdair MacIntyre have shown the emergence of morality as the product of a dissemination of values in a public and *secular* sphere. In their view, the rise of moralism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries accompanied liberalism and emergent "secular" nation-states. This "sensibility" was to be accomplished by the individual capable of self-transcendence. To Carl Schmitt, the twentieth-century German legal theorist and critic of liberalism, the same occurrence happened in legal writing of the period: "All significant concepts of the state are secularized religious concepts" and the state of exception (under which the Third Reich came into power in Schmitt's time) is analogous

to the “miracle” in theology (*Political Theology*). In the European imaginary then, the return to nature and the pre-political is accomplished in twentieth-century states of political exception as a return to enchanted, pre-transcendent theology.

Deterritorialization and depoliticization throughout the twentieth century creates the religious conditions for a return to immanent spirituality – a return to the miraculous.<sup>23</sup>

In this context, commerce and consumption appear to perform the inherent ability to produce sacrifice rites through the force of the economy. But according to a secularist narrative, this dissemination of traditional religiosity into “secular” morality would logically eradicate the necessity for religion in any institutional sense or *religio* as binding. The nature of “freedom” and “liberalism” is to unbind, but the frame in which these terms make sense must simultaneously reinforce something that acts as an oppressive force from which to inscribe subjectivity. Without that oppressive force, the values, as Marcuse argued, lose all revolutionary potential. However, if Schmitt was right and at their roots all significant political concepts are really religious, then secularization never really completed itself as a project and a political theological mess is at hand. What frightened Schmitt about twentieth century liberalism was the easy slippage away from political entities that could be defined internationally in terms of friend-enemy distinction into an amorphous and uncontrollable global economy.

The various economic problems of the twentieth century, the necessity to think in terms of international and world economies, outstripped even advanced industrial

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<sup>23</sup> The work of Hent De Vries on miracles has significance here.

governments' abilities to frame an individual citizen's sacrifice in geographical terms of nation-states. In the depoliticized transference of state power to the world economy, the "self" had to be buffered by economic consumption. One only needs to think of nuclear proliferation after World War Two to see that technology and the economy combined into the desperate attempt to regulate international state power that still occurs regarding nuclear weapons today. During the early half of the twentieth century, not only had State moral authority disseminated into the economic sphere, the entire western conception of self and how to transcend it became vacuous, and it is from this de-territorialized space that the ideas of "self help" and new ageism characterized in the mid-twentieth century by the psychedelic movement derived its exigency. But this return to self in the United States drew on enchanted aspects of subjectivity from both European and American aesthetic traditions. Enchantment saturates American aesthetics and politics from the Antinomian controversy in the 1630s on. Psychedelic aesthetics, however, draw on this tradition of enchantment while continuing to critique versions of subjectivity derived from the European imaginary. While seen in the 1960s as countercultural or revolutionary, psychedelic aesthetics in the 1960s often drew on the tradition of American enchantment *to conserve an idea of liberal subjectivity* – a preservation attempt. One need only think of freak flags flying and Peter Fonda's motorcycle in *Easy Rider*. Many works displaying psychedelic aesthetics in this regard were anything but anarchic – in their attempts to preserve liberalism they were quite conservative too.

A more specific example of this attempt to redefine liberal subjectivity shows up in the critique of masculinity as it came to occupy the effeminate, natural, and childlike qualities as refuge while the expanded notion of self came to allow a broadened sense of citizenship. Such emasculation broadened liberal citizenship, allowing for the extension of civil rights to those previously left out of the cultural imaginary. As bleak as it seems, much civil rights progress is made out of the motivation to preserve state power. As we shall see below, emasculation is an important theme in psychedelic works, but the more important point here is that this also entailed the questioning of the necessity of existence of the entire imaginary. Crises in liberalism are crises of self, subjectivity and transcendence.

General as this historical gloss may be, it is a necessary reminder in order to find a way into the psychedelic experience because “the psychedelic” – at least in the 1960s – largely manifests many aspects of the European fantasy structure. In doing so, psychedelic experiences (and the way they have been written about since the 1960s) perform an inherent social critique of a fantasy structure, and only in juxtaposition to such a fantasy structure do psychedelic experiences convey their whole meaning. In performing the critique, of course, psychedelic experiences also often *affirm* the power of such fantasy by relying on the critique, no matter what that structure’s flaws may be and no matter how radical the turn to the perennial was in the 1960s. Many psychedelic artists were aware of this at the time.

Some luminary writers were able to articulate the difficulties of the return to the perennial and psychedelics during the 1960s. Marcuse himself had said that nothing indicated that a revolution had to happen. As a literary example, Tom Wolfe's *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Tests* recounts Ken Kesey's unwelcomed reception at an anti-war rally in Berkeley where he tried to tell the crowd that activism only affirmed the authority of the existing powers-that-be. This incident evidences a different approach to the use of psychedelics, the perennial, and 1960s activism in contrast to my earlier examples. At the rally, Kesey told the crowd of demonstrators:

*We've all heard all this and seen all this before, but we keep on doing it...I went to see the Beatles last month...And I heard 20,000 girls screaming together at the Beatles...and I couldn't hear what they were screaming, either...But you don't have to...They're screaming Me! Me! Me! Me!...I'm Me!...That's the cry of the ego, and that's the cry of this rally!... Me! Me! Me! Me!...And that's why wars get fought...ego...because enough people want to scream Pay attention to Me... Yep, you're playing their game . . .  
There's only one thing to do...there's only one thing's gonna do any good at all...and that's everybody just look at it, look at the war, and turn your backs and say...Fuck it...(224) [Wolfe's italics]*

What sets psychedelic aesthetics here apart from other examples of social activism in the 1960s such as Hoffman and The Fugs is that the theory of the psychedelic experience aspires to participate *by situating a new subjectivity or citizenship*, not in a state of expanded consciousness, but rather in their *return* from that state. Whereas The Fugs and Hoffman invoked ludic ceremonies for public crises, Kesey at this point had given up on exigency as determined by existing politics. Whereas general civil rights protests may have been about more inclusivity for citizenship, the formulaic nature of the psychedelic



ultimately had to impose a limit. Not everyone could be a prankster. The bus was not big enough, at least not so long as it inhabited real space.

In other words, the psychedelic is not just an argument for more *inclusivity* into a larger social frame; it is also a tactic for exclusivity. Because, it employs enchantment to achieve the redrawing of citizenship, the psychedelic enacts political theology. The ego-broadening experience collects more, accounts for more, and often gets what it asks for – an overcoming of individuality, of ego, of self, etc. But then what? The psychedelic experience does not remain in Dionysian ecstasy or in Beatlemania. Such overcoming of ego is an inherent critique of European notions of selfhood and a therapeutic rehabilitation of the concept, but only in the return from the psychedelic experience can the newly (re)-incarnated ‘self’ account for the trip.

Kesey’s recommendation to say ‘fuck it’ is socially motivated by an ethical perspective that has transcended the authority of the nation-state. In this sense it is different than Timothy Leary’s more evangelical invocation to “Turn on, tune in, drop out.” For Kesey, all one needs to do is reject the entire frame of states, nationality, or an ego. He has no answers.

The problem of accounting for this transcendence beyond nation states manifests as an aesthetic concern with *process* and the difficulty of presenting works as open or transcending historical facticity. As seen with the Fugs’ song above, Kesey’s performance at the Vietnam Day rally, and the Merry Pranksters’ trip across the United States in the legendary bus “Further,” psychedelic aesthetics perform polysemus layering

at the level of poetics and story. It is a collapse that cannot be easily parsed out by a hermeneutic system distinguishing between gradated levels of reality – literal, allegorical, etc. since part of the point is to create *the collapse of distinction*. The collapse of distinction overcomes the ego while simultaneously invoking a failure. As *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Tests* exemplifies, Ken Kesey fails at being an outlaw as well as at his Tom Sawyer-like attempt to fake his own death. Kesey and the pranksters also importantly fail in their attempt to make a movie documenting their trip across the country. Nevertheless, what the film attempted to track is the progress itself. Once the trip was over, the attempt to edit dissipated as the pranksters lost the momentum of the trip.<sup>24</sup>

Because of the importance of failure and limit-experiences, the notion of reincarnation as an aesthetic quality is perhaps a better way to analyze psychedelic works. Inherent in *failure* is a refusal of immortality and a recognition of presence. Within the notion of reincarnation, we account for the return from the “death” of the perennial. We can also overcome the linear trajectory of narratives based only on causality. The ‘progress’ of the psychedelic experience is accomplished by an intentional redrawing of the border between self and world, perhaps with a deeper sense of one’s place in the world or connection to other things; nevertheless, the recovered self is an *embodied* self verified in aesthetic works. This is no appeal to pure transcendence. The failure remains

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<sup>24</sup> While a movie version, *The Magic Bus*, was released in 2011, ten years after Kesey’s actual death, it seems to miss the point of the original failure – all of which culminated in Kesey’s idea of a graduation from acid, which many people failed to do.

essential because the Clear Light of the Void was *not* achieved. One is here on earth, in a body – not with Atman, not with Oversoul, not with God, but separate and different *from*, like any good liberal subject. Re-embodiment is failure itself, not just because the emergence of consciousness is simultaneously the emergence of consciousness-as-different-from the divine, but because such a consciousness wills a kind of bodhisattva-like compassion. Failure broadens a definition of death. It becomes the “great equalizer.” The problem of the perennial and dehistoricization arises from a conception of being-toward death where responsibility cannot easily account for what comes before. One could certainly claim: “this is pure fiction!” But as political theology shows, we have many fictions already – it is a matter of good fiction. The end of any substantive rhetoric, as Socrates tells Gorgias, is to use myth for directing toward the Good.

The trope of death and rebirth permeates psychedelic works, but taken seriously we come up against a wall here. One does not will re-integration; reintegration happens. Not everyone is a bodhisattva who “chooses” to come back. Art struggles historically with relationship to religion because art appears to be consumed with corpses. With regard to a fiction of reincarnation, we remain here precisely because of the fact that true enlightenment was *not* achieved. The ego-death experience affords a temporary vantage-point, the ability to “hear behind the music,” so to speak, while an immersion takes place with nature in the raw. It is this aspect that affords psychedelic criticism with the ability to cover wide swaths of time and culture, to merge with the perennial. We never get the whole picture, but with the psychedelic experience we certainly get more of it.

Despite the ethical concerns one may have of such a method – for example, the seductive tendency for psychonauts of privileged means to superimpose their subjective experience onto “humanity” – it is important to see these critical affordances as part of a *structured social critique of liberal subjectivity* and not just naïve sentiment. Certainly lots of people during the 1960s and since have uncritically used psychedelics and made psychedelic art, but they have also uncritically gone to church, voted, etc. Early pioneers of the psychedelic movement did indeed have theories and plans to change the human condition.

Perennialism manifests in psychedelic works, but the critical problem remains, especially if we are considering how psychedelic works might give a context for deliberating about subjectivity currently. How can we *trust* such works? What disclaimers should we make from the outset so as to not seem naïve? Where does this paranoia about who to trust come from? Paranoia is the doubling of the mind – superficiality, above the face: the decentering of subjectivity already occurring in these states establishes an appeal to truth, to justice, and to the sacred. It is helpful here to turn to attempts to critically analyze and even theorize the psychedelic experience. In the next chapter I will ground some of these theories historically.

## CHAPTER FOUR: THEORIZING THE PSYCHEDELIC EXPERIENCE

R. A. Durr's *Poetic Vision and the Psychedelic Experience* (1970) is a model text for the period with respect to theorizing psychedelic aesthetics. Durr uses a perennial approach to literary criticism, focusing on the interrelatedness of all poetic experience from Plotinus to Eckhart to Blake to Wordsworth to Traherne to Yeats and Huxley...the list is expansive and exhaustingly inexhaustible. Durr's focus on poetry allows him to discuss his subject matter over time, and it allows him to make claims about mysticism and writing. There certainly are features of poetics that cannot simply be situated in a period study. More importantly, Durr's book offers a glimpse at an earnest acceptance of the value of psychedelic experience. He is not writing from a "Woodstock-became-Altamont" or post Charles Manson perspective. In addition, the sense of failure that psychedelic aesthetics inherit from the European avant-garde is not apparent in his entirely optimistic criticism. Durr's book, therefore, works better as an historical artifact than a detailed literary-aesthetic study. The book presents a native disposition from the late 1960s with all its seeming naïvete.

Durr arranges the book beginning with a description of the imagination; then he moves onto ego-loss, cosmology and the usefulness of "play." His basic structure begins by making observations about the psychedelic experience, usually citing contemporary psychological studies, and then delving into broad citations in no particular historical or geographical order. What is assumed is a kind of "Great Books" mentality where Human

culture, established by tradition, automatically takes on sacred spiritual qualities. Durr is fairly ecumenical and he enchants the secular. The poets he cites have as much spiritual authority as any religious figure – Walt Whitman appears alongside gospels and *The Upanishads*. It is all one: perennial.

A similar approach to literature appears as a bibliographic appendix to Ram Dass's classic *Remember Be Here Now* (1971), which is an extensive "further reading list." Like Hoffman's attempt to spread the gospel of good music along his journey, Ram Dass spreads the gospel of good literature. There is even a kind of hierarchy implied by various section titles: "Books to Hang Out With," "Books to Visit Now and Then," and "Books It's Useful to Have Met" (126). The first section is largely filled with books from the world's major religions accompanied by Theosophical literature and, of course, Aldous Huxley's *Perennial Philosophy*. The second section contains mystical poetry, a few novels by Hermann Hesse, Aldous Huxley and Christopher Isherwood as well as numerous books from the American New Thought tradition. The final section is more of the same, but more western philosophers are included and more literature – Isaac Asimov, Jorge Borges, John Fowles, Henry Miller, Ken Kesey and J. D. Salinger among them. Although Ram Dass and R. A. Durr both refer to authors ancient and modern from all over the world, they maintain a level of optimism with roots in American New Thought movement, an attention to self-help through thinking positively and caring for the spirit and soul. There is less overt social critique than in the sociological and activist literature and poetry. In both Durr and Ram Dass, the perennial works to transcend both

time and national territory. The space of the perennial is where one accomplishes spiritual “progress.” The critical move expands globally.

It also accounts for the newly emergent. In *High Priest*, Timothy Leary is perfectly comfortable interweaving *Genesis* and the *I-Ching* with *The Magus* by John Fowles, published in 1967 and R. G. Wasson’s writings on hallucinogenic mushrooms. Always the trickster, Leary is to a certain extent being intentionally “sacrilegious.” But his use of paratext or marginalia literally frames his personal narrative with perennial accounts of culture. One of the more charming aspects of psychedelic critical literature, however, remains the complete openness to accepting emergent aesthetic work as part of the discussion, yet even this is historically loaded. Many of the writers Ram Dass suggests, for example, spent time with Vedic philosophy. Philip Goldberg, in *American Veda*, discusses some of these writers’ relationships to Vedanta, which arrived in the United States in 1893 with Swami Vivekananda – a student of Sri Ramakrishna – at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago (Goldberg 67). With regard to any theory of the psychedelic experience, perennialism must be understood within the contexts of Vedanta and New Thought.

According to the Vedanta Society of California, where Aldous Huxley, Gerald Heard and Christopher Isherwood studied with Swami Prabhavananda and Isherwood edited the collection *Vedanta for the Western World*,

the word “Vedanta” is revealing: “Vedanta” is a combination of two words: “Veda” which means “knowledge” and “anta” which means “the end of” or “the goal of.” In this context the goal of knowledge isn’t intellectual—the limited knowledge we acquire by reading books. “Knowledge” here means the

knowledge of God as well as the knowledge of our own divine nature. Vedanta, then, is the search for Self-knowledge as well as the search for God. (“A Brief Overview”)

Psychedelic aesthetics inherit this approach to knowledge, which then affords a perennial approach. Vedanta also generally refers to the study of the *Upanishads* as closing commentary on the knowledge of the *Vedas*. Accompanying the knowledge itself is really a kind of disposition or attitude, easily written off as naïve and overly general, especially when the attitude is applied, as in Durr’s case, to literary study. Psychedelic aesthetics are Vedantic in the sense of using knowledge toward its end, and such knowledge is not determined necessarily by period or culture. This can easily be confused with an overly humanistic epistemology. This disposition, present in Durr, Leary and Ram Dass, gives many psychedelic works a “how to” quality, as well as particularly notable degree of earnestness. It is perhaps easier to accept when a book like Ram Dass’s advertises itself as a self-help manual and more difficult to accept in Durr’s book, which advertises itself as an academic survey.

Durr’s book is certainly not the only one of its kind; in fact, structurally it owes much to Aldous Huxley’s prototypical *Perennial Philosophy* (1944) – another broad collection of citations from various sacred sources around the world, accompanied by brief commentaries by the author. Huxley wrote it in the context of the Second World War and it builds upon his defense of pacifism in *Eyeless in Gaza*, *Ends and Means*, *An Encyclopedia of Pacifism*, and *The Grey Eminence* as well as his self-help book *The Art*



*of Seeing*. The difference between Huxley and the others is that Huxley is all too aware of the problem of superficiality. He writes in his introduction to the *Perennial Philosophy*:

Unfortunately, familiarity with traditionally hallowed writings tends to breed, not indeed contempt, but something which, for practical purposes, is almost as bad – namely a kind of reverential insensibility, a stupor of the spirit, an inner deafness to the meaning of sacred words. (vii)

Huxley is warning of the dangers of perennialism, and he intentionally tries to sidestep such insensibility by categorizing his examples according to a critical distinction used by the 9<sup>th</sup> century Indian philosopher, Shankara. He distinguishes between *Shruti* and *Smriti* texts. *Shruti* “depends upon direct perception [while *Smriti*] plays a part analogous to induction, since, like induction, it derives its authority from an authority other than itself” (Shankara in Huxley vi). This seems similar to common distinctions between primary and secondary sources in literary study. As above, Ram Dass’s book presents itself as a primary text insofar as it is a “how to” guide, but R. A. Durr’s survey loses some of its authority by being primarily a secondary source, passing as merely inspired commentary. What lies behind Durr’s book more than Ram Dass’s, however, is the perennial Vedanta model more articulately expressed in Huxley:

*Philosophia Perennis*—the phrase was coined by Leibniz; but the thing—the metaphysic that recognizes a divine Reality substantial to the world of things and lives and minds; the psychology that finds in the soul something similar to, or even identical with, divine Reality; the ethic that places man’s final end in the knowledge of the immanent and transcendent. Ground of all being—the thing is immemorial and universal. Rudiments of the Perennial Philosophy may be found among the traditional lore of primitive peoples in every region of the world, and in its fully developed forms it has a place in every one of the higher religions.

If we read Durr and Ram Dass with this attitude in mind, we begin to see how the move toward perennialism distorts linear, historical time intentionally and makes the author a kind of guide to the divine, a vertical move. In psychedelic aesthetics, the speaker occupies the space of a guide. This secularization of the priestly role certainly has precedent in liberal mystical religion, most notably Quakerism, where every member has the authority to speak.

But the “guiding” author is also personalized in a particular way in psychedelic works. Durr, citing Alan Watts’ *Joyous Cosmology* (1962) and Malden Grange Bishop’s *The Discovery of Love* (1963), writes:

most of the personal accounts of the psychedelic experience relate in various ways this sense of joyousness or happiness, the certitude that life is at its heart purposeless play, ‘joy for the sake of joy,’ however many and apparently disparate – or desperate – the games of human composition. (195)

A kind of *eudaimonia* is at work here. In his introduction to Malden Grange Bishop’s book, Dr. Humphry Osmond comments on the necessity for psychedelic therapy to include personal history: “The background here is the whole of the author’s life and unless we know what manner of man he is, we cannot hope to follow, let alone understand, his account of the mind manifesting experience” (Bishop 8). So, just as with Masters and Houston argue in *Psychedelic Art*, the personal “experience” of the initiated author is necessary. This is indeed the liberal “personalism” Farrell discusses in *The Spirit of the Sixties*. The evangelical impulse of psychedelic aesthetics is present here as a defense of liberalism.

The tradition of Enlightenment “experience” formulated in a liberal subject who can account for his or her actions also remains essential. The experience itself conditions the subject, which is why the psychedelic experience must include a return from an expanded ego. During the merged, perennial part of the experience, however, subject-object distinction breaks down. The evangelical aspects of psychedelic aesthetics merge the audience with the work or the artist as “guide” for that work, as in the earlier example of Leary’s listing description erasing first-person and avoiding “to be” verbs. The English language’s heavy reliance on subject-verb-object syntax lends itself to easy poetic clichés here, but it also matched Leary’s emerging concepts of collaborative experiences between patient and therapist in the late 1950s. The personal aspects here point to medicinal conceptions of the psychedelic experience. In theorizing psychedelic aesthetics, one cannot forget that the entire concept of the psychedelic experience arises as *therapy* – whether in Artaud, Eliade, Huxley or Leary – and early models are usually in one way or another entrenched in psychoanalytic theories. Eliade’s narrative of the double “fall,” first as a fall away from the state of nature and then as a repressed desire for return is useful here as a reminder that early psychedelic theory is steeped in critiques of the European imaginary.

In psychoanalytic theories of the European tradition there is almost always a locating and recovering of self from past trauma. The frame implies a fallen condition, and certainly there is an overlap with the avant-garde aesthetic impulse toward failure here. The value implied by early psychoanalytic models is a stable individual, a person

who is “normed” to some sort of social system in tension with the trauma that necessarily warps life; that is, the “normal” has necessarily and successfully overcome some sort of initial trauma, implying that trauma of some sort is fundamental not just to the person psychologically injured but to any normal person. Artaud’s antipathy for Lacan in the late 1930s rejected all of this, even though Lacan does not present nearly as “normed” a paradigm as Freud. For Freud, the steps toward well-adjustment appear as “stages,” which even he admitted to C. G. Jung were more stably structured and argued for the sake of founding the discipline rather than as a presentation of truly fixed stages. In other words, one cannot simply write-off the discipline as being overly “rationalistic” – though one is tempted to when Freud, in *Civilization and its Discontents* implies that the “oceanic,” sublime feeling of religion is for those who, unlike him, are rationally weak – but the very idea of the unconscious, founded in an aesthetics of the sublime, assumes that we gain something through the analytic process. Structural and post-structural accounts, across disciplines, merely perform a dialectical pattern collapsing subjectivity and objectivity, form and content, analyzer and analysand, ethnographer and people – State and citizen. Both Freud and Jung transfer care for the individual into care for the State.

For Jung, what is gained through psychoanalysis is a particular kind of care for the liberal individual. In a passage from a late essay (1957), Jung’s remarks seem prescient for the coming 1960s:

Happiness and contentment, equability of mind and meaningfulness of life – these can be experienced only by the individual and not by a State, which, on the one

hand is nothing but a convention agreed to by independent individuals and, on the other, continually threatens to suppress the individual. (60)

Following this passage, Jung suggests that the role of the psychologist is to enable the individual to be free from “illusions,” a guide of sorts. For him, these illusions are the fantasy structures of European society itself, which traditionally attempted to present a fully realized rational person. In this sense, Jung might agree with Antonin Artaud, whose avant-garde aesthetics rail against psychology: “Psychology, which works relentlessly to reduce the unknown to the known, to the quotidian and the ordinary, is the cause of the theater’s abasement and its fearful loss of energy, which seems to have reached its lowest point” (*The Theater* 77). Normed culture anaesthetizes art, in other words, and according to Artaud makes way for the necessity of a theater of cruelty.

One cannot downplay the importance that psychology as a discipline had to pervasively critique the idea of a homogenized culture in the 1950s. Perhaps the most widely known articulation of such a critique appeared in David Riesman’s *The Lonely Crowd*, which characterized two fundamental human revolutions: the first taking place with the advent of European markets in the Early modern era and the second being a “shift from an age of production to an age of consumption” (6). Riesman was by no means a lone voice, but when coupled with Jung’s take on the psychologist’s role as being to help the individual rather than society or the State, we can begin to see the climate in which the theorists of the psychedelic experience were working and from which they built their critiques of subjectivity. This was indeed serious academic study

for the period. The discipline of psychology was a fertile ground for theories of the psychedelic experience, but there were literary and philosophical counterparts as well.

It was in a letter in 1957 to Aldous Huxley that the term “psychedelic” was first coined by Humphry Osmond. Following Huxley’s own positive experiences with the Vedantic society and his personal experimentation with drugs, first with mescaline and later with LSD 25, which provided the grounds for *The Doors of Perception* (1954) and *Heaven and Hell* (1956), Huxley came to see the potential social benefits of drug-use for intentionally expanding consciousness. In their correspondence, Huxley and Osmond tried to find a less pejorative name than the term “psychotomimetic” for the drugs, implying an artificial production of a state of psychosis. This term largely derived from the development of psychoactive drug research into finding a “truth serum” to use on enemy soldiers during World War II in concert with the Office of Strategic Services, which after the war became the CIA. The central theory of psychotomimetic drugs was established in a paper by Dr. Paul Hoch, which “reported that the symptoms produced by LSD, mescaline and related drugs were similar to those of schizophrenia: intensity of color perception, hallucinations, depersonalization, intense anxiety, paranoia, and in some cases catatonic manifestations” (Lee and Shlain 20). Just a year before *The Doors of Perception* was published, “Allen Dulles, director of CIA, lectured at Princeton that the Soviets had started a ‘sinister’ battle for “men’s minds.” To deal with the problem in the emerging Cold War, Dulles authorized MK-ULTRA, (although it was Richard Helms’s idea) (27). MK-ULTRA became the umbrella project that provided funding for

widespread behavioral modification research, often involving unwitting subjects (and sometimes unwitting researchers), surreptitiously tested on all demographics of United States citizens. One cannot explore the psychedelic without excursions into State biopolitics, both at the philosophical and material-historical level.

The term “psychotomimetic” aligns with the research development goals for the State. The CIA was so paranoid about the Soviets developing mind-control techniques before the United States that it “authorized the purchase of 10 kilos of LSD in 1953 for \$240,000 from Sandoz Laboratories because ‘a CIA contact in Switzerland mistook a kilogram for a milligram’” (24). Despite the hilarious mistake which probably had a significant role in production and distribution of LSD 25, this reveals CIA’s interest in keeping the drug in their control, which of course did not work. Huxley and Osmond had different research goals.

Although Huxley’s *Brave New World* had presented a dark view of a drug-induced society in the early 1930s, a view that seems to be explored implicitly by MK-ULTRA, Huxley had changed his mind about the drugs’ potential for social liberation by the early 1950s. Even so, Huxley’s characteristically sardonic take on consumerism remained intact throughout both periods. For example, employing his propaganda slogans made famous in *Brave New World* in the 1930s, Huxley suggested to Osmond the verb ‘*phaneroein*’ “to make the visible manifest” compounded with “thymos” for soul as a replacement for psychotomimetic (*Moksha* 107). Huxley ends his letter:

“Phanerothyme – substantive. Phanerothymic – adjective. To make this trivial world

sublime, take half a gramme of phanerothyme.” Eventually, Huxley and Osmond settled on “psychedelic,” literally mind-manifesting, as a replacement. And while psychedelic was a less pejorative term, Huxley’s rhetorical agenda was also based on his aesthetic sensibilities.

Huxley saw his role as a “literary man” (he had wanted to become a doctor but his problems with his eyesight prevented it) as being able to keep scientific specialists aware of the ethical concerns surrounding their work. While the bioethical concerns are clear in *Brave New World*, he also lectured heavily at conferences on psychology and parapsychology, as well as at the Vedanta Center. Ultimately, Huxley believed that giving public access to psychedelics with entheogenic properties could help bring in a new stage of human civilization by giving people the opportunity control their own minds. In this, Huxley is the premiere theorist of psychedelic experience and its political-theological ramifications.

Huxley built his agenda out of scientific, philosophical and psychological thought current at the time. In 1953, trying to obtain the mescaline with which he planned to experiment on himself, Huxley wrote to Osmond:

It looks as though the most satisfactory working hypothesis about the human mind must follow, to some extent, the Bergsonian model, in which the brain with its associated normal self, acts as a utilitarian device for limiting, and making selections from, the enormous possible world of consciousness, and for canalizing experience into biologically profitable channels. Disease, mescaline, emotional shock, aesthetic experience and mystical enlightenment have the power, each in its different way to varying degrees, to inhibit the functions of the normal self and its ordinary brain activity, thus permitting the “other world” to rise to consciousness. The basic problem of education is, How to make the best of both worlds – the world of biological utility and common sense, and the world of



unlimited experience underlying. I suspect that the complete solution to the problem can only come to those who have learned to establish themselves in the third and ultimate world of 'the spirit', the world which subtends and interpenetrates both of the other worlds. (*Moksha* 29-30)

Huxley presents a good glimpse at his metaphysics here. Humans, by the nature of their limited consciousness, have limited access to reality. Through a myriad of ways, both good and bad, the limits can be expanded, at least temporarily. However, what is "outside" the limit is not necessarily "more real" than the inside. The "other world" in this passage seems to account for both the physical world and the unconscious. The "ultimate world of 'the spirit' fuses both. Optimistically, humans can learn "to establish themselves" in this world. This, it seems, would require a certain degree of self-control, however. One must consider this view of spirit in tandem with the cosmology presented in *The Perennial Philosophy*.

Huxley's letter goes on to lament the poor state of learning in the world and especially the United States, where Huxley believes education destroys "openness to inspiration" outside of the Sears-Roebuck catalogue "which constitutes the conventionally 'real' world" (*Moksha* 30). In order for human society to progress in such a state, Huxley believes that people's minds must be opened, even if by artificial means. Although it was a decade before Herbert Marcuse would publish *One Dimensional Man*, Huxley, one might say that Huxley thought of drugs as a potential way out of one-dimensional society. He goes on:

In such a system of education it may be that mescaline or some other chemical substance may play a part by making it possible for young people to 'taste and see' what they have learned about at second hand, or directly at a lower level of

intensity, in the writings of the religious, or the works of poets, painters, or musicians. (*Moksha* 30)

Young people, students, are particularly situated to benefit from drug use here, but they benefit from aesthetic enhancement that helps them better understand art. For Huxley, consciousness may be expanded both intentionally and unintentionally, internally through self-reflection and externally through drugs, but not to infinity and not for long periods of time. Consciousness is a non-static form, but it is still a form, and the process of limiting it is necessary to survival. Embodiment is necessity because form coincides with the ability to perceive form. A theory of psychedelic experience begins to take shape proceeding from the notion that consciousness is dynamic and expandable, but at the same time a limiting shape of consciousness heuristically establishes itself. It is not necessarily through the willed-act of the individual that consciousness takes shape – that seems to be a ‘natural’ ordering property of the brain – but the will can have an affect on the size and shape of consciousness.

Although Huxley seems optimistic about the will and self-determination in relation to consciousness, he is simultaneously deeply critical of subjectivity. One of the benefits of drugs is the ability to transcend selfish solipsism. In Huxley’s 1958 essay, “Drugs that Shape Men’s Minds,” an article commissioned by *The Saturday Evening Post* (Horowitz 146), he claims that human society is moving closer to the one he described in *Brave New World*, faster than he ever could have imagined. Like many other thinkers at the time, Huxley begins by lamenting the trap of modern subjectivity, going on to say,

Correlated with this distaste for the idolatrously worshipped self, there is in all of us a desire, sometimes latent, sometimes conscious and passionately expressed, to escape from the prison of our individuality, an urge to self-transcendence. It is to this urge that we owe mystical theology, spiritual exercises, and yoga – to this, too, that we owe alcoholism and drug addiction. (9)

Huxley is echoing William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* here, in which

James argues that

the sway of alcohol over mankind is unquestionably due to its power to stimulate the mystical faculties of human nature, usually crushed to earth by the cold facts and dry criticisms of the sober hour. Sobriety diminishes, discriminates, and says no; drunkenness expands, unites, and says yes. (387)

Later in the article, Huxley takes his discussion to the level of the State, particularly addressing Cold War issues and Russia. He predicts the availability of drugs to help men find happiness and the complex relationship between drugs and personal liberty. He says, "it may soon be for us to do something better in the way of chemical self-transcendence than what we have been doing so ineptly for the last seventy or eighty centuries" (10). As his burgeoning theory suggests, Huxley's concerns rest on an evolutionary anthropology in which humans move toward "spirit" as the realm into which an individual may situate him or herself to find a balance between subjectivity and objectivity, where objectivity includes both the physical world and the latent unconscious. This accounts for Huxley's interest both in physical science and the paranormal, and he was not alone in this interest.

Although more sinister in both agenda and execution of their agenda, CIA was also experimenting across the board during the 1950s, and it was keeping tabs on Huxley too. Admiral Stansfield Turner's (then Director of CIA) testimony before the Senate

Subcommittees on Intelligence, Health, and Scientific Research of the Committee on Human Resources explaining project MK-ULTRA, Turner mentions research on hypnosis, as well as

aspects of magicians' art useful in covert operations . . . developing, testing, and maintaining biological agents for use against humans as well as against animals and crops . . . electro-shock, harassment techniques for offensive use, analysis of extrasensory perception, and four subprojects involving crop and material sabotage. (*Project MKULTRA* 11-12).

CIA was interested in enchantment at all levels. The paranoia was so great that the American government was willing to transplant and hire many Nazi scientists to break the Nuremberg Treaty it helped set up that prohibited testing on human subjects without consent.

The surreptitious testing by CIA had a direct impact on the dissemination of psychedelic drugs in the three largest artistic centers in the United States during the 1950s: New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. Lee and Schlain note

George Hunter White “rented an apartment in New York’s Greenwich Village, and, with funds supplied by the CIA he transformed it into a safehouse complete with two-way mirrors, surveillance equipment and the like. Posing as an artist and a seaman, White lured people back to his pad and slipped them drugs.” Transferred to San Francisco in 1955, White opened two more safehouses and initiated project Midnight Climax, where drug-addicted prostitutes were given \$100 a night to bring johns back, have sex with them and drug them while CIA agents secretly observed. (32-33)

There is simply no way to extract the cultural aesthetic developing out of the use of psychedelics from the CIA’s involvement in disseminating and testing the drugs.

Science, the paranormal and magician’s art were all areas of exploring enchantment.

Further, one cannot extract these scientific and aesthetic studies from Huxley's inherently political-theological critique of the State from his interest in Vedanta.

In CIA research, agents were at times dosed with drugs so that they could be aware of the effects if captured by an enemy. In addition to testing the effects of drugs on people without their knowing, it was a practice among CIA agents in competing projects within the agency – all of which ultimately came to fall under the MK-ULTRA umbrella – to surreptitiously drug each other. Agents were expected to develop knowledge of the symptoms of having been drugged so they could recognize the symptoms early on and hopefully avoid giving over information in interrogation.

Not all agents, however, saw drugs as being merely “psychotomimetic,” and such experiences created converts to the therapeutic use of LSD within the CIA. In fact, Captain Al Hubbard, a former OSS officer known as “the Johnny Appleseed of LSD,” was responsible for both distributing LSD across the US and Canada as well as helping to develop therapeutic uses for LSD. Hubbard had a mystical experience on his first trip, leading him to be an outspoken proponent of its use. Hubbard worked with Dr. Humphry Osmond in Canada developing psychedelic therapy; “using religious symbols to trigger psychic responses, he attempted to assist the patient in forming a new and healthier frame of reference that would carry over after the drug wore off” (Lee and Shlain 49). These sessions were “geared toward achieving a mystical or conversion experience. The procedure involved high dosages of LSD, precluding any possibility that the patient's ego defenses could withstand psychic dissolution” (56). Hubbard was responsible for turning

Bill Wilson, founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, on to LSD. Wilson believed in the drug's religious potential as well as in its treatment potential for alcoholics. Hubbard was also responsible for acting as guide for Aldous Huxley's first LSD trip in 1955. Huxley had already written *The Doors of Perception* based on his first mescaline experience in 1953. Like many universities and researchers in the 1950s, unwittingly, both Huxley and Humphry Osmond were surrounded by CIA agents overlooking their work.

At the same time, Huxley's status as a public intellectual was allowing his writing to set the tensions for the entire debate surrounding the term "psychedelic" that was to develop in the 1960s. In the process, Huxley's theory of experience and his metaphysical notions are carried over during a period that demanded behavior adjustment regarding citizenship. This adjustment depended on a revaluing of the individual's relationship to the State. Both Aldous Huxley and the agents of the MK-ULTRA project explored to what extent an individual's conscious use of drugs might influence and redraw notions of citizenship. It is in this respect, and no mere conspiracy theory, that much of the psychedelic movement was a planned social experiment – not just in behavior modification, but also in citizenship modification, and the best way to analyze this is in the aesthetic artifacts produced at the time.

After coining the word "psychedelic," Osmond used it in a research paper entitled, "A Review of the Clinical Effects of Psychotomimetic Agents" ("Psychedelic"). It came into wide use within a decade of its introduction to the language. While it was originally both a substantive and an adjective given to name and describe certain

pharmaceuticals – almost always with relation to LSD 25 – it later became a term for the experiences of a drug-induced state, and finally a catch-all term for a cultural style. By 1967, the *Oxford English Dictionary* reports the introduction of “psychedelia” to the language. A synthetic drug thus became metonymic for cultural products and attitudes by offering some degree of controlling ego-expansion and retraction, of controlling experience itself. Even an overdose in this respect is an attempt at controlling one’s liberal subjectivity. The entire debate around the illegalization of psychedelics centers on the question of citizenship in a liberal nation-state, on subjectivity itself.

Because of Huxley’s public intellectual status, his influence spread far and wide. Huxley’s 1954 *Doors of Perception* profoundly impacted new age gurus like Alan Watts, as well as Harvard psychologists Timothy Leary, Richard Alpert, and Ralph Metzner, who would build off Huxley in their reworking of Evans-Wentz’s translation of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, which they titled *The Psychedelic Experience* (Lopez). This book tapped into a cultural longing that Huxley had already identified. Religious scholars such as Huston Smith and Mircea Eliade too were also influenced by Huxley, and of course also popular bands like The Doors in the mid 1960s.

But it was the Harvard psychologists: Timothy Leary, Richard Alpert and Ralph Metzner who employed Huxley’s ideas most deliberately in early psilocybin tests and later research in the sixties. Increasingly indiscriminate use of test subjects and political enemies within the institution, combined with controversy over how scientific their methods were, forced the removal of Leary and his cohorts from the university. In Leary

and company's view of the psychedelic experience, the therapist and the patient tripped together. The question became, how could the therapist maintain a scientifically "objective" stance to conduct research? Going solo, first to Mexico and then, with the financial help of Billy Hitchcock, to the Millbrook estate in New York, Leary founded the International Foundation for Internal Freedom (IFIF). Along with Alpert and Metzner, Leary produced *The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead* (1964). The book is a "how to" manual for achieving a psychedelic experience, thus performing a step towards Huxley's vision of democratizing mystical experience. For Leary, building on Huxley, "a psychedelic experience is a journey to new realms of consciousness," and although drugs are not necessary for such an experience LSD, psilocybin and mescaline have the *democratic* importance of "making such an experience available to anyone" (11). The therapist-patient model reveals the influence of psychoanalysis in its descriptions of a guru, or guide, through the experience, but also the monks' role in the death experience as described in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. The monk is to guide the dead person to enlightenment, but Leary, et al., emphasize the coupling of this with therapeutic methods used by psychologists in the late 1950s, methods that combined administering LSD with many hours of psychoanalysis before the acid trip. This is no small amount of screening. Such experimentation was not only in practice at Harvard. Interest was wide all over the psychological community.

In his 1958 article, "Psychotomimetic Drugs," Henry K. Beecher uses the term "psychedelic" in a list of a "new class" of drugs used to treat – incredible as it may sound



now – schizophrenia (254). He particularly associates “psychedelic” with LSD, asserting that LSD has had “more profound changes in the results of Rorschach testing than any other drug studied in this laboratory,” and it was more useful treating alcoholism than schizophrenia (280). If the literal definition of psychedelic means to manifest the psyche, the early usage of the term may seem accurate on the surface, but it is philosophically convoluted in its assumptions about what the psyche is – assumptions rooted in European conceptions of subjectivity and selfhood, in the European imaginary.

As LSD was used in psychoanalysis with the Rorschach test, the “latent” psyche made “manifest” reveals a Freudian influence. It is only one step away to say psychedelic drugs make the *unconscious* manifest. Huxley’s theory had the effect of reconciling the scientific and religious or occult aspects of the psyche by combining Freudian and Jungian conceptions with the Evans-Wendtz translation of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, which, as Donald Lopez has shown in *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West*, was inspired by the theological-political agenda of Theosophists like Helena Blavatsky, Henry Steel Olcott, and Annie Besant. Jung, of course, also wrote an introduction to the Evans-Wendtz translation, and so the tensions of politics and of a conception of self that is not merely contained within one individual’s unconscious but rather in a collective sense of unconscious come to be in concert with Theosophy’s global and ecumenical spiritual and political concerns. All of this is to say, the neologism “psychedelic” is itself a cultural product with metaphysical assumptions inherent in it, every bit as much as psychotomimetic, and perhaps even more so, as it

comes to symbolize a re-incarnated liberal citizenship. In order to parse this out more clearly, it is important to see how psychologists built upon Huxley's theories.

*The Professional Discourse of Psychedelics in the 1960s*

In *Tripping: An Anthology of True-Life Psychedelic Adventures*, Charles Hayes reports, "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" (9). Looking at psychotherapy and psychology journals in the late 1950s and 1960s, it becomes clear that the "psychedelic" experience refers to only one part of a larger process, or "trip." In "Lysergic Acid Diethylamide (LSD 25) and Behaviour Therapy," C. G. Costello uses "psychedelic" in reference to only later stages of an LSD experience. He says, "the psychedelic experience [occurs when] the experience is stabilized and the patient establishes 'order and organization to the unhabitual perceptions'" (119). In this theory, the experience is one of recovery, not of having one's mind blown. We can read into the term "psychedelic" a cultural tendency to intentionally produce consciousness expansion, but also the inherent return from a perennial state of nature or ecstatic experience.

During the administered LSD trips, suggestions and affective music were also used during controlled sessions. Costello's studies document the use of "soothing music" in LSD sessions. Offenbach and Mahalia Jackson apparently qualified as suitable music early on – although in one case the patient was "agitated" by Jackson's music, and the

therapist “suggested” the psychedelic stage to her saying, “to face whatever ideas, thoughts or pictures were presenting themselves to her” (119). The article reports: “she was told that life was a beautiful though sometimes awesome pattern which we spoiled by turning away from it.” The use of suggestion, itself arising from mesmerism and trance therapies in the nineteenth century, along with its use in American New Thought, has not been emphasized enough in popular conceptions of the psychedelic experience. When accompanied with the “guide,” taken from the role monks traditionally played in the *Bardo Thotol*, Costello’s work reads like a direct application of Leary, Alpert, and Metzner’s *Psychedelic Experience*. Yet he is also critical of using LSD in certain environments: “The effects have apparently been harmful when LSD has been administered in a party atmosphere embellished with beatnik and occultist jargon” (128). Unfortunately, he offers no citation for such circumstances, but his attitude illustrates an attempt at controlling the superficial through scientific expertise, something that is recurring in the literature and historical documentation of the field, especially with regard to Timothy Leary. For many later psychiatric and psychological professionals, Leary’s outlandishness single-handedly has had the effect of stalling almost all “respectable” scientific research on psychedelics between the late 1960s and the 1990s. During the 1960s, Costello and others were quite optimistic about LSD’s therapeutic uses, a sentiment generally echoed in much of the professional psychological journals in the 1960s, even when professionals show antagonistic attitudes toward Leary and his crew.

In “The LSD Controversy” (1964), Jerome Levine and Arnold Ludwig emphasize benefits of LSD in therapy for alcoholics addressing the LSD controversy by noting journalists’ interest in Leary and the Harvard school. The authors are quite critical though, claiming that Leary and his cohorts helped create “an aura of sensationalism”: “neither critical scientists nor laymen could see very much therapeutic or scientific value in the ‘educational’ hallucinatory flights or voyages taken by the mental astronauts of IFIF” (316). Remaining positive about the therapeutic value of LSD, Levine and Ludwig provide a more balanced approach while relying, perhaps naively, on the power of scientific method to sort out the controversy.

By 1966, perhaps through the public attention gained by Leary, the meaning of “psychedelic” clearly broadens in professional journals. In “Some Psychological Aspects of Privacy,” Sidney M. Jourard, writing in the journal, *Law and Its Contemporary Problems*, uses both Freudian language and the all-pervasive language of David Riesman’s *The Lonely Crowd* (inner and outer-directed personalities) to describe the social dangers of pressures to conform. Jourard argues that repressed desires help maintain the individual in society, but he attaches “psychedelic” to transformative experiences and healing:

Each time a man reveals himself to another, a secret society springs into being. If the healer sees himself in the role of teacher or guru rather than as a further agent of socialization, he will aim at helping the sufferer gain a perspective on the social determiners in his existence and how he might transcend them. Just as drugs, like lysergic acid and marijuana, have a kind of releasing effect upon the consciousness of the user, so teachers and gurus have a “psychedelic” (mind-manifesting) effect upon those who consult with them. True consciousness-

expansion (education) yields a transcultural perspective from which to view one's usual roles and the society within which one enacts them. (313)

Jourard's take on the psychedelic evidences a kind of liberal logic: psychedelic drugs are like teachers; they help people distinguish their roles in society by liberating them from the repressive social structures blocking their potential. The psychedelic experience, for him, not only releases one from the shackles of social conformity, it potentially increases liberal innovation by reforming subjectivity. To take part in the psychedelic experience is to be active in the sense of social activism during the early sixties, to make oneself accountable through a civic gesture, to become a politically responsible citizen.

No matter how superficial the drug scene may have become by the end of the decade, the underlying intellectualism in the action of participating coded a civic stance. At the same time Jourard's statements are a reminder that the psychedelic experience through drug use is merely one of many methods to attain a sublime and spiritual experience. This is of course a sense of the spiritual as integrating subjectivity and objectivity, which as Huxley describes, owes its lineage to enchantment and mystical experience. The drugs merely democratize access to the experience. Jourard also echoes the sentiments that Ken Kesey expressed in the post-trip return with regard to "graduating" from acid tests. The psychedelic experience carries with it political concerns relating to education, citizenship and personal liberty in tension with governmental control; it is a means toward a political end.

The articles here exhibit the tension in the public air at the time. With them, one may speculate that, with the illegalization of LSD in 1966, illicitly taking psychedelic

drugs became seen as an assertion of self against governmental control, and that such an assertion was coupled with an intention to seek out a mystical experience. This was a civic gesture, and state control over drug-use establishes enmity between self-determination as an act of social progress and “institutional” authority. The state here becomes the enemy of the liberal agenda by imposing an authority that appeared to limit access to even something as undetermined as “happiness,” but more accurately here as a revised version of subjectivity itself. State authority was something to be transgressed, and that transgression was a civic act. Psychedelic aesthetics perform this transgression.

Works of art displaying psychedelic aesthetics ideologically express the notion that seeking an “inner experience” promotes both individual freedom as well as social action. One need not take drugs to achieve it, but to do drugs so was to make public one’s transgression. In post 1960s decades, this transgression became ritualized (and trivialized) in the United States. But in its early ideology, the psychedelic created a “better” citizen than the “conformist.” Overcoming of mere subjective interiority through a psychedelic return to the perennial also out-moralizes the State. Beyond the state, in the European imaginary, the psychedelic experience produces a communion with the divine lost in the modern era. This is a return to enchanted space of the pre-political begging the following questions: When we consider the deep critique of modern subjectivity in the psychedelic experience, are the affective responses of the individuals who intentionally seek mystical and psychedelic experiences more civically useful than the Enlightenment rationality that founds the modern state? Moreover, in the civic

transcendence of the State, does the psychedelic experience end with a revised subjectivity that is akin to globalized cosmopolitanism? American civic foundations certainly occurred in a literal state of nature, giving American politics a long history of enchantment.

The theory of the psychedelic experience applied to aesthetic works, and we can now begin noting some ideological and ethical characteristics present in psychedelic aesthetics. The term “psychedelic” applied to aesthetics signifies a collection of tendencies among artistic works which each exhibit an attempt to represent either something metaphysical in a unique form, or to represent an expansion in consciousness – in other words, artistic attempts to represent the outside, exterior, and the infinite in necessarily finite circumstances. The psychedelic, in this sense, relates to a cultural condition where consciousness, which has been rapidly expanded and destabilized, begins to re-orient itself in light of what it has seen. There is a therapeutic quality in the aesthetics, a recovery attempt from both individual and cultural trauma. In this recovery attempt there is inherent critique of the past coupled with an attempt to distance the past or even transcend it. Insofar as there is an overlap with avant-garde aesthetics, like those present in Artaud’s “theater of cruelty,” which he presents as anodyne for the state of emergency brought on by the “plague” affecting European culture in the late 1930s, psychedelic aesthetics in the United States generally express a more optimistic view, but there is more to the picture.

Aesthetically, the inherent violence of avant-gardism remains the “Hell” of the psychedelic experience – a hell that saturates the work of avant-gardists like William Burroughs’ seedy and junky global consumerism, the films of Kenneth Anger with his nods to Aleister Crowley, and articulated in the *depense* of Hunter S. Thompson’s work as “fear and loathing.” The flipside to such hell is the “soma state” or “moksha” experience of re-attunement and return to enchanted consciousness. Articulations of soma and moksha are where psychedelic aesthetics and political theology meet beyond crass representations of a globalized free-for-all. I will return to such issues in a later chapter.

The well-worn “Heaven and Hell” and the less known Soma state / globalization binaries are discursively helpful and aesthetically identifiable at times, but they are both at work in the same experience. Psychedelic aesthetics, as Huxley would suggest, include both of Blake’s “Heaven and Hell.” In terms of ego-death and return to a revised notion of liberal subjectivity, I have chosen to characterize the entire experience along the theme of metempsychosis or reincarnation as a way to broaden the aesthetic cosmology. There are violent and starry-eyed representations in psychedelic aesthetics. I make no allegiance to either. What is more important is that in the process of these aesthetics, a kind of sacred violence is imposed on the State. Such violence accompanies the fantasy return to the “state of nature” attained through dissimulation of the ego during the psychedelic experience, and this is what accounts for much of the use of sacrifice, religious and mystical symbols in psychedelic works. It also accounts for the evangelical



nature of psychedelic aesthetics and the aestheticized figure of the exploding citizen or “terrorist” in the post-psychedelic era. It is at this point that the psychedelic experience aestheticized produces political deliberation and where psychedelic aesthetics and political theological meet. The eruption of the perennial operates through deterritorialization of both subject and State in order to produce a primordial space for rebirth and poetic making.

In the previous three chapters, I began by describing the critique of modern subjectivity at the heart of the European imaginary and pointing specifically to the work of Artaud as calling for a return to a primeval state of being. I then described a trajectory of continental philosophy that, like Artaud, sought an aesthetic answer to political crises in the form of poetry. Combining Artaud’s concept of an oversaturated poetry with Heidegger and his students’ call for *poiesis*, I argued that each in its own way points toward a poetics of re-enchantment. Psychedelic aesthetics, drawing on these ideas, then performs this poetics of re-enchantment through the use of the perennial as a device to overcome the problem of linear time and narrative reflection. I explicated Abbie Hoffman’s *Woodstock Nation* to show the direct impact of Marcuse and Artaud on his activism. Drawing on Maurice Blanchot’s “Great Refusal” and Artaud’s call for a poetry of metempsychosis, I claimed that psychedelic aesthetics attempt to figure human life in terms of reincarnation. In this chapter, I have explored how theories of the psychedelic experience use models based on perennialism and reincarnation to provide therapy for

human development. The result of such theories in practice is the re-drawing of the boundaries of subjectivity and citizenship as the result of re-entry from a psychedelic experience, which indicates that psychedelic aesthetics present political-theological answers to crises in liberalism. In the following chapter I will explore how some of these poetic answers appear in writing.

## CHAPTER FIVE: PSYCHEDELIC CITIZENSHIP AND RE-ENCHANTMENT:

### AFFECTIVE AESTHETICS AS POLITICAL INSTANTIATION

*Profounder things had also passed. It was a completely secular age. Of faiths that had existed before the coming of the Overlords, only a purified form of Buddhism – perhaps the most austere of all religions – still survived. The creeds that had been based upon miracles and revelations had collapsed utterly. (66)*

- Arthur C. Clarke, *Childhood's End*

In *Faith of The Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (2012), Simon Critchley writes that in the early twenty-first century, “what is lacking is a theory and practice of the general will understood as the supreme fiction of final belief that would take place in the act by which a people becomes a people or by which a free association is formed” (92). Critchley essentially calls for a fiction on which to base a new citizenship. Like the continental philosophers in the mid twentieth century, his work turns to poetics or “making” as a mode of engagement and resistance for dealing with liberal-democratic crises. In this chapter I suggest that psychedelic aesthetics and religion can provide a discursive ground for Critchley’s “supreme fiction” in the United States, because the making of the sacrificial figure in the psychedelic experience presents itself as capable of more ethically aware citizenship. The poetics already exist, but it is a matter of both aesthetics and spirituality being taken seriously in public and political life. A brief

historical look at religions founded in the 1960s gives insight into the instantiation of a certain citizenship.

In classic representations of the psychedelic experience, citizenship is “re-enchanted” through a broadened commitment transcending the authority of nation-states. A critique of modern subjectivity is performed as an allegory through ego-death and rebirth – metempsychosis or reincarnation. One’s body becomes the site of sacrifice through ingesting a psychedelic “sacrament,” disseminating ego into the material world while a perception “behind” subject-object relationships emerges. Such experiences prompted groups to start their own religions in the 1960s as governmental forces criminalized psychedelics, causing friend-enemy distinctions with the State to be determined at a biopolitical level.

It is an oversimplification to write the psychedelic movement off as either vacuous New Ageism or sinister cultism, but I am not presenting the period as a panacea either. There is a more current exigency here. With the current re-introduction of psychedelic therapy into end-of-life care in the early twenty-first century, there are implications for discussions of “citizenship” as *bios* or qualified life and the boundaries of “bare life” (*zoe*). These tensions exist as analogues between state-recognized religion as the qualified life of citizenship and re-enchanted attempts to found New Religion or “spirituality” as emergent *zoe*. Psychedelic aesthetics thus offer a discursive zone for both bare and qualified life. The main implication is that in an expanded ego state there is more room for “bare life” to become qualified life.

Emerging legislation made psychedelic substances illegal during the 1960s originally as an extension of consumer protection attempts from pharmaceutical companies. As Nicolas Langlitz has written in *Neuropsychedelia*,

In 1961, the thalidomide disaster came to the fore: 8,000 children with gross anatomical malformations, an unknown number of abortions, and many patients suffering from peripheral neuropathy. The US Congress passed the Kefauver-Harris amendments in the following year, giving the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) control over all investigational drugs (Daemmrich 2004: 60– 69). LSD happened to be such an investigational drug just like thalidomide. A drug safety study on Hofmann’s problem child, also published in 1962, warned against the risks of suicide and prolonged psychotic reactions (Cohen and Ditman 1962). Regulations were tightened. Consequently, researchers could no longer mail a form to Sandoz, receive LSD in return, and administer it to patients without even informing them about the experimental nature of their treatment. (Kindle Locations 670-676)

These concerns are the backdrop for growing suspicions about researchers like Timothy Leary, Richard Alpert and Ralph Metzner, as well as their student, Walter Pahnke, who developed the famous Marsh Chapel Good Friday experiment in 1962. As Langlitz notes, hallucinogen research was actually in decline before Leary and his cohorts began working with them, especially in relation to religious and spiritual experiences. Langlitz concludes,

What was at issue when scientific applications of hallucinogens were subjected to a strict regulatory regime in the early 1960s was not spiritual liberation through consciousness-expanding drugs and their association with the politics of the counterculture, but medical paternalism and pharmaceutical marketing practices. (Kindle Locations 683-685)

When one imagines the practices of CIA with regard to MK-ULTRA along with the medical establishment’s indiscretion with regard to pharmaceuticals, regulations do not

seem so unreasonable. This would become a political theological issue in the mid 1960s. Leary and Pahnke were conducting experiments in neurotheology, another term coming from Aldous Huxley's recently published novel, *Island*. The growing public concern, however, was with a damaged perception of medical authority to begin with, and this concern paralleled the political concerns with the Cold War and the Far East.

As the Vietnam War's legitimacy was debated, many citizens saw participation in the psychedelic movement and illegal drug-use as a way to assert moral authority and self-determination over a morally corrupt nation-state of "experts." (This is an empty but almost ubiquitous rite of passage continuing for young Americans today). By the time LSD was made illegal in 1966, proponents of psychedelics had turned to rhetoric of religion in order to claim psychedelics as sacred entheogens or "god-infused" substances. Such rhetoric often employed the aesthetic language of the occult and secret societies as obfuscation, as exemplified earlier with my explication of The Fugs' "Homage to Catherine and William Blake." In the late 1960s, Timothy Leary, psychedelic guru psychologist, was facing a thirty-year prison sentence for a small amount of marijuana police found in his daughters' underwear. As Leary's legal trouble intensified, he adopted more and more of a quasi-guru status, claiming he was a "Hindu," and the substance was sacral. Religious enchantment became a rhetorical safety net for Leary's case. We may be right to question his sincerity, but what is especially interesting is that he thought it would work as a defense plea. His rhetoric claimed allegiance to the founding principles of the United States with regard to religious freedom. Inventing

himself as guru and performing pseudo-mystical and occult experiments created a public persona with which to challenge the nation-state in terms of political-theology. The most overt claim regarding this was the call to “start your own religion,” which is exactly what some of his followers did.

In contrast to Leary, psychologist Art Kleps, founder of the Neo-American Church was no fan of gesturing toward occultism or Eastern religion for justifying his “spiritual” practice. Initially promoting Leary as prophet of the church, Kleps excommunicated Leary in 1973 for his excessive “horse shit” (his religion’s motto, after all, is “victory over horseshit”). In Kleps’s account of the Millbrook estate in the late sixties, where Leary and others of the League of Spiritual Discovery researched psychedelics and spirituality after being kicked out of Harvard, Kleps writes: “I found nothing in my visionary experience to encourage me to believe in any occultist or supernaturalist system . . . Instead, dualism of every variety was blown out the window, never to return” (*Millbrook* 8). Following Leary’s advice, Kleps started his own religion of “Boohoos” in 1965, attempting – by analogy to the Native American Church’s use of peyote – to claim the legal right to use psychedelic substances as religious sacrament. As Martin A. Lee and Bruce Shlain summarize, “Not surprisingly, the Boohoos lost their case in court when the judge ruled that an organization with ‘Row, Row, Row your Boat’ as its theme song was not enough to qualify as a church” (105).

Kleps’s church is truly the product of a kind of Yankee dim-witted *accutezza*. Kleps spoofs, but he spoofs with seriousness. He put together the puzzling *Boo Hoo*

*Bible: The Neo American Church Catechism* during the years following Millbrook's collapse. The catechism is a mixed-media psychedelic performance of identification and participation, requiring its reader to transcend the personal in an act that simultaneously simulates and dissimulates, establishing and overcoming the ironic – all features of psychedelic aesthetics. Like a psychedelic *Mad Magazine*, integrating selections from Henry Miller, pulpy comics, news clippings, senate testimonies and political-religious diatribes, the text presents a cosmology of simultaneity, which Kleps considers essential to psychedelic experience. A radical solipsism emerges that sees all conscious and unconscious life as part of one dream where meaning-making becomes completely associative. Was “Row, Row, Row Your Boat” an appropriate theme song after all?

Despite his solipsism, Kleps longs for transformation of citizenship, for a “new” American. At first this seems like standard antinomian individualism – a longstanding American tradition. Critical of Leary's “translation” of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* into the manual *The Psychedelic Experience*, Kleps writes: “It's great stuff for the social control of ignorant peasantry, and that's about it. A first-class horror show to terrify the kiddies into mindless obedience” (*Millbrook* 12). Kleps broke away from early models of psychedelic therapy that employed a guide and forty hours of prior, one-on-one psychoanalytic therapy, as well as the convention for the therapist to trip with patient. This model had been encouraged by Aldous Huxley and Humphry Osmond as ways to democratize mystical experience in order to create more engaged citizens. Leary's view of democracy was much less controlled than Huxley's and called for a collective change



in consciousness of *all* citizens. By the early seventies, both Leary and Kleps encouraged novice users to trip alone from differing rationales.

For Kleps, individuals are to determine their own spiritual progress. When he actually sounds serious in *The Boo Hoo Bible*, he says (riffing on Martin Luther) that “Acid is *not* easier than traditional methods, it’s just faster, and sneakier. If there is shit in the way, it has to be disposed of, and the veritable explosion of shit is, in many ways, an even more disagreeable experience than a constant dribble over a period of years” (19). Instant enlightenment is a shit-storm. One can reasonably expect that a large group of people’s mind-manifestations will be messy. For Kleps, enlightenment overcomes individuation through a return to abject substance.

And so Kleps also presents a goal for tripping that is social in nature. The church will eventually offer accreditation sources for psychedelic therapists. But this requires some preliminary work:

one of our most important objectives should be to drive the crack-pot faddists and the simple-minded occultists out of the temple and replace them with intelligent, literate, professional psychologists who know the meaning and use of the psychedelic experience. (20)

To do this, Kleps must invoke criteria for measuring a kind of liberal elitism. In measuring those criteria, a global civic quality arises:

To attempt to separate our cause from that of the millions starved, robbed, corrupted and killed abroad by the industrial military robot masters of the U.S. is nothing but cowardice and hypocrisy. Their suffering may buy our leisure, but never our freedom. Our religion grows here because it is needed, not because it is welcome . . . You cannot expand your consciousness without joining the great task of expanding the consciousness of mankind. I do not propose this as a moral rule, but as a physical law. Anyone who supposes his spiritual ‘motion’ can be

measured relative to a static world, or to the motion of others, as if this were some sort of million mile dash, has missed the point of the psychedelic experience. (21)

The psychedelic experience for Kleps then, in its inability to be separated from human plights around the world, is not a nihilistic unveiling of our solipsistic nature, but an act of citizenship that transcends the authority of the nation state. While successful trips are to be measured on a personal level, he simultaneously maintains the Vedic phrase repeated in Huxley's writing over and over: *tat tvam asi* or "thou art that." Kleps ends one article for *The Psychedelic Review* stating, "the object is to become what you are" (124). As potentially empty as this may sound, Kleps cannot be summed up as naïvely unaware of one-dimensionality. He charges his readers to fight "phony attempts to make psychedelia look like just one more swindle that can be blended into all the other swindles and controlled by the super-swindlers in Washington" by dropping "our own forms, our own language and our own standards, as every genuine religious novelty has done in the past" (24). Kleps invokes "genuine religious novelty" as a method of resistance. As critical of occultism as Kleps is, he still adheres to some kind of enchantment.

Spoofing with language is part of the method. Kleps's statements are congruent with Giorgio Agamben's claim that "[l]aw is ... constitutively linked to the curse, and only a politics that has broken this original connection with the curse will be able one day to make possible another use of speech and of the law" (*The Sacrament* 66). From Kleps's spoofy *Boo Hoo Bible*, to the famous testimonies of Abbie Hoffman and the Chicago Seven, to attempts to levitate the Pentagon and exorcisms of Senator

McCarthy's grave, psychedelic aesthetics perform the collapse of oath and law in an effort to redefine citizenship through enchanted speech, with extra-ordinary qualities as Agamben and Derrida call for, beyond the definition of human as the rational speaking animal.

The courtroom antics of Kleps and the later Chicago Seven do not merely rebel against authority; they rebel against the mode of language as law in a state of emergence. We see in psychedelic literature and art a collapse of image and text and attempts at visual and auditory representations of boundary-less states, and we can see intentional implementation of these aesthetics in Kleps's own Senate testimony from 1966. For example, Senator Burdick asks, "Mr. Kleps, would you mind telling me if you are really called Chief Boo Hoo?":

Mr. Kleps: I am afraid so. It is difficult to explain this. That is always the first question that comes up. The reason we do it is to distinguish between the church and the religion. We think it is very important not to take ourselves too seriously in terms of social structure, in terms of organizational life. We tend to view organizational life as sort of a game that people play.

Later in the testimony, after threatening that making LSD illegal will prompt civil war in the United States, Kleps claims that LSD "puts you in the mind of God, and . . . God is not a verbal being as we are to such a large extent." Kleps argues that current scientific and legal views of psychedelics are atheistic and "fundamentally erroneous."

Consciousness for Kleps is not sequential or an aggregation. Rather, consciousness works, as in a psychedelic state, by analogy, and feels experientially more anagogical. Speech and gesture collapse. In questioning the boundaries of modern subjectivity,

psychedelic works open up a broadened way of thinking about what personhood is and what citizenship is, particularly in their attempt at re-orienting of the subject's moral center. The shit-storm opens the possibility for gestural *poetics* beyond speech.

Kleps attempts to disestablish governmental authority by a return to “genuine religion” of double entendre through a collapse of sacred and profane. This cannot be written off as empty spiritualism. Rather, we should look here to “free association” of Critchley’s “faithless” congregation. The 1960s nostalgia for a return to the pre-political, to nature, and to early religion is certainly the product of modernity’s long-standing narrative of alienation from the state of nature, but psychedelic works situate that nostalgia through a journey to the timeless, mythological expanded ego and a *return* to the temporal or historical. In studying the psychedelic, we re-introduce time into the shitstorm of consciousness expansion. This blurs the distinction between transcendent and immanent religion with appeals to more fundamental language of law and requires needs thorough evaluations of both the “spiritual” and the “religious.”

In a narrative of secularization, the 1960s appear as a massive blow to the theocracy of the State, a decline not in religious morality but in the already-secularized morality that developed as a move away from religiosity a century prior. The revolution of the 1960s was then, perhaps unknowingly, a revolution against secularization itself. The revolt used enchantment as a critique of the State. Such enchantment appears secular as a spoof, but like Kleps it is a serious spoof. Enchanted objects, deifying personhood, New Ageism makes use of enchanted aesthetics as the profane to secular authority.

This does not necessarily mean that such a revolt was lasting, that somehow people became “more religious,” but emergent religion was used to protect lifestyle. Lifestyle and belief were one and the same, but according to Kleps’s metaphysics, because the church and religion ought to be kept separate, the performance of daily lifestyle became more openly ludic. And just as Kleps, Huxley and Leary used the rhetoric of religious enchantment to assert the moral authority of their citizenship over the State, citizens appealed to spiritual growth as a way to redefine their selves. The culture of “play” or performance here, reveals a spiritual quality, for what play attempted to distort was the sense that reality – social or otherwise – was ordered. Everything became a game. Here the appeal to religion makes an important entry into the “public” sphere; as lifestyle itself was performed citizenship changed.

### *What’s for Tea, Mum?*

Perhaps nothing seems so mundane and so simultaneously sacred as that which we ingest and put into our bodies. The United States Food and Drug Administration had attempted to keep one version of American citizenship safe while psychedelic citizenship attempted something different. This tension appears in William Burroughs’ writing as the binary between the junky state and the soma state. The Drug Enforcement Administration was created in 1973 by Richard Nixon, “in order to establish a single unified command to combat ‘an all-out global war on the drug menace’” (United States Department of Justice). In a way, this was a heavy blow to aspirations of a soma state,

but perhaps the true nature of the conflict inspiring the war on drugs – which still continues today – is that the spiritual qualities underpinning the lifestyle choices that motivated performance culture are unable to be discussed within the public frame of a secularization narrative. Ironically, Nixon’s “unified command” occurred just before the public became widely aware of CIA’s MK-ULTRA projects.

In 1978, discussing ways to solve the problem of addiction, William Burroughs told Victor Bockris and Raymond Foye, referencing Gordon Taylor’s *The Biological Time Bomb*, “Any sort of *selective* distribution of a medication to prolong life would run into, uh, social difficulties . . . our creaky old social system cannot absorb the biologic discoveries that are on the way” (106). When Bockris points out that this “points toward a much more controlled society,” Burroughs counters, saying he agrees with Timothy Leary, “Washington is no longer the center of power.” Because the government cannot compete with private wealth, Burroughs believes the government will have no “monopoly on scientific discovery.” He predicts, “they’re going to legalize marijuana, and sooner or later they’re going to come around to some sort of heroin maintenance” (107). He points to growing feelings of futility within drug enforcement and says, that the sooner there are less restrictions, the necessity for the DEA will be eliminated. But how does this fit into arguments appealing to religion?

In “Testimony Concerning a Sickness,” an addendum to *Naked Lunch* (1959), Burroughs says,

I have heard that there was once a beneficent non-habit-forming junk in India. It was called ‘soma’ and is pictured as a beautiful blue tide. If ‘soma’ ever existed

the Pusher was there to bottle it and monopolize it and sell it and it turned into plain old time JUNK.<sup>25</sup>

Burroughs associates junk with the crassest of globalized consumerism, and his characters, William Lee and Clem Snide move through differing personas in and out of being agents of the State and deliriously high junkies...his narratives move geographically around the world, broken and cut-up spatially and temporally. Junkies clearly deterritorialize the world. Yet toward the end of the book, *Naked Lunch* is itself referred to as a “blueprint, a How-To Book” (203). The reader “can cut into *Naked Lunch* at any intersection point,” essentially becoming a manual for divination in deterritorialized space:

Black insect lusts open into vast, other planet landscapes....Abstract concepts, bare as algebra, narrow down to a black turd or a pair of aging cajones....

How-To extend all levels of experience by opening the door at the end of a long hall....Doors that only open in *Silence*.... *Naked Lunch* demands Silence from The Reader. Otherwise he is taking his own pulse....

Appearing in ficto-poetic form years before either Leary’s version of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, Kleps’s catechism, or Ram Dass’s *Remember Be Here Now*, Burroughs presents his own avant-garde psychedelic guide. Like Artaud, Burroughs had traveled to South America to experience Yage and Ayahuasca. He describes the drugs as producing “blue flashes” in the appendix to *Naked Lunch* (230). Earlier in the novel, Burroughs, in a rare moment of almost reverence strews images:

Pictures of men and women, boys and girls, animals, fish, birds, the copulating rhythm of the universe flows through the room, a great blue tide of life.

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<sup>25</sup> I provide a more thorough enquiry into soma in my discussion of Aldous Huxley.

Vibrating, soundless hum of deep forest – sudden quiet of cities when the junky copes. A moment of stillness and wonder. Even the Commuter buzzes the clogged lines of cholesterol for contact. (74)

Again the list avoids the syntactic completion by avoiding “be” verbs. Here Burroughs aligns the silence of “The Reader” with the experience of “Blue Tide” through a collapsed, perennial space of humans, animals and cities and the “Commuter” – Sloan Wilson’s “man in the grey flannel suit.” This associative performance, like Kleps’s performance in *The Boo Hoo Bible*, is psychedelic aesthetics in action. Collapsing identities of reader and author and character and State, Burroughs pushes toward a new citizenship beyond geography, time and space, but he masks his Soma state well with seedy digressions and soupy plotlines. As a narrator explains:

The President is a junky but can’t take it direct because of his position. So he gets his fix through me. . . . From time to time we make contact and I recharge him. These contacts look, to the casual observer, like homosexual practices, but the actual excitement is not primarily sexual, and the climax is the separation when the charge is completed. (66)

The necessity for the sexual encounter is because, if it were done by “Osmosis Recharge, . . . it will put the President in a bad mood for weeks, and might well precipitate an atomic shambles.” The president has formed “an Oblique” habit. He has sacrificed all control, and is dependent as an unborn child”(66). As a result, the “Oblique Addict” ingests and consumes and “suffers a whole spectrum of subjective horror, silent protoplasmic fury, hideous agony of the bones.” The bones of the skeleton, the inside kills the addict, “straining to climb out of his unendurable flesh.” The State at this point is preserved by the sacrifice of the junky in communion with the President.



Burroughs's narrative performs a collapse of subjectivity and objectivity typical to mysticism and psychedelic aesthetics. Like Artaud, it is presented through the extreme materiality of biology, sex, bones and junk. Later in the novel, a narrator recalls a trip saying,

And I don't know what I am doing there nor who I am. I decide to play it cool and maybe I will get the orientation before the Owner shows....So instead of yelling "Where Am I?" cool it and look around and you will find out approximately....You were not there for *The Beginning*. You will not be there for *The End*....Your knowledge of what is going on can only be superficial and relative....(199)

Here Burroughs pushes to a state of exception: to life, death and knowledge. But he also converges the first and second persons, establishing the evangelical effect typical of psychedelic aesthetics. This state of exception where boundaries between personas collapse is the state that produces the writer or poet:

There is only one thing a writer can write about: *what is in front of his eyes at the moment of writing*....I am a recording instrument....I do not presume to impose "story" "plot" "continuity."... Insofar as I succeed in *Direct* recording of certain areas of psychic process I may have limited function....I am not an entertainer....(200)

Here the writer becomes an object, an instrument – a machine. But this quickly establishes a different communion.

"Possession" they call it....Sometimes an entity jumps in the body – outlines waver in yellow orange jelly – and hands move to disembowel the passing whore or strangle the neighbor child in hope of alleviating a chronic housing shortage. As if I was usually there but subject to goof now and then....*Wrong! I am never here*....Never that is *fully* in possession, but somehow in a position to forestall ill-advised moves....

The narrator turned reader turned writer turned machine turned possessed body is repositioned as an advisor...as a new subject. That subject enacts interstitially with the State, but is positioned outside:

Patrolling is, in fact, my principle occupation....No matter how tight Security, I am always somewhere *Outside* giving orders and *Inside* this straitjacket of jelly that gives and stretches but always reforms ahead of every movement, thought, impulse, stamped with the seal of alien inspection....

The passage moves on to distinguish writers from junkies over the smell / lack of smell of death: “the death smell is unmistakably a smell and complete absence of smell.” The absence of smell is the death of organic life (201). What is the end of all of this associative transfer?

Burroughs has described Carl Schmitt’s democratic nightmare, where public and State are completely indecipherable and left with no sovereign decision-maker. Rather there has been an orgy of consumption at every level. Burroughs describes this in perhaps the most well-known image and story from *Naked Lunch*: The man who taught his asshole to talk. The talking asshole develops its own personality and teeth, eventually consuming the rest of the body from the bottom up and the inside out. This becomes Burroughs’ figure for bureaucratic democracy, and we get a slight glimpse of another way he’d like to be. The character Dr. Benway, to whom agent Lee has been assigned in Mexico, lectures the younger Schaeffer, justifying their work as “Pure scientists” (119). Benway says, “Democracy is cancerous, and bureaus are its cancer. A bureau takes root anywhere in the state, turns malignant like the Narcotic bureau, and grows and grows,

always reproducing more of its own kind, until it chokes the host if not controlled or excised” (121). As an aside, Benway then throws in,

A cooperative on the other hand *can* live without the state. That is the road to follow. The building up of independent units to meet needs of people who participate in the functioning of the unit. A bureau operates on opposite principle of *inventing needs* to justify its own existence. (122)

While not necessarily throwing democracy completely out the window, Burroughs’s character suddenly sounds quite a bit like Herbert Marcuse with perhaps a tinge of Edward Abbey. In any case, the vision requires a more balanced and shared reciprocity. But how to determine between true and false needs with this new citizenship? Burroughs has suggested more implicitly and more powerfully that this would be a poetics that disrupts existing narratives, that in doing so a new poetics moves beyond the birth-death or being-toward-death narrative.

Burroughs often seems so irreverent that it is difficult to see anything like religion or spirituality in his work. This is partly because, for him, drawing on Artaud and the perennial, he presents the world of spirit as being closer to immanence than transcendence. It is necessary for both Artaud and Burroughs to intensify the grotesque and the body as their spiritual practice. This is easiest to see in Burroughs’s invocation and critique of the European imaginary, which he does in *Naked Lunch* by way of reference to the anthropologist, Franz Boas. Occurring through a globalized montage of non-industrialized societies that Burroughs calls the “*Yage state*” (99) and sounding much like Artaud, he writes:

“All medicine men use [yage] in their practice to foretell the future, locate lost or stolen objects, to diagnose and treat illness, to name the perpetrator of a crime.” Since the Indian (straitjacket for Herr Boas – trade joke – nothing so maddens an anthropologist as Primitive Man) does not regard any death as accidental, and they are acquainted with their own self-destructive trends referring to them contemptuously as “our naked cousins,” or perhaps that these trends above all are subject to the manipulation of alien and hostile wills, any death is murder. The medicine man takes Yage and the identity of the murderer is revealed to him. As you may imagine, the deliberations of the medicine man during one of these jungle inquests give rise to certain feelings of uneasiness among his constituents. (100)

And so similarly, Burroughs seems to suggest, the yage ingestion or psychedelic trip creates in its perennial and deterritorialized state the possibility for determining social justice. In the matrix of *Naked Lunch*, the perpetrator has been identified by the bureaucratic state through a sacrificial and excessive consumption of junk.

It makes sense to put Burroughs into more current anthropological findings regarding to Psychedelic aesthetics. Michael Taussig’s early work on shamanism in South America was followed by *The Myth of the State*, in which his ficto-criticism uses a genre collapse as participant-observational writing method that transcends subject-object distinction, as well as establishing a quasi-magical relationship between a colonial state enchanted by and inextricable from, native religion. In more recent work, Taussig connects drugs, consumption, color and global commerce, pointing out hidden enchanted aspects of things typically thought of as completely mundane. Taussig notes that drugs and dyes were for years commercially equivalent:

If historically color has been categorized as a spice, as in the phrase, “the spice of life,” a phrase suggestive of a “rush” that takes us out of ourselves, like a drug, it is exceedingly curious that this association with color should have been forgotten in our usual understandings of the rise of the West to economic and military

prominence. Color was every bit as important as so-called spices, if not a great deal more so, and indeed could be as highly valued as gold and silver. (*What Color is the Sacred?* 146)

Methodologically, Taussig has an implicit debt to psychedelic aesthetics. His associative figuring allows him to see global economic relationships in strikingly new ways, ones that complicate more traditional readings of colonial and post-colonial. Without the lineage of psychedelic aesthetics' playing on critiques of the European imaginary, Taussig may seem pretty far out there. Within it, he makes good sense.

Another more contemporary thinker dealing with these issues is Giorgio Agamben in his reading of Marcel Mauss on gift-giving in *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government*. Agamben's work shows an important relationship between the divine and sacrificial rites. He notes that Mauss was deeply influenced by the anthropologist Sylvain Levi, whose work on early Brahmin religion and sacrifice in *The Rig Veda* (which is the soma sacrifice) suggests that, "Indian sacrifice is not simply an effective action, as are all rites; it does not limit itself to merely influencing the gods; it creates them" (226). Rites are essentially *poetic* in the sense of making.

Through ingesting the divine one not only becomes divine, the act determines and makes the divine. It is a relationship similar to the economy Burroughs suggests as cooperative. Agamben says that "both sacrifice and prayer present us with a theurgical aspect in which men, by performing a series of rituals – more gestural in the case of sacrifice, more oral in that of prayer – act on the gods in a more or less effective manner."

This leads Agamben to an aesthetic notion that has been de-emphasized in politics – a fundamental relationship to “glorification over glory”:

Perhaps glorification is not only that which best fits the glory of God but is itself, as effective rite, what produces glory; and if glory is the very substance of God and the true sense of his economy, then it depends upon glorification in an essential manner and, therefore, has good reason to demand it through reproaches and injunctions.

We begin to see here the importance of understanding psychedelic aesthetics in relationship to not only citizenship but to a citizenship of *re-enchantment*. It is not merely nostalgia for religion or spirituality left behind by narratives of secularization, but the very substance of economic process itself. The affective qualities of poetic works are at the heart of politics and the economy. Insufficient attention to them is what creates Simon Critchley’s call for a return to poetry as a new foundation of “supreme fiction.” Because of their enchanted qualities, works like *Naked Lunch* and *The Boo Hoo Bible* that display psychedelic aesthetics are fundamentally political-theological in nature and useful to Critchley’s call. Besides Burroughs and Kleps, a similar process was present, although to a lesser extent, in other writers’ work dealing symbolically with different aspects of the economy.

### *Narrative Comparisons*

It is well known that drug culture had awful affects in the United States by the end of the 1960s, and common historical accounts of the 1960s narrate the decade itself as a kind of trip. In these accounts, the open possibilities articulated at the end of the 1950s in

the United States end with violence and destruction, a breaking down of a national identity center as well as the dispersing of activist movements into different factions that cease to communicate with each other. The end of the decade is often characterized as the political inefficacy of progressive movements, government scandals, murderous cults, and the loss of some sort of moral fabric. While some will claim that the magical time in San Francisco ended well before the decade's end, with the Diggers' public funeral for "Hippie – Son of Media" in 1967, the performative nature of the funeral still expresses psychedelic aesthetics both in attention to its own construction and to its death and rebirth overtones. No matter the narrative's location of nostalgia, for many the chaos of the 1960s returns to order – even if it is a morally corrupt one – and most children eventually grow up. And so another narrative often superimposed on the 1960s in the United States is one of growing up, coming of age, and losing innocence. More microcosmically: Woodstock became Altamont.

But it is important to know, as groups like the San Francisco Diggers certainly did, that the construction of the supreme fiction of the 1960s as an exceptional era was present in criticism before the decade even happened. At the end of the 1950s, across discursive media, people seemed to be looking for something new. Anthologized in Gerald Howard's *The Sixties*, an article from *Esquire* in 1960 by Arthur Schlesinger characterized the "rise of the Beat Generation" as "the result of the failure of our present society to provide ideals capable of inspiring the youth of our nation" (45). In the same

year, Paul Goodman wrote in *Growing Up Absurd* that “Culture is, first of all, city and patriotic culture” (57). He claims,

I shall try to show that patriotism is the culture of childhood and adolescence. Without this first culture, we come with fatal emptiness to the humane culture of science, art, humanity and God . . . Young people aspire mightily to appearances on television and other kinds of notoriety, but I doubt that many now think of being honored by a statue in the park and winning ‘immortal’ fame, the fame of big culture. (57)

The generation gap was being written into public dialogue. The youth were central, but the current youth were disaffected. C. Wright Mills used the term post-modern in 1963 to characterize an age where “the ideals of freedom and reason have become moot; [where] increased rationality may not be assumed to make for increased freedom” (74-5). Again there are reverberations of what Riesman articulated in *The Lonely Crowd* and Marcuse would articulate shortly in *One-Dimensional Man*. The irony of the late 1950s, according to cultural historian Lary May’s argument in *Recasting America*, was that although the United States had actually achieved its utopian dreams expressed earlier in the century, the effect was to bring about a state of extreme anxiety. While the perception of living in crisis was not new, “their concern, particularly in its intensity, was new: it is rare for people to be so self-aware, so self-conscious, so self-concerned” (23). According to May, one of the main reversals in the feeling of relief at America’s newfound power was in “mass participation in government.” Mediated culture had created the “youth” as an identity category to be marketed to, but this “produced” culture. We can even see this in jaded reactions to the 1960s. While Schlesinger, in the article mentioned above, presciently claimed that “national purpose . . . acquires meaning as part



of an ongoing process; its certification lies, not in rhetoric, but in performance” (46), in 1971, John Lennon expressed his jadedness surrounding the period by reflecting that “nothing happened. We all dressed up, the same bastards are in control, the same people are runnin’ everything. It is exactly the same” (in Wenner). For Lennon in his freshly post-Beatles bitterness, the performance of the 1960s was not effective. It was all show. Such bitter perspectives are just as present as nostalgia for a time when “everyone” had a cause, for a time when the “personal” became “political,” when the fabrication between public and private made a public game of lifestyle. The fact that the personal could become political, however, is merely an articulation of expanded citizenship.

Mediated culture challenged longstanding notions about subjectivity, perhaps especially the idea that subjectivity is a trap. In 1958, Hannah Arendt described with dismay the reactions people exhibited at the success of Russia’s Sputnik satellite. In her prologue to *The Human Condition*, she says, “when [humans] looked up from the earth toward the skies, [they] could behold there a thing of their own making. The immediate reaction, expressed on the spur of the moment, was relief about the first ‘step toward escape from men’s imprisonment to earth’” (1). We see in Arendt’s words that just before the psychedelic movement took off there was a culturally expressed desire for something “outside,” something more expansive in terms of situating subjectivity. It is also true that the youth of the affluent societies were growing up having their lives documented and directed in ways previously unknown to humans. This may be because youth of affluent societies grew up *less as subjects* than previous generations – in the

sense that the standard of living afforded a great deal of expendable income to the youth. At the same time, mediated culture located youth itself as a *subject*. These themes dominate the literature of the late fifties and early sixties. Two especially poignant themes are a return to childhood and a critique of masculinity.

The first of these themes can be seen in a few important books before the introduction of psychedelics to the public. In *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Tests*, Tom Wolfe mentions the importance of Hermann Hesse and Arthur C. Clarke. Wolfe compares Ken Kesey to Leo from Hesse's *Journey to the East*: "He was never openly known as the leader: like Kesey, he was the non-navigator of the brotherhood" (266). Earlier in his narrative, Wolfe explains, "For a long time, I couldn't understand the one Oriental practice the Pranksters liked, the throwing of the *I-Ching* coins" (142). What the divinatory practice leads him to understand is Jung's concept of synchronicity in which "the way the coins fall is inevitably tied up with the quality of the entire moment in which they fall." The synchronous moment of "Now" here invokes the ancient past and ushers in the space of the perennial. It is then that Wolfe has another "ah-ha" moment:

There is another book in the shelf in Kesey's living room that everybody seems to look at, a little book called *Journey to the East*, by Hermann Hesse. Hesse wrote it in 1932 and yet...*the synch!*...it is a book about...exactly...the Pranksters! and the great bus trip of 1964. (142)

But another book of Hesse's that perhaps more ideologically prefigures psychedelic aesthetics work: *The Glass Bead Game*.

Hesse, who was a pacifist like Aldous Huxley, produces politics that may seem overly naïve and even complacently dangerous on the surface, but the *The Glass Bead*

*Game* centralizes themes of childhood and the transcendence of time that are important to psychedelic aesthetics. In the book, Joseph Knecht, an aging scholar, decides to leave the distinguished position as *Magister Ludi* of the Glass Bead Game set in the future, an “academically religious” land called Castalia – the name Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert used for one of their foundations after leaving Harvard in the early 1960s. The Glass Bead Game is, among other things, academic precision *par excellence*, and Knecht has completely mastered it. Open to the criticism of a few long-time friends, however, he comes to see that Castalia is intellectually over-privileged and thus out of touch with humanity in the rest of the world. According to Knecht’s friend, an aged Catholic priest named Father Jacobus, what Castalia is particularly out of touch with is a deeply critical account of history. In Knecht’s resignation letter as *Magister Ludi*, he cites the words of his friend in the following post-script:

Times of terror and deepest misery may be in the offing. But if any happiness at all is to be extracted from that misery, it can only be a spiritual happiness, looking backward toward the conservation of the culture of earlier times, looking forward toward serene and stalwart defense of the things of the spirit in an age which otherwise might succumb wholly to material things. (363)

Spirit and history are intertwined for Father Jacobus and Knecht.

Though an old man, Knecht leaves Castalia for a more “secular” territory in order to become a tutor to his friend Plinio’s son, Tito, at a remote house in the mountains. Here, his mission into the secular world seeks to re-enchant the world with a religious conception of the temporal. It is a deepening of Knecht’s own spiritualism. On the first

morning of his arrival at the families' vacation home in the mountains, Knecht finds Tito dancing in the dawn's sunlight:

the young man seemed to him stronger and more impressive than he had hitherto thought, but also harder, more inaccessible, more remote from culture, more pagan. This ceremonial and sacrificial dance under the sign of Pan meant more than young Plinio's speeches and versemaking ever had; it raised the boy several stages higher, but also made him seem more alien, more elusive, less obedient to any summons.

In this dance, Tito,

without knowing what he was doing, asking no questions, . . . obeyed the command of this ecstatic moment, danced his worship, prayed to the sun, professed his devout movements and gestures his joy, his faith in life, his piety and reverence, both proudly and submissively offered up in the dance his devout soul as a sacrifice to the sun and the gods, and no less to the man he admired and feared, the sage and musician, the Master of the magic Game who had come to him from mysterious realms, his future teacher and friend. (422)

Knecht, compelled by admiration for the young Pan, follows him swimming into a cold mountain lake. The cold water is too much for the old man though, and Knecht drowns.

Tito, sobered by the experience, goes on to reform his recklessness, and so it would seem that Knecht, in the act of dying, fulfills his final task – a teacher till the end. But what of Tito's sacrificial dance?

The reference to Pan, a demigod, the one who lulls with music and forgetfulness, is an appropriate image that was frequently invoked in early twentieth century children's literature as a rise in interest in classical and pagan deities accompanied the perception of an end to metaphysics in general. In drowning, Knecht merges into a timeless pre-history. The novel then follows with a legendary account of Knecht's life and three fictional autobiographies that Knecht had written during his student days, two of which

are pre-historical as well, the other an account of a saintly life. Transcendence through a sacrifice that ecstatically disseminates a life outside of lived-time, or what Martin Heidegger might call “care” or “being-toward-death. Hesse’s book itself, as in Knecht’s three fictional past-life accounts, each account for Knecht’s various incarnations over time. The reason for being, in Hesse’s novel, points toward this enlightened transcendence, but it does so through overcoming histories. Knecht’s drowning represents a well-intentioned will that is overcome by the force of fate, and the narrative of the book presents itself as a biography of Knecht, celebrating his acts. The will acts to overcome its intention. In Heidegger’s philosophy again, it is the taking up of one’s angst through one’s thrown-ness in the world in order to live the authentic life. The authentic life is to be praised, glory in the destruction of will, transcendent merge with impersonal spirit. But the metempsychosis and the return to the perennial is crucial in relaying the fact that it is not just one time, modernity, which is to be overcome through some technologizing account of progress.

In Hesse’s novel, Knecht’s transcendence makes way for Tito’s enlightenment and moral development while he himself achieves a sort of bliss in death. Hesse presents the enlightened subject who is reconstituted through an experience that occupies so much of literature, and psychedelic literature in many ways merely continues this. It performs the literary subject as the site of identification. Later works, such as Italo Calvino’s *If upon a Winter’s Night a Traveler* is psychedelic in the way the text performs identification with the reader’s gaze, even if like Hesse it remains Romantic in its

presentation of experience. There is an amplification of the text's constructed-ness when compared to *The Glass Bead Game* or Nabakov's *Pale Fire* (1962). In many ways, the form of the artwork as transferable, containing the experience.

An easy way to conceptualize this is the theme of childhood innocence. In contrast to Hesse, during the psychedelic era Arthur C. Clarke's science fiction novel, *Childhood's End*, projects a vision of the human race overcoming all subjectivity and ending itself through a kind of mass-scale transmigration of souls. The narrative of the book arrives at the space beyond humans:

There was nothing left of Earth: *They* [the last generation of children] had leeched away the last atoms of substance. It had nourished them, through their inconceivable metamorphosis, as food stored in a grain of wheat feeds a plant as it climbs toward the sun. (211)

In order for the book's narrative to proceed from this point in the novel, the reader must adopt the longing gaze of the alien, Karellen, as he contemplates why his race is not allowed to evolve the way humans do. In following Karellen, the reader is invited to transcend humanity itself.

Tom Wolfe, in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Tests*, compares Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters to the children in Clarke's novel. Here, the "return" to nature is not a mere return but a fulfillment of some sort of evolutionary progress. Wolfe explicitly writes that the entire idea of the psychedelic experience involved in the acid and in the Prankster's performance antics could be found in a long passage from Clarke's book describing "total identification," which was itself the product of constructed media space:

The history of cinema gave the clue to their actions. First sound, then color, then stereoscopy, then Cinerama, had made the old 'moving pictures' more and more like reality itself. Where was the end of the story? Surely, the final stage would be reached when the audience forgot it was an audience, and became a part of the action. To achieve this would involve the stimulation of all the senses, and perhaps hypnosis as well...When the goal was attained, there would be an enrichment of human experience. A man could become – for a while, at least, – any other person, and could take part in any conceivable adventure, real or imaginary. (in Wolfe 233-34; in Clarke 142)

The Pranksters, through their performances, through LSD, through being aware of their own construction in their movie, “re-enchant” a participatory space. Total identification became the goal of their psychedelic aesthetics, but it was not ideologically a one-dimensional goal.

In *Childhood's End*, it is significant that the last human, Jan is a black man. With his characterization, Clarke expands citizenship and inverts the racist primitivism present in the early 1950s. Jan remains curious about space travel, and had wanted to be an astronaut before the Overlords had come and made the innovation useless to humans. His romantic dreams were not, however, destroyed. Jan attends a party where an alien interested in paranormal activity in humans has come. The partygoers decide to play a Ouija Board, and Jan asks it the location of the Overlord's home planet. The board, powered by Jean Greggson's latent psychic ability, produces the exact coordinates to the astounded crowd. Jan decides to stowaway on the alien's ship while Jean and her husband eventually move to the artist colony “New Athens,” where people are suspicious of the Overlords' true intentions. Clarke describes New Athens as having been founded by a Jewish man, a nod to the recently created Israeli state merged with irenic Greece:

He had been born in Israel, the last independent nation ever to come into existence – and, therefore, the shortest lived. The end of national sovereignty had been felt here perhaps more bitterly than anywhere else, for it is hard to lose a dream which one has just achieved after centuries of striving. (139)

If Wolfe's connection to the goals of the acid tests being the total identification achieved by the children in Clarke's novel with the Overmind, the tests also push toward deterritorialization and transcendence of nation-states. In doing so, they appear to have given up transcendent religion altogether; but secularization is also overcome through the enchantment of the psychic mind. Childhood as a theme in the works the Merry Pranksters found important was not just a return to the romantic construction of childhood innocence. Childhood works as a theme in psychedelic aesthetics to invoke the perennial through the nostalgia produced by modernity's claim to temporal progress and alienation from nature. History is overcome by moving to a pre-political state of nature both before and beyond the nation state. Another important theme in accomplishing this goal was a critique of masculinity and the family.

Although not necessarily a psychedelic work, both the themes of childhood and masculinity are beautifully allegorized in Vladimir Nabakov's *Lolita* (1955). In the novel, Humbert Humbert, the double-named academic tries to reconcile European fantasy structures with American consumerism by fetishizing and attempting to possess his nymphet, Lolita. Humbert embodies the decadent authority of specialists. His attempt to control consumption itself carries to the end of the book. As Humbert awaits his own death, he writes his memoir and elegy, but then refuses to publish it:



When I started, fifty-six days ago, to write *Lolita*, first in the psychopathic ward for observation, and then in this well-heated, albeit tombal, seclusion, I thought I would use these notes in toto at my trial, to save not my head of course, but my soul. In mid-composition, however, I realized that I could never parade living Lolita. I still may use parts of her memoir in hermetic sessions, but publication is to be deferred. (308)

Humbert's narcissism presents as a chivalry, or a parody of chivalry – as if it were not always parody of a sort: “I could never parade living Lolita.” Humbert desires for the book to be published only after Lolita is dead. His final act of control is his own metempsychosis into the transcendental realm of Art: “I am thinking of aurochs and angels, the secret of durable pigments, prophetic sonnets, the refuge of art,” he writes, addressing the living / dead Lolita (309). From his refuge, Humbert is still able to make threats to Lolita's husband from beyond the grave: “That husband of yours, I hope, will always treat you well, because otherwise my specter shall come at him, like black smoke, like a demented giant, and pull him apart nerve by nerve.” Art effects and enables control, and as Nabokov's professor John Ray, writes in his “Introduction” to *Lolita*, claiming the book's moral lessons “should make all of us – parents, social workers, educators – apply ourselves with greater vigilance and vision to the task of bringing up a better generation in a safer world” (6). The book parodies the desire to control, whether it is Humbert, the professor, or the reader. The narratives of the “generation” of youth in the 1960s enact a similar desire. The youth generation's consumer freedom positions them as hyper-mediated subjects-objects. This realization accompanies a collapse of idealism in the narratives of late sixties and early seventies, as “coming down” from the trip brought baby boomers into adulthood. A liberal generation was normed.

Ian Hacking has eloquently argued in *The Taming of Chance* that the construction of “normal people” is developed in the late nineteenth century as an outgrowth of Enlightenment thought replaces chance as “superstition of the vulgar” (1). He says, “the cardinal concept of the Enlightenment had been, simply, human nature. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was being replaced by something different: normal people.” Yet chance and indeterminacy came to “subvert” such rational normality in the early twentieth century, according to Hacking, by way of massive amounts of collected data and the rise of probability and statistics to account for such data (3). What arose with indeterminacy in physics and these ways to account for data was a theme of games and the theorization of play:

Games of chance furnished initial illustrations of chance processes, as did birth and mortality data. Those became the object of mathematical scrutiny in the seventeenth century. Without them we would have nothing like our modern idea of probability. But it is easy for the determinist to assume that the fall of the die or the spin of a roulette work out to the simple and immutable laws of mechanics.

One can see both the ludic and the fascination with chance in psychedelic aesthetics with the Merry Pranksters use of the *I-Ching* for divination and the importance of performance as self-aware. This is perhaps fully realized in late psychedelic works like Thomas Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow* (1973). Pynchon’s main character Slothrop comes to find that German V2 rockets land wherever he has recently had sex. Philip M. Weinstein writes:

Slothrop (thanks to his re-scriptable member) can become ‘organically’ aligned within political organizations utterly alien to his sense of who he is. Engineered to be somatically foreign to himself, but unaware of this, he is, for much of the novel, both Slothrop and not-Slothrop” (202).

What appears in the “both Slothrop and not-Slothrop” is a questioning of liberal subjectivity that marks the trauma of the psychedelic era, and the narrative seeks to overcome this mystery. Pynchon’s work, like Hacking’s, shows normalcy to be a construction, hence marking a well-known postmodern shift. While the narrative construction of *Lolita*, with its false introduction, also parodies the construction of normalcy and the construction of the book as consumed object through professor Ray’s moralizing message, Pynchon’s work attributes the construction to an almost enchanted interstitial and even international governing forces and conspiracies.

There are two extremes at work here, visible in the doubling of characters. Humbert is a culpable agent who, though consumed with desire, maintains a certain degree of self-identity. Slothrop, on the other hand, in his search for the V2 rocket with the impossible serial number 00000, is completely dissimulated. His character disappears as the novel focuses on the rocket itself. Slothrop’s doubling, in contrast to Humbert Humbert, is much more directly tied to the idea of a nation-State that is being destroyed by the rockets. Slothrop is a bio-political entity whose masculinity has been transfigured by the State itself. He is experimented on both as a child and an adult. Whereas Humbert Humbert’s fetishes become transcendent art, Slothrop’s sexual conduct marks and portends destruction. Whereas the forces that Humbert transgresses are cultural norms, Slothrop’s are political institutions where control and chaos are difficult to distinguish from one another. While a typical modern-versus postmodern theme about agency can be set up here, psychedelic aesthetics exists somewhere in-between the subjective perverted

sexual agent, Humbert, and the objectified, dismembered soldier whose story becomes a cypher numbered rocket. The difference is biopolitical, and psychedelic aesthetics are particularly concerned, not just with overcoming conventional morality, but with the state's construction of it through subjugation of its citizens.

Psychedelic aesthetics, according to Aldous Huxley's thinking presented earlier, must transcend into "the spiritual" which situates subjectivity and objectivity, and these aesthetics are largely evidenced in works between the late fifties and the early seventies. At the heart of psychedelic therapy is a continued reliance on the return to subjectivity. While a critique of European fantasies of modern subjectivity is at work, a liberal subject remains. Institutional critique, even if it is cartoonish, exists as an *earnest* part of psychedelic aesthetics. These aesthetics suggest that what institutions need is not to be destroyed, but to be updated through a return to a state of nature accomplished by a psychedelic experience. Figuratively, psychedelic aesthetics accomplish this by a critique of masculinity and through the transfer of narrative perspective.

Between *Lolita* and *Gravity's Rainbow* we can situate another major literary work dealing with masculinity: Ken Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Here, the state institution performs a virtual castration of McMurphy's masculinity through the normative and generic frigidity of Nurse Ratched. Normalcy conquers by lobotomizing McMurphy's wildness, his attempts at leadership and his attempts for fraternal organizing. But the narrative perspective belongs to Chief, the sanest of the bunch, whose voice is the text itself, though he remains mute through most of the narrative. And

it is only through Chief's smothering of McMurphy that his lobotomized virility is transferred to the half-Native American, allowing him to escape the hospital. Chief performs euthanasia on the "white man," taking his symbolic power with him. Chief is also a different kind of subject. He learns and leaves. Power is redistributed through him and re-territorialized.

Tom Wolfe explains that Kesey's interest in normalcy is driven by his interest in controlling people. In *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Tests*, he writes of Kesey's antics when asked to come talk to a conference of the Unitarian Church in California:

Kesey was, in fact, now tremendously interested in the phenomenon of...Control. He had discovered that the Pranksters had been able to control the flow of the conference, not by any Machiavellian planning, but simply by drawing the conference into their movie. The conference was on a schedule, but the Pranksters always arrived...*Now*, and in no time at all everyone had become a part of their movie. (190)

Kesey's control was electric, affective and aesthetic. At the conference, Kesey lectured the crowd about "symbols we use and the games we're in and how you can't really know what an emotion is until you've experienced both sides of it" (187). His answer was an affective study. Kesey took an American flag off of the stage and began trampling it. Unitarians, one would think, would be all too aware of iconoclasm, but instead there were gasps and sobs. Wolfe frames Kesey's intent: "don't just describe an emotion, but arouse it, make them experience it, by manipulating the symbol of the emotion, and sometimes we have to come to an awareness through the back door." As Kesey tries to explain his action, he refers to singing the song "America the Beautiful" as a child, but one of his Pranksters interrupts him telling him to "do it" or "sing it" and Kesey leads the whole

crowd singing the song. Here again is another instance of what Agamben calls glorification over glory. Glorification exists in the affective moves of psychedelic aesthetics as an aesthetic that re-enchants superseding the power of nation-state authority.

Kesey makes essentially the same gesture in the transference of narrative perspective in *Sometimes a Great Notion*. While the narrative is largely about two brothers, one a weaker, suicidal hipster named Leland Stamper, who seeks revenge on his more manly, older half-brother, Hank, for carrying on a love affair with his mother, their father's second wife. Part of the revenge plot involves winning the love of his older brother's wife, Viv. But, as with *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, the narrative frame allows for a different ending. Despite the fact that character's shift perspective throughout *Sometimes a Great Notion* in a fashion reminiscent of William Faulkner, the dramatic situation that holds the novel together is that of Viv Stamper relaying the mythological story of the Stampers to Union Boss, Floyd Evenwrite. While the revenge narrative emphasizes the family struggle, and the failed search for a new masculinity – Leland sets ultimate revenge on “stealing” his brother's woman – Viv's narrative ends the novel when she leaves town and both men. Again, the old myths are transferred to the voice of a seemingly marginalized character. Citizenship is expanded. Viv has been on a marriage trip, and on the return she has said, “no thank you.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Both film versions of these novels ignore the dramatic situation implied by the storyteller, hence they miss the point of the transfer of power present in Kesey's work and a larger thrust in his critique of modern subjectivity.

Kesey's novels, like many psychedelic works, valorize a "return" to the un-modern, the pre-modern, and the perennial. In the casting off of modernity the new citizen is ushered in with the consciousness of the failure of modernity. Kesey figures this return in *Sometimes a Great Notion* with nods to the tradition of American literature and the home. With echoes going back to Poe's "Fall of the House of Usher" and Hawthorne's *House of Seven Gables*, the home flawed at its foundation is a long-standing device for establishing familial and generational conflict.

Nine years before Kesey's book was published, Sloan Wilson's *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1955) was a best-seller. The book opens with the story of a crack in the wall of Tom and Betsy Rath's house. After a marriage fight over money, Tom had "heaved" a forty dollar vase Betsy had bought that day against the wall, causing a crack in the plaster to form all the way up the wall in the shape of a question mark (1). Wilson's heavy-handed figure is completely earnest. Tom and Betsy repair their marriage by eventually moving into Tom's mother's home after she dies. The house is on a large plot of land and the couple wins a zoning battle with the local city council to have part of the land turned into a subdivision. They also win a battle with his mother's corrupt gardener who claims to have rightful inheritance to the land. Throughout the book, Tom's manhood is in question as he struggles to be ambitious enough to please his wife. He constantly thinks about how many men he killed as a soldier in the war and a lover he left in Europe whom has contacted him for monetary support for a child he did not know he had. The settling of the situation with Tom's intergenerational home and his

commitment to build modest homes for others while stepping out of the corporate world saves his marriage and family and lets him become a stand-up father to his child overseas. Family wins over corporate ambition. Family produces a balanced masculinity, at least when the wife is understanding enough. This is not the case with Kesey's approach to the home.

*Sometimes a Great Notion* opens by returning to a mythical time, gesturing toward *Beowulf*. Outside the Stamper household, a man's arm hangs for the public to see. The house is on a riverbank in Oregon, was built by Jonas Stamper, who left Kansas in 1898 with his two sons. Jonas, convinced by his "seven-teen-year-old son" that "we can do better than this yere sticker path we got now" (17), acquires Oregon land by homesteading, but he quickly realizes that the land he has built the foundation of his home on is slowly being eaten away by the river: "Watching, it occurs to Jonas that it isn't the bank that is giving way, as one might naturally assume. No. It is the river that is getting wider" (25). Jonas's dilemma is characterized as an American generational problem. He is a religious man who has left his wife behind in Kansas.

A stringy-muscled brood of restless and stubborn west-walkers, their scattered history shows. With too much bone and not enough meat, and on the move ever since that first day the first skinny immigrant Stamper took his first step off the boat onto the eastern shore of the continent. On the move with a kind of trancelike dedication. Generation after generation leapfrogging west across wild young America; not as pioneers doing the Lord's work in a heathen land, not as visionaries blazing a trail for a growing nation . . . but simply as a clan of skinny men inclined always toward itchy feet and idiocy, toward foolish roaming, toward believing in greener grass over the hill and straighter hemlocks down the trail. (16)



Jonas eventually loses hope and leaves his sons and wife to go back to Kansas without telling them. He is a failed father. To get money to live and finish the house, Henry Stokes must join a local co-op against his will and pride. Fighting against the expanding river, Henry builds a bank that requires constant maintenance. This is the result of the flawed foundation of the flawed father at the end of the continent. Nature itself de-territorializes the home, and the flawed father returns in the next generation.

Henry Stamper makes up for what his father lacked by becoming ultra masculine and a shrewd ruler of his house. By the time he has a family, “the domain is an absolute monarchy in which no one dares make a move, not even the crown prince himself, without first consulting the Great Ruler” (78). The “crown prince” is Hank, Henry’s first-born. His mother dies and Henry takes a trip back to New York to get another wife. He returns with a woman less than half his age with whom he has a second son, Leland, but he is too old to please her. Lonely and desperate, she develops a romantic relationship with Hank. Leland sees them together as a boy and develops a hatred for his older brother. Leland is brainy instead of brawny and goes off to college; meanwhile his mother leaves the Stamper house and eventually kills herself. Blaming his brother for his mother’s suicide, Leland returns home after his own failed suicide-attempt to take revenge on his brother.

The typological references to sibling rivalry in the book are themselves a reference to Steinbeck’s *East of Eden* (1952), which offers a perspective of individual will overcoming the shadows of history and fate. But the generational struggle is

different with Kesey. Before leaving to go back home, the young hipster Leland has a session with his psychiatrist, telling him he thinks he is going mad. His doctor tells him, he is not mad.

“You, and in fact quite a lot of your generation, have in some way been exiled from that particular sanctuary. It’s become almost impossible for you to ‘go mad’ in the classical sense. At one time people conveniently ‘went mad’ and were never heard from again. Like a character in a romantic novel. But now” – And think he even went so far as to yawn – “you are too hip to yourself on a psychological level. You are all too intimate with too many of the symptoms of insanity to be completely off your guard. Another thing: all of you have a talent for releasing frustration through clever fantasy.” (71)

Leland’s entire generation has been so “normed” they do not know where else to go. The psychologist proves to be right in a way, for Leland’s fantasy becomes set on outdoing his overly masculine older brother by stealing his wife, Viv. And through the novel we see him plot with hipster leanings toward paranoid schizophrenia and “sensitive” masculinity. Hank’s masculinity is as much a trap for him as anything. Everyone wants to fight him, including his younger brother. In his ultimate confrontation with Hank, Leland performs his failure at physically overpowering Hank while demonstrating that his plot to disrupt Hank’s marriage worked. But in a characteristically Keseyan twist, the brothers unite together to save their family business in a desperate attempt to fight labor unions, and Viv leaves both of them. Like Chief at the end of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, the shift in narrative frame accomplishes an expanded sense of citizenship, even if they are only Kesey’s fantasies of Native-American-ness and femininity.

In disrupting not so much the mythological narratives that Kesey draws on to invoke a literary lineage but the perspective by which myths are told, Kesey challenges both state citizenship and transcendent religion. His use of enchantment occurs partly through his choice of character shifts – in these two examples, a half Native American and a woman from Colorado. Both are associated with a land that becomes re-territorialized through their emerging perspectives. But Kesey enchants at a more subtle level as well.

*Sometimes a Great Notion* constantly calls attention to its own construction through song and frequent shifts in character's perspectives. For example, Kesey attempts to one-up William Faulkner by generally using perspective shifts between chapters while occasionally shifting from paragraph to paragraph. In addition, characters interrupt their own narratives to point this out. Leland speaking in first-person, at one point says, "Looking back (I mean now, here, from this particular juncture in time, able to be objective and courageous thanks to the miracle of modern narrative technique), I see the terror clearly" (71). And, in a technical sense, the narrative of the book moves from Viv's frame on the last page to "Jenny," a Native American woman, lifting her skirt for a man. These moves mimic camera-like shifts in perspective throughout the novel and point to an "electric" quality of enchantment. In doing so, they gesture outside of the medium of the written word.

Perhaps more overtly, this is accomplished throughout the novel as country song lyrics interrupt scenes from the jukebox in the bar, and even then, more significantly in the title's allusion to "Goodnight Irene":

Sometimes I live in the country  
Sometimes I live in town,  
Sometimes I have a great notion  
To jump in the river and drown

Besides being an allusion to suicide by drowning and drugs (the lyrics reference dying of morphine) because a woman left, which seems to unify both Hank and Leland's situations at the end of the novel, as well as to land and the river in the book, "Goodnight Irene" has a larger cultural significance for Kesey. "Goodnight Irene" was a popular song in the late nineteenth century, but its melody had been forgotten until a Lead Belly performance of it was recorded by John and Alan Lomax. It was then recorded by Pete Seeger and the Weavers in 1950 and became a mega hit. Kesey is directly tapping into not just a hit but also into America's past. According to John Szwed, between the Weavers' release of their version in July and October of 1950, the song was heard all over the country in jukeboxes and on the radio "an estimated two million times a day" (249). Although the move is subtle, Kesey uses the texture of recorded music as a way to move into the perennial.

Again, psychedelic aesthetics invoke the perennial as a way to collapse textures into a space beyond time. It is a virtual space in the fact that it is constructed and "produced." In recorded music, the explosion of folk music during the 1950s was a way to re-territorialize the American landscape in the postwar years. It was also a way to

critique state power, and so much of folk music of the time was left-leaning. It hardly needs mentioning that Bob Dylan made this more psychedelic when he “went electric” at the Newport Folk Festival in 1963. What made the move so shocking both to the audience and to Dylan was a perceived inauthenticity in Dylan’s use of instrumentation associated with more commercial music. Commodification removed the intellectual “status” of the austere folk aesthetic. But Dylan seemed to already be aware that there was nothing “authentic” about any of it. It was all performance, and there was nothing wrong with that.

In another way, there was nothing particularly revolutionary about Dylan’s move; in his song structure he remained committed to folk and blues forms, but his lyrics became more narrative-driven, associative and textural – and that, combined with electricity (a familiar psychedelic trope) was what made him psychedelic. What folk listeners had yet to understand was that all of it was already mediated, and their aesthetic was based in a commitment to a virtual presentation of landscape from which they could deterritorialize and the re-territorialize the political landscape. They were simply committed to a kind of naturalism they romanticized. In a nostalgia for the land and the “people” of the land, folk music collectors work to preserve territory, whether it be local, national or “world.” In psychedelic aesthetics, “folk texture” becomes one of many ways to invoke the perennial through the gesture of a return to “nature” or the land. The technological innovations in musical production destroyed any sort of claim to naturalism in recorded music. In his brilliant study, *Echo and Reverb: Fabricating Space in Popular*

*Music Recording 1900-1960*, Peter Doyle traces how early uses of reverb were used to convey a kind of naturalism through a sense of vastness of space. However, by the late 1950s, musical production had shifted beyond appealing to naturalism and created entirely virtual space:

Reverberation and echo simply are sonic attributes of physical space. When discussing the nature of the space(s) inferred by the use of echo and reverb on recordings, however, especially when lyrics do not cue us to imagine specific space(s), we move further into connotation; in teasing these meanings out, we run the risk of interpreting idiosyncratically, of over interpreting, or of misreading.  
(14)

Again, this can be connected to the virtual space alluded to by Arthur C. Clarke in *Childhood's End* with regard to the cinema and Lary May's writings about "produced culture." The virtual space in psychedelic aesthetics provides another access point to the perennial.

But the perennialism of psychedelic aesthetics also builds out of the modernist avant-garde aesthetics of failure, and that is why my initial chapters linking psychedelic aesthetics to European thought are important. The failure of traditional masculinity was one way to present a critique of the state. While Burroughs accomplished this with surreptitious homosexual encounters with the president in *Naked Lunch*, Kesey showed it to be a trap. His apathy for the inability to "graduate" from acid tests is already apparent in the fractured ending of *Sometimes a Great Notion*. Viv does not know where she is going, she is simply going. The only recourse seems to be some "becoming" of other that knows its failure. Of course, this failure is evident in earlier literary figures, and the most famously inspiring figure for both Kesey and Dylan is the figure of the beatnik hipster.

Power is generally redistributed in the literature of the 1950s and 1960s. When Jack Kerouac imposes his white privilege in *On the Road* calling the “Negro” the essential American, he expresses more than the invisibility of white power and its ability to drain who or what it others by its narrative enthusiasm. The ignorance of the power is indicative of the power itself – a power unrecognized because it is taken for granted. Because power *powers*, it does not recognize. As such, much of the Beat and post-Beat poetry, like the emerging avant-garde jazz of the period, is fundamentally about the intensity of energy outside of source. Taking away existing harmonic song structures essentially produces the perennial, it moves to a state preceding functional harmony. The convention in avant-garde jazz at the time was to begin a piece with a pre-written melody or “head,” and then to use that as a point of departure into free improvisation. This process dramatically performs the psychedelic experience. But in a narrative medium like fictional literature, getting to the perennial requires associative and allegorical moves. It is these moves that accomplish the transference of power by creating a state of “becoming,” as Deleuze and Guattari would say.

The perennial brings one into contact with one’s desire. Desire here ceases to be a lack. If racial essentialism is present unconsciously, in the perennial it will be overt and part of what Kleps called the “shitstorm” of enlightenment. Kerouac’s essentialism has been noted by many in passages like the following from *On the Road*: “I wished I were a Denver Mexican, or even a poor overworked Jap, anything but what I was so drearily, a ‘white man’ disillusioned” (180). If one takes his desire seriously, however, then one has

to acknowledge that “true” American citizenship is coded as “non-white.” White power and masculinity, like the European imaginary, fail in the perennial, especially as citizenship expands and new narratives are formed – at least this is how the aesthetics figure it.

The figure of the Beat attempts to shrug off the weight of biology as it exists socially while maintaining a certain naivety concerning the fact that the choice to sacrifice himself is a self-employed consecration. At least part of this had to do with a generation feeling they were inheriting a “utopia” they had never asked for. It is important to note that Sal Paradise, Kerouac’s narrator, fails to become an essential American. The book itself performs a kind of failure. Sal meets Dean Moriarty just after his marriage has fallen apart. His New York intellectual friends bore him with their “negative, nightmare position of putting down society and giving their tired bookish or political or psychoanalytical reasons, but Dean just raced society eager for bread and love; he didn’t care one way or the other” (8). Moriarty’s appeal initially comes to Sal as a kind of feigned or even anti-intellectualism from just as keen a mind as his New York friends. This is what makes Sal take his initial trip out west beginning his life “on the road,” because “somewhere along the line I knew there’d be girls, visions, everything; somewhere along the line I knew the pearl would be handed to me.” But the novel ends with Sal reluctantly off to a bourgeois concert with New York friends and Dean romantically off west again.



Kerouac's personal goals for his work also perform a kind of spiritual failure.

Ann Charters has noted that

Kerouac was never able to convince his critics that the Beat Generation was 'basically a religious generation,' but his friend [John Clellon] Holmes understood that the characters of *On the Road* were actually 'on a quest, and that the specific object of their quest was spiritual. (xxix)

It was for Holmes an inward turn despite the outward-ness of the traveling. Even so, Sal and Dean never succeed in finding Dean's absent father, and by the end Kerouac rests in the cold comfort that "nobody knows what's going to happen to anybody besides the forlorn rags of growing old" (307). It is deeply Romantic, but more than being optimistic, it is a performance of failure.

Kerouac's aspirations to mysticism accompany an abdication of the responsibility of privilege. The romantic "holiness" of the artist privileges the self while sacrificing the self's power. Who it "others" may never have asked for the blood of the self-sacrificing artist. Nevertheless, the sacrifice is there – the blood of privilege that destroys itself in its last attempt to maintain control. But like any such violent act, the demonstration is itself the demonstration of powerlessness. Viv, like the Dean Moriarty at the end of *On the Road*, simply disappears into the distance.

The difference between *On the Road* and *Sometimes a Great Notion*, however, is poignantly revealed in narrative comparison. In the latter, the reader has more freedom to travel with Viv or to recede from the book. A certain "naivety" accompanies the Beat, embedded in the knowing-non-acknowledgment of modernism's failure, because the *enthusiasm* of the spiritual quest remains genuine. The Beat believes in his holiness, but

the move to self-sacrifice for the sake of holiness is larger than any individual decision to self-sacrifice. The decision to perform sacrifice itself arises from the cultural reconfiguration of power and privilege. Although Kerouac's narrator is not emasculated in the same way Nabakov's Humbert Humbert, Kesey's McMurphy, and Pynchon's Slothrop are, Sal Paradise can do nothing but go to a boring concert and think of the layered poetic figure of desire that Dean Moriarty has become – a tragic return to one-dimensionality. What keeps Kerouac's *On the Road* from really displaying psychedelic aesthetics then, is its fetishization of failure – (he even later came to perform this very failure in his own life). Psychedelic aesthetics, on the other hand, track a certain masculinity that must die and be mythologically disseminated and reborn, but *On the Road* glorifies its own failure.

However, certainly if anyone bought into the glorification of this failure it was Kerouac's readers and the emerging displaced affluent youth who had nowhere to turn in a utopic society overcome by its own anxiety, to put it in Lary May's terms. And Kesey was an avid consumer of Kerouac. Becoming involved at one level requires an act of will and at another level an overcoming of that will. Groups like the Merry Pranksters sought to overcome the will through affective means, but they certainly weren't the only group to do so. John Gruen, in *The New Bohemia* (1966) referred to this produced culture as "combine culture": "The true emblem of this New Bohemia," he says, "is action – physical, mental, emotional." He contrasts these youth with Jack Kerouac and the beats in terms of mobility:

[The combine generation's] highway leads not so much through the Whitmanian wonderment of these United States, as through the currently more relevant Whitmanian social awareness of the development of comradeship, the beautiful and sane affection of man for man. (9)

Mobility, process, means over ends, but also means overcoming themselves: these characteristics are present in psychedelic aesthetics, as well as a transcending of geographical place, accomplishing a more hazy distinction between 'subject' and 'world.' Artifice here ceases to be alienated from nature and instead presents as 'organic'. As Bob Dylan sings, "You don't need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows," but the weathermen's terrorism is merely the performance of a return to a pre-political state of nature. There is nothing necessarily in the return to the state of nature that means it must be non-violent. Thomas Hobbes would perhaps laugh and shrug, but he would also be deeply concerned with the complete lack of controlled meaning through associative aesthetics.

If the narrative of the trip itself becomes allegorical, a kind of pilgrimage, the story of the psychedelic experience in many ways can be superimposed onto Sal Paradise. What began as guided trips in the "overly intellectual" east coast psychology became a free for all on the west coast. As Tom Wolfe tells it, the entire trip the Merry Pranksters began with the assumption that they were all already crazy: "The trip, in fact the whole deal, was a risk-all balls-out plunge into the unknown, and it was assumed merely that more and more of what was already inside a person would come out and expand, gloriously or otherwise" (87). Kesey's prankster was an updated form of Leland the hipster from *Sometimes a Great Notion*, so familiar with the symptoms of madness, he

could not do anything to escape it. In such a situation one might as well recognize the entire metaphysical situation as a game. Once this is recognized, it all becomes performance. The existing social structures in America became the stage for this performance:

Pranksters were out among them, and the citizens of the land were gawking and struggling to summon up the proper emotion for this – what in the name of God are the ninnies *doing*. But the opposite was happening, too. On those long stretches of American superhighway between performances the bus was like a pressure cooker, a crucible, like one of those chambers in which the early atomic scientists used to compress heavy water, drive the molecules closer and closer together until the very atoms exploded. On the bus all traces of freakiness or competition or bitterness were intensified. (Wolfe 88)

Fiction becomes reality in psychedelic aesthetics.

### *Psychedelic Citizenship*

In accepting the metaphysics of life as a ludic performance, Ken Kesey and his friends decided to make a movie. But the production of the movie, like Federico Fellini's *8½* is a context collapse of self and other, inside and outside. The body becomes the focus of such a collapse, and psychedelic aesthetics come to be expressed through lifestyle in the late 1960s and 1970s. In entering this "headspace," there is an abdication of control for both self and environment, and things are left up to aesthetic forces and affective waves. But it is not simply an experiment in anarchy. Control moves through the force of energy and power itself. Unsurprisingly, the acid tests alarmed even other folks in the psychedelic community. Wolfe notes that Owsley Stanley, the famous manufacturer of LSD was skeptical at times of Kesey's tests, but also the ex-Harvard

crew who had originally promoted guided trips. The Merry Pranksters had fully embraced the perennial “Now,” and it is this move that underlies the experience of “happenings” and guerilla politics of the late 1960s. Like Kleps in his *Boo Hoo Bible*, setting and preparation became way less relevant: “Let the setting be as unserene and lurid as the Prankster arts can make it and let your set be only on your...*brain*, man” (233). The plan for the Acid Tests was: “Everybody would take acid, any time they wanted, six hours before the Test began or the moment they got there, at whatever point in the trip they wanted to enter the new planet. In any event, they would be on a new planet.” What would citizenship look like there?

The result of the Acid Tests was that there needed to be a “graduation” from acid. Wolfe presents Kesey’s theory to go beyond acid: “You find what you came to find when you’re on acid and we’ve got to start doing it without acid; there’s no use opening the door and going through it and then always going back out again” (263). Here Kesey begins to sound much more like Aldous Huxley had sounded in theorizing that drugs could potentially help society by giving people access to mystical experiences who otherwise would not have it within their means to achieve a feeling of spirituality on their own. Huxley then remains the theorist of the psychedelic experience *par excellence*, even if his aesthetic implementation of his ideas was more austere and less performative. Still, Kesey and others building psychedelic aesthetics off of allegories of trips certainly left a cultural stamp with the emergence of festival culture.

An obvious connection here, and one that was often invoked during the 1960s, is that of the Dionysian festival. In its political sense, the festival was articulated in liberal philosophy by Rousseau in the form of civic religion. Festival culture, so present in our society today, exploded in the 1960s, and the acid tests invoked a similar rhetoric of citizenship: “you’re either on the bus or off the bus.” With the acid tests and psychedelic aesthetics, citizenship is presented as a performance that is self-aware, the outcome of “produced culture” that arises after World War II. It is a mass-produced self-awareness that is participatory and may or may not be ironic – for dramatic irony depends on an audience perceiving a difference, and total identification leaves no audience behind. Festivals function to rejuvenate the spiritual life of the community, but they also involve sacrifice.

Simon Critchley’s *Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology*

explicates Rousseau on festivals and civic religion. Critchley writes:

in order for the internalist laws generated by the general will to have authority, they have to be decreed or ‘statuted’ by a quasi-external lawgiver, who belongs neither to the realm of politics nor nature, but who exists in a ‘no place’ . . . It is by occupying this quasi-external, quasi-divine ‘no place’ that the lawgiver gives a fictional majesty to the law. (61)

But Critchley later turns to explications of Wallace Stevens, saying that “in the realms of politics, law, and religion there are *only* fictions. Yet I do not see this as a sign of weakness, but as a sign of *possible* strength.” Although it is merely a dim possibility, Critchley believes “the critical task of poetry is to show that the world is what you make of it. But that does not exhaust the category of fiction. Paradoxically, a supreme fiction

is a fiction we know to be a fiction – there is nothing else – but in which we nevertheless believe” (91). As the affective turns of psychedelic aesthetics in the mid-twentieth century redraw subjectivity outside the legal norms of nation-states through consciousness expansion, they re-enchant citizenship in terms of a spirituality that must overcome its own irony. Experimentation in religion during the 1960s and 1970s becomes here a civic gesture – though perhaps more global cosmopolitan than nationalist – whether it be through yoga, New Ageism or Satanism. The advantage in religious experimentation is in its ability to deterritorialize.

Critchley’s turn toward a poetics that would enchant “faithless” citizens during crises in liberalism, resonates strongly here both with early twentieth century aesthete Walter Benjamin’s use of aesthetics against politics and also with a similar passage from structuralist criticism of the 1960s and 1970s. Rene Girard’s *Violence and the Sacred* (a work I would characterize as psychedelic), for example, argues regarding ritual sacrifices that

sacrificial substitution implies a degree of misunderstanding. Its vitality as an institution depends on its ability to conceal the displacement upon which the rite is based. It must never lose sight entirely, however, of the original object, or cease to be aware of the act of transference from that object to the surrogate victim. (5)

Fiction becomes especially important to political accounts of secularization in this regard.

A fictional displacement occurs in structural and post-structural and criticism with regard to writing. Poststructuralism exhibits many qualities of psychedelic aesthetics, especially if one considers them in terms of the body and narratives of secularization.

Poststructuralism re-enchants in its deterritorializing of cause-and-effect historicization and gestures toward the perennial. If Critchley's call for a poetic approach to citizenship, we can consider the enactment of citizenship in terms of writing. In psychedelic aesthetics, however, this remains figurative. A poem may be a dance or an enchanted gesture. It is possible to situate re-enchantment by looking at some writing from the late sixties and seventies with respect to subject-object demarcations and critiques of subjectivity. I begin with approaches to writing.

Two of the most well-known post-structural essays, Michel Foucault's "What is an Author?" and Roland Barthes' "Death of the Author," both frame their arguments as secular critiques of religion while simultaneously pushing toward a poetics of metempsychosis. For Barthes writing is "the neutral space" where identity slips away "starting with the body writing" (142). Barthes in particular compares this "death" to "ethnographic" societies" in which authority is not assumed or placed on a located subject but rather channeled by a mediator or shaman. "We know now," he says, "that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (146). Foucault, in contrast, presents his author function as the disciplining of subjects with regard to punishments and liabilities enacted on them during the Reformation. Insofar as both writers critique modern subjectivity as its own fiction they also align themselves with a secularization narrative that desires liberation from



religion in its binding sense. Both Barthes and Foucault in these essays buy into a narrative of disenchantment.

In *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, Cornel West echoes more recent thought concerning Max Weber's thesis, saying, "disenchantment of the world – resulting in fewer commitments to God-talk – is not true" (105). Rather, there is a shift towards immanence over transcendence that in turn intensifies an "enchanted" immanence. In a 2009 essay collection entitled, *The Re-Enchantment of the World*, editors Joshua Landy and Michael Saler challenge the standard narrative of secularization, along Max Weber's term, "disenchantment." They claim that

the world must be enchanted anew – human flourishing requires it – for those who wish to be consistent in their adoption of secular rationality. It must be enchanted with *dignity*, which is to say in concord with secular rationality, in full awareness of pluralism and contingency. And it must be *multiply* enchanted, so as to satisfy again all pressing demands satisfied by religion. (14)

Yet Landy and Saler's collection positions itself carefully against what they call "atavism" with regard to re-enchantment, claiming that their version of re-enchantment is not "the periodic resurgence of traditional ideas and practices," of which they claim exorcism as one (2). As such, they take a rather snobbish academic approach to New Ageism and the occult, because they are unable to see such moves in a long tradition of critiques of the European imaginary.

The most recent authority on secularization narratives is Charles Taylor, who in *A Secular Age* asserts a gradual "taming of nobility" over the past few centuries:

the eighteenth century generated new, stadial theories of history, which saw human society developing through a series of stages defined by the form of their

economy . . . Commerce, “*le doux commerce*,” was endowed with this power to relegate material values and the military way of life to a subordinate role, ending their age-old dominance of human culture. Political societies could no longer be understood simply in perennial terms; one had to take account of the epoch in which things happened. (218)

History situated against the perennial here accompanies what Taylor calls the Immanent Frame in which belief in God becomes merely one choice among others rather than a persistent authority or cosmology. In this light the call to re-enchantment, to fiction, to culture, remains historicized and in tension with the mythological and perennial. In comparison to this, poststructuralist attempts to transcend the body of the subject suspiciously dematerialize into the space of myth by de-stabilizing subjectivity and objectivity. One can see this in poststructural experiments in figuration with regard to “chora.”

The aesthetic tension that critically accompanies an overcoming of subject-object distinction, or the dissolution between ontological and epistemological methods, can be characterized with the term “chora,” as it is used in Lacan and Kristeva as a hazy boundary between the conscious and the unconscious. As James DiCenso summarizes with regard to Jacques Lacan, “The chora represents a psychical condition referred to retrospectively but never known as a subjective position as such ‘in which the linguistic sign is not yet articulated as the absence of an object and as the distinction between the real and the symbolic’” (71). In an overlapping metaphor with Deleuze and Guatarri’s de-territorialization and with emerging studies of gender and the body, Kristeva explicitly attaches the term to its Greek origins in *Revolution in Poetic Language*:

We borrow the term *chora* from Plato's *Timaeus* to denote an essentially mobile and extremely provisional articulation constituted by movements and their ephemeral stases. We differentiate from this uncertain and indeterminate *articulation* from a *disposition* that already depends on representation, lends itself to phenomenological, spatial intuition, and gives rise to a geometry. (25-6)

For Kristeva, *chora* precedes symbolic representation. It is not yet 'worlded,' not yet born. Kristeva's use of the term refers to pre-oedipal life in the womb. Patricia Huntington notes that the term in Plato's *Timaeus* refers "to the notion of the maternal receptacle" and "constitutes the space where subjectivity is generated" (478). The overtones of a redistribution of metaphors based on female anatomy are of course part of Kristeva's politics, which expand citizenship for women. The poetic ambiguity, her stress on the not-yet 'worlded,' expresses the convoluted politics of "returning" to nature or to the primordial while effectively contributing to the political situation in the early 1970s. Subjectivity is then generated pre-reflexively and pre-politically by the rhythm of the maternal body, but not only that. Kristeva also emphasizes

the regulated aspects of *chora*: its vocal and gestural organization is subject to what we shall call an objective *ordering* [*ordonnancement*] which is dictated by natural or socio-historical constraints such as the biological differences between the sexes or family structure. We may therefore posit that social organization, always already symbolic, imprints its constraint in a mediated form which organizes the *chora* not according to *law* (a term we reserve for the symbolic) but through an *ordering*. (26-7)

During and after the late sixties, theorists like Kristeva come to see the subject as ordered beyond and prior to the domesticated symbolic space of law. This is psychedelically similar to what Kesey was after through his attention to affective waves in the Acid Tests. He was looking for the force of ordering beyond control.

This is also the discursive backdrop to what in Political Theology becomes “the state of exception,” which arises out of critiques of the narrative of secularization. There is couched in the state of exception a desire for a return to the pre-political, to the mythological time of Persephone’s daughter. It is a kind of chora, in the sense that Lacan, Kristeva, and Derrida use the term, as a hazy boundary between the conscious and the unconscious but also between body and world – *poiesis* in its earliest form, yet historicized. There is an attempt to transcend and re-instantiate history through mergence with the pre-representational. This is a kind of sacrifice.

We can see this more particularly with regard to literary criticism from the late 1960s turning to a sacrifice of its own subject matter. In Tzvetan Todorov’s 1968

*Introduction to Poetics*, he writes:

there is not *one* science of literature, since, apprehended from different points of view, literature becomes the object of every other human science . . . on the other hand, there is not a science of literature exclusively, for the features characterizing literature are to be found outside it, even if they form different combinations. The first impossibility relates to the laws of the discourse of knowledge; the second, to the particularities of the object studied. (71)

Todorov then goes on to say, “today [1968] there is no longer any reason to confine to literature alone the type of studies crystallized in poetics: we must know ‘as such’ not only literary texts but *all* texts, not only verbal production but all symbolism.” Poetics unattached to the study of “literary works” alone thus takes on a “transitional role” which then requires “the investigation of the reasons that caused us to consider certain texts, at certain periods, as ‘literature’” (72). Poetics is called upon “to sacrifice itself on the altar of general knowledge.” This sacrifice is a civic act.

Todorov's book gives an account of a widening, "secularization" of professional conceptions of literature since the 1960s characteristic of the "mind-manifesting" of psychedelic aesthetics. But the move does not disenchant the literary. It does not destroy poetics. Rather, it makes the field of the literary more immanent and less transcendent. But what is especially important is that he characterizes the move in terms of a *sacrifice*. "Meaning" itself is pushed into ambiguous ether in order to create the circumstances for the possibility of new fictions. As a background discourse to the state of exception, psychedelic works perform public sacrifices on both state authority and modern subjectivity, enacting a kind of mystical re-enchantment. A kind of practical mysticism becomes the civic action of psychedelic citizenship.

Mystical experiences create stories, overlapping with structural literary models of journey and return, yet with the benefit of not going anywhere physically. The narration of the experience is at the heart of the literary. In *Mysticism after Modernity*, Don Cupitt has argued that mysticism is itself a certain kind of *writing* poststructuralist thinkers employ, "steeped in paradoxes" of life experience traditionally made "secondary" by the attempt among the Greek political philosophy to locate a "primary" basis for living. Celebrating "postmodern" writers who challenge a fixed center, Cupitt also *calls* for anarchic mysticism to disrupt fixed religious and governmental institutions. That is, he calls for worldly action arising from passive, other-worldly experience. Mysticism can therefore be a model for exploring how intentional passivity relates to social action in our

society. Cupitt's reliance on text as writing perhaps displays a limited and essentially modernist hermeneutics:

Mysticism is protest, female eroticism, and piety, all at once, in *writing*. *Writing*, I say, and not 'immediate experience,' that Modern fiction. Many or most mystics have been persecuted by the orthodox, but whoever heard of someone being persecuted for *having heretical experiences*? To get yourself persecuted, you have to *publish heretical views*; and at your trial for them your judges will need evidence of them in writing. Indeed, unless mysticism *were* a literary tradition of veiled protest, we'd never have heard of it. (62-3)

Yet as Barthes says, the death of the author births the reader, and mystical and divinatory methods are sought when there are no worldly answers to the woes of living. This reading-writing is ritual, *ancient ritual*. Can we really claim a secularized re-enchantment? Or was enchantment present all along and simply left out of discussions?

In Marcel Gauchet's *The Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion*, he employs structuralist techniques to argue that the development of transcendent religion accompanies the formation of early nation states in what is now referred to as the axial age, thus moving away from "primitive" immanent religion.

Gauchet claims:

Immanence is the result of distance from the instituting period, since which time nothing has happened; thanks to its remoteness, it is actually present in a world that replicates and revitalizes it. Supernatural beings and gods themselves inhabit a completely formed world, within which they regularly exert an influence, without dictating its course. (51-2)

Immanent religion relies on myth and magic. The development of state religion alters this significantly by inaugurating transcendent religion which reunites "the *original* and the *actual*, the inaugural institution and the actually present forces of the invisible" (52).

With the formation of the State then, “the religious Other actually returns to the human sphere” (35). Gauchet characterizes this as the birth of a long history of humans moving away from religion itself and even calls Christianity the religion to end all religion (15).

Thus,

transcendence not only separates reason and faith, it also divides subject and object. The world’s objectivity is the result of a radical separation from God, which moreover frees and institutes the cognitive subject in humans by making it autonomous in relation and withdrawing it from the hierarchy of beings. (53)

At this point, Gauchet’s argument fits into European narratives of secularization. But if we add psychedelic aesthetics’ sacrificial attempt to remove the State’s transcendent authority, the immanent gods return.

In America, mysticism has a long tradition of worldly, do-it-yourself, pragmatic qualities, which have informed mystical political activism, and perhaps this is part of the cultural cache poststructuralism acquired among academics in the late twentieth century. With the inheritance of longstanding critiques of subjectivity as it existed in the European imaginary we call modernism, psychedelic aesthetics signify a collection of common tendencies among artistic works which each exhibit an attempt to represent either something metaphysical in a unique form, or an expansion in consciousness – in other words, artistic attempts to represent the outside, exterior, and the infinite in necessarily finite circumstances. In the gesture toward the un-definable they code their desire to be beyond subjection, to being locate and seen as something. The psychedelic, in this sense, relates to a cultural condition where consciousness, which has been rapidly expanded and destabilized, begins to re-orient itself in light of what it has seen. It is a

therapeutic recovery from a trauma which may not be so much final as necessary for discursive continuity in a community that is looking for what its sacrifice is; that is, what holds to hold communities together. One sees this clearly when regarding poststructuralism and its debates, the claims of the death of theory, etc., in terms of psychedelic aesthetics as sacrificial citizenship re-instantiating liberalism's values outside of political territories and outside of bodies. With this, a freshly enchanted citizenship is imagined as part of globalizing efforts in the west to include the east.

In *Prisoners of Shangri-la: Tibetan Buddhism and the West*, Donald Lopez tracks the concept of Tibet as a nation over the past two hundred years. Escaping formal colonialism until China took it over in the late fifties, deterritorializing the Dalai Lama, Tibet becomes the conceptual storage space for all that *could be* sacred – a true mystical State without states – the leaderless imaginary space Critchley requires for the making of law. Lopez tracks the influence of Theosophists, Helena Blavatsky and Henry Olcott (whose anti-colonial activism in Ceylon produced enough development for the country to him a postage stamp), through varying translations of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, including Timothy Leary, Richard Alpert and Ralph Metzner's *The Psychedelic Experience* and Sogyal Rinpoche's focus on end of life care in *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*.<sup>27</sup> Spiritualism here merges with and informs fictional western figurations of Buddhism. Lopez claims, "Tibetan Buddhists are building an empire of individuals" regardless of nation or ethnicity (207). Lopez notes the Dalai Lama's

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<sup>27</sup> Lopez's book precedes the most recent and thorough translation of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*.



theosophical universalism, discussing in particular large Kalachakra ceremonies, initiating people into the religion. According to Lopez's account of the religion, "world peace" is to be restored by enlightened Buddhists in the year 2425 in the mythical land of Shambhala (206). Such a vision is a psychedelic amplification to Puritans seeking to establish a New Jerusalem.

Simon Critchley's "dim possibility" for poetry is indeed potentially overly optimistic, and certainly many concerns quickly arise when considering art's involvement with politics. Giorgio Agamben's tracing of *oikonomos* as an aesthetic "Archaeology of Glory" as an amplification of Foucault's "Governmentality" is informed by a disembodied and sacrificial apparatus. Coupling this with the psychedelic, we see the coding of a "secular" version of the afterlife as a new form of culture. In one's answer to the question, "Can culture be cultivated?" is an important convergence of selfhood, state, and history. The question is not "when does life begin?" or "when does life end?" but "how do the dead continue to haunt the living?" and "how do we communicate with them?" Having traced these questions through psychedelic literature to various post-structural writers, we can argue psychedelic citizenship enacts a poetics whereby to read culturally and aesthetically today is to read 'humanity's guts,' rather than simply the ancient practice regarding the entrails of birds, but it remains divination all the same. Mystical writing of the sort Cupitt describes above is a performance of re-enchanted divination.

By applying discussions of Political Theology to the interpretation of literature, and in particular reading works that inform the “psychedelic movement,” we can narrate the ways an emerging aesthetic style helped to expand and critique notions of citizenship while preparing people for globalization amid the decline of the modern State. Such works present a “sensibility” or “frame” – and in some cases “no places” or utopias – by which citizens can contain and then transcend their conceptual arrangement of self. This is a way of conceiving self as a temporary stasis from which to transcend: I know who I am so that I may transcend who I am. In this transcendence there is a social-integration that is willed, but will or intention overcomes itself through the obliteration of ego, a kind of pragmatism for sure. Again here, Huxley is especially relevant in his being the inspiration behind Timothy Leary’s translation of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* as *The Psychedelic Experience*. At its most practical level, the self (or the soul’s) “progress” is merely a committed engagement with the world. Whether or not one believes in such progress or not does not matter, the emphasis on effective fictions remains relevant.

In light of Aldous Huxley’s importance to both the theory of the psychedelic experience, we can now begin to approach his work, both fiction and non-fiction, in terms of Political Theology. My approach in the remaining chapters will be to explore the theme of sovereignty and its dissemination into various forms of subjectivity in Huxley’s works. Such a method favors an initially aesthetic treatment of texts over an historical account of their production, which may initially seem a-historical. My ultimate

goal, however, is to situate these works into a larger philosophical-historical context, one relating to discussions of “self” and “subjectivity,” because I believe the ways these categories get treated in the works I study can inform current discussions of global and liberal citizenship.

## CHAPTER SIX: ALDOUS HUXLEY THE POLITICAL THEOLOGIAN

More than simply being a theorist of the psychedelic experience, Aldous Huxley was a state theorist and political theologian, but he has not traditionally been read this way. Recent scholarly work in Political Theology has opened a discursive frame for receiving Huxley – and literature in general – in new ways. Huxley has not had the influence he deserves in the field, partly because he is thought of as merely a fiction writer or public intellectual and partly because his attachment to re-enchantment, pacifism and mysticism was *not taken seriously* in the earlier half of the twentieth century. The development of New Ageism has not helped either with respect to Huxley. Although portions of Huxley's *Perennial Philosophy* appear in the recently published anthology *Spirituality in the Western World* (2011), Political Theology as a discourse has yet to take Huxley seriously as an historian of the 30 years war (*Grey Eminence*) and 17<sup>th</sup> century mysticism (*The Devils of Loudon*), as well as a large body of political writing, including the book-length study, *Ends and Means*, let alone his novels. This is because Political Theology as a discourse has yet to engage seriously with the question of aesthetics.

Scholarship that does connect the political-theological overtones in Huxley's work instead tends to focus on his more well-known fiction books like *Brave New World*. For example, Peter Manly Scott in *Future Perfect? God, Medicine and Humanity*

connects Agamben's *Homo Sacer* to *Brave New World* (77) but neglects to account for the ways Huxley updated the ideas in *Brave New World* in his last novel, *Island*. Similarly, according to David William Martinez, "The Placeless in No Place: The Deconstructive Identity of *Homo Sacer* in *Brave New World*." Both works point to the importance Huxley had on discussions of biopolitics, but there is less direct discussion about his emerging spirituality that informed his later work. Having explored the implications of psychedelic aesthetics for citizenship in my previous chapter, we can now work backwards into Huxley's large body of works to explore political-theological questions.

In *Neuropsychedelia*, Nicolas Langlitz notes that important members of George W. Bush's President's Council on Bioethics, the physician Leon Kass and the political economist Francis Fukuyama, "emphasized the analogies between this historical diagnosis and the dystopian future envisaged in Huxley's *Brave New World*" (Kindle Locations 147-150). Langlitz writes of the "peculiarities" of their reading of Huxley within a frame critiquing technological and scientific advances over the religious view that, especially with the developments in anti-depressants over the last half-century, further alienated "modern man" from the conditions of "being." This leads them to follow philosopher Michael Sandel's advocating for

the development of a "religious sensibility" resonating "beyond religion" and acknowledging the giftedness of life. "Respect for a being created in God's image means respecting everything about him, not just his freedom or his reason but also his blood," Kass . . . wrote. Any attempt to overcome the limits and burdens imposed on the individual by God or nature was supposed to entail a loss of humanity and human dignity. Human nature was to be protected against its

biotechnological transgression and deformation. (in Langlitz Kindle Locations 165-169)

Langlitz correctly points out that both Kass and Fukuyama have neglected to account for Huxley's final novel, *Island*. Kass and Fukuyama are plain evidence that literary interpretation, wrong or right, has direct political consequences. Kass, Fukuyama, and Sandel believe that a critique of modernity's extreme alienation of humans from nature should entail a return to the pre-modern of religious enchantment. In this view, neo-conservatives erringly locate their return to a version of transcendent, state-based religion, rather than going back to the anthropological foundations of religion. A return to the perennial, in other words, is not a chance to time travel where you can pick and choose the moment of human history you nostalgically long for to determine the value of human life. What they are correct about, however, is the undeniability of religious enchantment in the post-secular world. This chapter aims to provide a fuller accounting of Huxley than both scholars of Political Theology and public intellectuals have given. In doing so, my implicit claim is that Huxley's influence on psychedelic theories and aesthetics reveal the deeply political-theological nature of the aesthetics.

Huxley's scope was wide indeed, and his knowledge of continental and English political history was deep. He constantly presents tongue-in-cheek observations. As early as 1930, in a slight nod to Swift's "Modest Proposal," Huxley writes in *The Evening Standard*:

Human standardisation will become a political necessity . . . ‘Advanced’ people propose that the family system should be abolished altogether and that the professional educator, paid by the State, should take control from earliest infancy. Indeed, this view threatens to become the orthodoxy of the modern democratic State. (“Babies – State Property” 49)

During the mid 1930s, he also predicts serious environmental concerns and wryly mentions a coming “generation war” due to the necessity to embrace new kinds of socialism (“The Next 25 Years” 174). Despite political ramifications, however, Huxley has been received as “anti-political.” In his introduction to a 2012 edition of *Ends and Means*, sociologist Howard Schneiderman’s descriptions of Huxley’s work on pacifism are particularly backhanded:

Huxley seems to define pacifism either in terms of what it is not, or in terms of what it stands against. Thus, pacifism is not politics, indeed it is anti-politics; it is not nationalism; it is obviously not militarism; it is not imperialism; and it is not about competing for international prestige, wealth and power. On the contrary, Huxley’s pacifism is about brotherly love, reform, peace, cooperation, social justice, and more than less it is about socialism and a leavening of wealth and power. In a word, it is anti-political. It is also, at least in large part, anti-sociological. (*Ends and Means* xvii)

Schneiderman even goes on to compare Huxley to Max Weber with respect to Huxley calling twentieth-century politics “primitive”: “We might well take this as the utopian atavism of an otherwise brilliant and progressive mind at work. Weber was undoubtedly the more clear-minded and realistic thinker about politics” (xviii). This is because, “the state determines the nature of politics, and for Weber, the state is defined by its aims, which differ from state to state, but always by the means specific to it, namely physical force” (xviii). This account of Weber is close to Carl Schmitt’s description in *The Concept of the Political* of friend-enemy distinctions characterizing international

relations. Schneiderman points George Orwell's claim against Huxley during the Second World War that "Pacifism is objectively fascist" (xxi). Despite Huxley's ability to "arouse interest" among current "social scientist intellectuals," Schneiderman's indictment of Huxley is clear: "the fact that [Huxley] extolled the virtues of pacifism, in spite of its consequences for the Jews, shows his utopian thinking as an ethic of conviction that is morally and politically distasteful" (xxii). Huxley's pacifism thus continues to be characterized as anti-political and irresponsible today. Schneiderman has nothing to say about Huxley and religion with reference to his apparent moral vacancy, nor does he have anything to say about the much more politically exigent place that international and even supra-national politics and economic forces have in 2012. If we look at Huxley as a perhaps unwitting political-theologian, citing his influence on psychedelic aesthetics as evidence of real political action, Huxley appears as anything but atavistic. However, this requires a much broader reading of Huxley's vast amount of work.

Besides Huxley's overtly political non-fiction, it is important to focus on how Huxley's fiction, and literature in general, might contribute to discussions concerning Political Theology. In a recent paper by William M. Curtis on Aldous Huxley's last novel, *Island*, Curtis argues that it should be read alongside *Brave New World*, the book Richard Rorty has referred to as "the best introduction to political philosophy" (in Curtis 91). Rorty, as Curtis discusses, is interested in an idea of liberal utopia as "an imaginative extension of our best liberal democratic ideals" where malleability of human



nature maintains a kind of optimism. Huxley's work presents and critiques such utopias, and the fact that he was so consciously writing both in his fiction and non-fiction makes him an appropriate place to start if we are to take the "dim possibilities" for the poetically informed re-enchantment of citizenship to which Simon Critchley refers. By focusing on Aldous Huxley's literary work alongside major contributors to Political Theology, we get a better view of how aesthetic works have been playing out the very political issues we consider critical today. To situate Huxley within the discourse of political theology, however, requires some tricky historical moves.

When we look at Huxley's politics and their influence on the psychedelic movement, a different conception emerges. The work of Aldous Huxley presents one example of the politically useful nature of literature – an underlying social value of art that psychedelic aesthetics inherit – but this requires that we read Huxley *as literature* and not merely as philosophy coded in the literary, which is how he is often read, especially in reductive readings of *Brave New World*. It is necessary to conceive of "the literary" as a discursive space where simultaneous meaning provides an economic way to communicate. Literary trends in the United States over the past fifty years emphasized an intense relationship to the performance of language to convey the dynamic nature of philosophical ideas. This linguistic focus is an extreme pushing of a kind of high-modernism, present in a writer like James Joyce, who Huxley says, "seemed to think words were omnipotent" and had "a magic view of words" ("Huxley Interviewed: Part

1”<sup>28</sup>). Such a linguistic approach is itself indicative of a trend toward material immanence, but Huxley has an altogether different conception of literature. As a writer, Huxley theorizes through the hypothetical space of the literary. He employs many qualities of psychedelic aesthetics, but unlike later psychedelic literature he does not overtly point out the performance of them. Because of this his language is more austere and less radical, which, in the post psychedelic, poststructural world has made him seem less interesting and even snobbish as a writer.

Rather than relying on extraordinary uses of language, Huxley tells one interviewer with his characteristic anaphora:

What interests me in writing, in expression, in thought, is the attempt to coordinate different fields; the attempt to say many things at the same time; the attempt to bring together in a single and coherent meaningful whole a great many disparate events and data. (“Huxley Interviewed”)

Huxley’s works cannot be summed-up as merely thinly disguised philosophical dialogues because of his layering techniques, and if one removes his literary qualities, one misses many of his points. Huxley should rather be read allegorically because his sense of the literary is bound with the idea of figural blending of characters, plot and theme with genre, themes and historical context. While he claims to be uninterested in “bare, bald classical style” which he regards as too simple, for him art should impose “order on a complex number of formal, literary, and emotional elements in the widest sense.”

Unsurprisingly then, Huxley regarded New Criticism as “boring,” “trivial,” and “barren,”

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<sup>28</sup> The documentation of this source is flawed on *YouTube*. It is not Watts interviewing Huxley. I cite it because it is electronically available, easily accessible and clearly Huxley himself speaking.

claiming “elaborate linguistic work is probably useful but to regard it as the be all and end all of criticism seems to me absolutely absurd.” As opposed to scientific, legal, and political language – the kind of fixed meaning Thomas Hobbes longs for in the early chapters of *Leviathan* – Huxley uses straightforward language to communicate through complex arrays of characters and ideas, performing a kind of “practical mysticism.” He associates elaborate philological attempts with nineteenth-century aesthetics. Yet Huxley’s approach seems both pragmatically useful and allegorically rich. He, like Spinoza, writes simultaneously for philosophers and the vulgar (Strauss).

For example, in 1935 Huxley wrote a short piece published in *The Daily Express* entitled “The Next 25 Years.” Huxley here introduces a trend that would be widespread among political writers in the 1950s: that of predicting what the 1960s would have in store. He poses himself as writing from the year 1960, and with his typical edge, says,

Ministries of Propaganda found that it was possible to supply dictators, monarchs and even democratic Prime Ministers with a brand of synthetic eloquence incomparably more moving than that of the greatest orators of previous epochs. It was in America that the invention was first applied to religion. Revivalists made use of synthetic voices so pathetic and persuasive, so terrifyingly minatory, so suavely unctuous, that they were able to secure mass conversions on a hitherto unprecedented scale. (172)

Huxley’s sardonic writing here presents an irony that even he would overcome by the end of the 1930s after he had relocated to the United States. In the States during the 1930s, “the Voice” of Arthur Bell was just beginning his prosperity cult, Mankind United, and Frank Robinson had begun one of the fastest growing religions of the day, Psychiana, by

publishing an ad in *Psychology Magazine* stating, “I TALKED WITH GOD – SO CAN YOU – IT’S EASY.” As Mitch Horowitz writes in *Occult America*,

Within the first decade, [Robinson] secured six hundred thousand paying subscribers spanning sixty-seven nations. His direct-mail ads, consisting of detailed pamphlet-length espousals of Psychiana theology, began entering two to three million households a year.” (107)

Huxley’s imagined future was not far off, and his warnings though characterized as “anti-political” are certainly politically motivated; this is apparent in his fiction.

Huxley’s intensifying commitment to pacifism in the 1930s made him the subject of public ridicule in England, as his unwavering views and the Peace Pledge Union gave way to England’s political involvement on the continent. *Eyeless in Gaza*, the story of a sociologist coming to terms with his own commitment to pacifism and mysticism, documents this with its slightly masked allusion to John Milton’s *Samson Agonistes*, a dramatic retelling of Samson’s fight against religious oppressors. The novel was difficult for Huxley to write as a follow-up to *Brave New World*. It took about six years due to depression and writer’s block, which Huxley overcame through a rigid dedication to meditation and exercise. Despite his previous success, Huxley was troubled by monetary concerns and needed to finish another novel (Dunaway 2). And as one of his biographers, David Dunaway accounts, *Eyeless in Gaza* captures Huxley’s move from his grandfather’s agnosticism to “that hard-sought substitute for religion – pacifism” (14). During the period of writing *Eyeless*, Huxley’s pacifism became very public and political, as many of his peers, still critical of Victorian British colonialism and its over-attention to an empire on which the sun never sets, became critical of attempts to muster English

support for the brewing violence on the continent. Other leftists and socialist cohorts came to see his pacifism as overly idealistic. This struggle prompted Huxley and his friend Gerald Heard to take their views in lecture form to the United States, where Huxley would eventually settle for the rest of his life.

As with most Huxley novels, the intersections between the people in his life and characters in his books – and particularly with his own life – are thinly drawn. Anthony Beavis, the central character of *Eyeless in Gaza*, displays many of the conflicting emotions that Huxley’s biographers convincingly attribute to his life, not the least the reference to blindness itself. But also on a literary level, *Eyeless in Gaza*’s biographical aspects reflect a continuing commitment to the *Bildungsroman* as filtered through Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu* and Joyce’s *Ulysses*. Later in Huxley’s life, he claimed that *Ulysses*, although a great book, displays more the limitations of the novel as a form than the characteristics of a successful one (“Aldous Huxley Interviewed”). He recounts Joyce’s flawed personal etymology of Odysseus’s name as a blend of the nobody (ουδείς) and God (Zeus) as an inspirational idea for Leopold Bloom.<sup>29</sup> Still, *Eyeless* is one of Huxley’s most experimental in terms of form. Dunaway calls *Eyeless in Gaza* “a modernist novel with a postmodern structure; its antihero, Anthony Beavis, is caught between these two eras,” and it “is probably his most autobiographical novel” (vii). It is reasonable to conjecture that *Eyeless* philosophically takes the collision of time

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<sup>29</sup> For a more precise discussion of the etymology of the name “Odysseus” see “The Homeric Etymology of the Name Odysseus” by W. B. Stanford in *Classical Philology*, Vol. 47, No. 4 (Oct., 1952), pp. 209-213.

and myth in the subject of the protagonist as not only Huxley's autobiography of his struggles but also as a philosophical statement on how time works.

He particularly does this with his allusions to the tyrant, Polycrates as an intersection between mythical and historical time – a clear case of embedded political theology in Huxley's work. The collision of the two temporalities relates by allusion to the lucky king point to in the midst of Huxley's emerging Vedantic cosmology. As a writer, Huxley builds characters in polysemous literary ways, blending historical fact and mythical truth. *Eyeless in Gaza* marked a transition point in Huxley's own literary career. Huxley's use of Polycrates shows a particular instance of how Huxley's approach to myth informs his writing. Ultimately, this conception moves toward Huxley's pre-Greek interpretations of the figure of soma, the famous drug of *Brave New World*, which returns in various places in his writing about the psychedelic experience. But his method is clear: organized, polysemous layering of figures of his characters maps a systemic approach to political action. This is ultimately realized in psychedelic aesthetics. Moreover, as an outgrowth of his commitment to pacifism and mysticism which deepened during his years in America, Huxley's use of myth informs mythological scholarship's searches for soma as a political symbol for what transcends nation-states in the later twentieth century. In other words, Huxley's work on mythology discursively shapes the tenor of later ethnobotanical and mythological scholarship with respect to psychedelics, and that scholarship is embedded with the political-theological underpinnings of Huxley's cosmology.

In *Eyeless in Gaza*, Anthony Beavis and his lover, Helen, have a discussion in 1933 about pain in reference to a scar on his leg. Anthony had received the scar eighteen years before, training to be a soldier in the Great War. An “imbecile recruit” had thrown a grenade short during training; it wounded Anthony and prevented him from going into battle. He tells Helen, ending the chapter:

“In hospital, I had all the leisure to think of that other royal progress through the earth. Stupidity has come back, as a king – no; as an emperor, as a divine Fuhrer of all the Aryans. It was a sobering reflection. Sobering and profoundly liberating. And I owed it to a bumpkin. He was one of the Fuhrer’s most faithful subjects.” There was a silence. “Sometimes I feel a bit nervous – like Polycrates – because I’ve had so much luck in my life. All occasions always seem to have conspired *for me*. Even *this* occasion.” He touched the scar. “Perhaps I ought to do something to allay the envy of the gods – throw a ring into the sea next time I go bathing.” He uttered a little laugh. “The trouble is I don’t possess a ring.” (68)

In this passage historical and political time collapse into the present as an almost Proustian accumulation of Anthony Beavis’s personal experiences. The time of kings becomes the emperor, then the dictator or tyrant. The First World War and Nazi Germany collapse as well. But during the silence this is transferred over into Anthony’s imagination of himself. In this sense, Polycrates operates as a kind of mythical persona, acting as a figure for Anthony himself – and possibly Huxley too.

The historical account of Polycrates is given in *The Histories* of Herodotus. Polycrates became the despot of Samos by overtaking the government and then dividing the land between himself and his two brothers, only to put one to death and drive the other out. He made a guest friendship with Amasis, the King of Egypt, who curiously dedicated offerings in Hellas, first to Athena and then, in Samos with two wooden figures

of himself, to Hera as a gesture of his friendship with Polycrates (2.182). Polycrates was so successful that Amasis wrote him a letter saying,

It is a pleasant thing to hear that one who is a friend and a guest is faring well; yet to me your great good fortune is not pleasing, since I know the Divinity is jealous; and I think that I desire, both for myself and for those about whom I have care, that in some of our affairs we should be prosperous and in others we should fail, and thus go through life alternately faring well and ill, rather than that we should be prosperous in all things: for never yet did I hear of anyone who was prosperous in all things and did not come to an utterly evil end in the last. (3.40)

So, Amasis advises Polycrates to take something he treasures dearly and cast it away where no man can find it and to keep doing so until his fortune changes. Polycrates, heeding his friend's advice casts an emerald ring into the sea, only to find it inside a large fish gifted to him by one of his subjects days later. Upon hearing this news, Amasis breaks off his friendship with Polycrates fearing evil to come. Meanwhile, things continue to go well for Polycrates, and Herodotus makes a striking claim about him:

Polycrates was the first of the Hellenes of whom we have any knowledge, who set his mind upon having command of the sea, excepting Minos the Cnossian and any other who may have command of the sea before his time. Of the allegedly mortal race Polycrates was the first. (3.122)

Donald Lateiner, commenting on this passage notes that Herodotus is making a distinction between the age of heroes and the historical age (183). Polycrates thus represents the entrance of mortals into history and an accompanying hubris, or at least ignorance of how to appease the gods through sacrifice.

This agonistic relationship with the divine can be seen in Polycrates' death as well. Against the warnings of his diviners and an ominous dream of his daughter's, Polycrates makes an alliance with Oroites, a Persian, who "killed him in a manner not fit



to be told” and impaled his body (3.125). His daughter’s vision saw him “bathed by Zeus and anointed by the sun,” which foretold his exposure. Polycrates’ body and life become the sacrifice he was unable to make through his own deeds. Rather than being a man of action, he is subject to the force of fortune and history.

This is a strange allusion for Huxley to use for character named Anthony, whose name derives from the Greek words for “man” or “flower” and Beavis, meaning “dear son” or “beautiful man,” especially as he speaks to a lover named ‘Helen.’ Also at work here is St Anthony, patron saint of swineherds, who was invoked to cure the mania of “St Anthony’s Fire,” caused by ergot poisoning – a subject Huxley returns to often in later work. Huxley’s protagonist seems then to assert something different than, but in reaction to, James Joyce’s “nobody-god.”

Anthony Beavis is a sociologist by occupation who, as the novel progresses, engages in-depth with the definitions of persona, religion, mysticism and pacifism. The novel begins with Beavis in 1933 looking at photographs and then cuts to one of many chapters presenting passages from his diary. Chapter two begins, “Five words sum up every biography. *Video meliora proboque; deteriora sequor*. Like all other human beings, I know what I ought to do, but continue to do what I oughtn’t do” (9). By chapter four the reader accompanies Anthony as a young boy who has just lost his mother on a train ride where the wheels make the sound, “dead-a-dead-a-dead” (10). He is comforted by his friend Brian’s mother, Mrs. Foxe, who reads to him from the New Testament. Yet

she tells him regarding the Ascension the authors merely wanted Jesus to seem wonderful:

“to us, nowadays, these things make it seem less wonderful; and we don’t feel that they do him honor. The wonderful thing for us” she went on, and her voice thrilled with a deep note of fervor, “is that Jesus was a man, no more able to do miracles and no more likely to have them done for him than the rest of us. Just a man – and yet he could do what he did, he could be what he was. That’s the wonder.” (79)

As a young man, Anthony tells his friend, “I do believe . . . not in orthodox explanations, of course. Those are obviously idiotic. But in the facts. And in the fundamental metaphysical theory of mysticism” (89). Experience of the thing itself, the young man pedantically asserts to his friend, tells more than any bookish knowledge. Despite his youthful aspiration to be a saint, Anthony is capable of ditching his poor and pious friends for rich idiots, feeling “by the mere force of social and economic circumstances, these ignorant barbarians found themselves quite naturally behaving as he did not dare to behave even after reading all Nietzsche had said about the Superman, or Casanova about women” (96). Still, the longing for an experience of being more than he can be consumes Anthony intellectually. A bit older, Anthony writes of Hamlet being the character who could rise above the knowledge of his time (106). He goes on:

Man, according to Blake (and, after him, according to Proust, according to Lawrence), is simply a succession of states. Good and evil can be predicted only of states, not of individuals, who in fact don’t exist, except as the places where the states occur. It is the end of personality in the old sense of the word. (Parenthetically – for this is quite outside the domain of sociology – is it the beginning of a new type of personality? That of the total man, unbowlerized, unselected, uncanalized, to change the metaphor, down any one particular drain pipe of *Weltanschauung* – of the man, in a word, who actually is what he may be. Such a man is the antithesis of any of the variants on the fundamental Christian

man of our history. And yet in a certain sense he is also the realization of that ideal personality conceived by the Jesus of the Gospel. (107)

Anthony comes back to his interpretation of *Hamlet* after this, claiming that “Hamlet didn’t have a personality – he knew altogether too much to have one” (109). Anthony Beavis thus longs to overcome personality itself, but his move toward impersonality betrays a kind of heartlessness.

In perhaps one of the most memorable moments of the book, a dog falls from the sky, splattering blood all over Helen and Anthony as they sunbathe. Anthony’s inability to feel sympathy for the dog or Helen causes her to leave him. He tries to get her to come back, but it’s too late. His luck appears to have run out. His lack of a “ring” appears to accompany a lack of values or commitment. He is unable to deal with utter absurdity.

In referencing Polycrates as one of the layers to Anthony Beavis’s personality, especially because the character imagines himself as Polycrates, Huxley portrays a character trying to transcend his “succession of states” and enter something that perhaps transcends history while simultaneously being the realization of history. Similar to Anthony’s imagining himself as Polycrates, he implies that the character of Hamlet is some sort of model for transcending of personality. Both Hamlet and Polycrates are political figures who meet their respective ends through violence to their bodies. Their deaths appease fate, drama or action. Yet Anthony describes Hamlet as unrecognized by his peers *because* of his body. According to Anthony, Hamlet also was

just a succession of more or less incongruous states. Hence, that perplexity at Elsinore and among Shakespearean critics ever since. Honour, Religion, Prejudice, Love – all the conventional props that shore up the ordinary personality

– have been, in this case, gnawed through. Hamlet was his own termite and from a tower has eaten himself down to a heap of sawdust. Only one thing prevents Polonius and the rest from immediately perceiving the fact: whatever the state of mind, Hamlet’s body is still intact, unatomized, microscopically present to the senses. (109)

The soul that eats itself realizes the divine inside and nourishes it. Sounding a bit like Artaud, Anthony later says, “Only the rather stupid and insentient, nowadays, have strong and sharply defined personalities. Only the barbarians among us ‘know what they are’” (110). For Anthony at this point, the ‘sentient’ seem to be void of personality but held in place by their bodies.

What would seem appropriate, then, would be something that transcended both. Huxley presents such a solution in *Eyeless in Gaza* with Anthony’s ultimate turn toward a pacifism that allows him to sacrifice his body willingly by going to speak in front of a crowd despite a violent threat warning him against it: “There is no remedy except to become aware of one’s interests as a human being, and, having become aware, learning to act on that awareness, which means learning to use the self and learning to direct the mind” (343). He seems to have found his values and commitment through an act of sacrifice on behalf of “human interests.” Anthony’s commitment to self-sacrifice through a communicative action of non-violence shows a kind of optimism that was not present in Huxley’s earlier work.

Even *Brave New World*, written just a few years before *Eyeless*, lacks this emergent intentional behavior modification. *Brave New World* describes a future where the happiness of civilization is controlled by ingesting soma, the fictional drug that

Huxley invents by invoking the substance described in the *Rig Veda*. Unhappy with his place in the “World State,” Bernard Marx searches for self-determination by limiting his soma intake and exploring “primitive” life on a southwestern Indian reservation. Marx and his friend Helmholtz’s dissatisfaction with a “doped-up” existence eventually results in their choosing to be banished from society. They choose the authenticity of an existence that includes unhappiness and pain. In *Brave New World*, the banishment of intellectuals like Marx and Helmholtz helps maintain a society of status quo individuals anaesthetized by soma. The World State determines and maintains moral authority, yet banishment is certainly not death.

Soma ingestion in *Brave New World* performs Karl Marx’s oft quoted remark about religion being the “opiate of the masses,” thus solving the problem of modern humanity’s alienation from meaningful labor. Yet Soma also marks Huxley’s use of mythological figuring in his texts, because soma comes from his studying of Sanskrit and *The Rig Veda*. Operating like the figure of Polycrates, the reference to soma signifies a return to ancients’ religious ritual in society’s future. This perennial state unites east and west while overcoming history. The darkness of *Brave New World* comes more from the unification of religion and technology in “Fordism” as a blend of totalitarianism and state religion. The social ingestion of the drug makes soma the sacrament of the World State.

While this imagined future is scary for liberalism, it is as much a critique of liberalism as it is totalitarianism. Huxley’s use of soma somewhat ironically creates the space later mythological scholars explore unity beyond nation-states altogether – a unity

that does not work with a notion like a ‘world state.’ The later scholarship develops through an awareness of the structure of ritual sacrifice that informs the study of Greek culture. In order to understand how this works, in the following section I will trace (insofar as possible) the concept of soma as it enters Greek and ultimately “western” culture. My intention here is to paint a *scholarly imaginary* that extends from the European imaginary with regard to subjectivity described in earlier chapters. This scholarly imaginary space is the landscape for an ideological battle about citizenship, nation-states, human consciousness – indeed, the very definition of human. The still unsettled debate over the substance of soma, the original psychedelic drug from the sacrifice ceremony, is something Huxley’s literature significantly helped to set in motion. After exploring discussions of soma, I will then return to my broadened reading of Huxley as political-theologian.

### *Soma*

Soma, in *The Rig Veda*, has multiple meanings. In “On the Significance of Soma,” Sanskrit scholar Biswanath Mukhopadhyay historicizes the development of the term as follows: “*soma* first meant the inebriating juice of plants, secondly, the plants bearing soma, thirdly, the elixir of life and delight and lastly the god” (6). It is unclear what Mukhopadhyay’s rationale is for this specific order of placement. He generally moves toward the more abstract concept. He mentions that it is derived from the Proto Indo European root, *su*, meaning “to press” (7). Soma in *The Vedas* is also related to

music, along with the deities Agni and Savitr, but it is particularly associated with the Anustubh meter in the creation of the sacrifice (*Rig Veda* 10.130). In a related article on the *Bhagavad Gita*, “The Song Celestial,” Mukhopadhyay discusses the distinction between divine and mortal soma, saying, “it is through the power and inspiration of this drink alone that the victorious god Indra accepted the task of killing the fearful demon, Vritra” (28). Soma is also associated with Srikrna’s celestial singing and the *Samaveda*, which along with the *Rig Veda* date as far back as 1700 B.C.E. Soma persists through later Indian literature; in *The Bhagavad Gita*, Srikrna tells Arjuna “that Krsna is Arjuna himself” (Mukhopadhyay 29).

In order to attempt understanding the ancient meaning of soma, it must be linked to the part it plays as oblation in the sacrifice, and that part is to be a unifying aspect of the mortal and the divine. Thomas Oberlies argues “that access to the divine draft *soma* signifies political power and legitimizes rule” (in Whitaker 417). Those who took the soma became a political elite. Jarrod Whitaker, however, disagrees with Oberlies’ assertion that “the terms ‘presser’ (*susvi*) and ‘non-presser’ (*asusvi*) represent a separation of Vedic society into two halves; one that participates in the *soma* cult and one excluded from it.” In either case, it appears that access to *soma* was still meant for those who were privileged and those who were “non-pressers” were looked down upon for not participating in the cult (425). While it is unclear to what extent soma pressing determined Aryan citizenship, it is certainly a term that distinguished an identity group, even if that was only a group of priests. Partaking in the sacrifice determines citizenship.

If Mukhopadhyay is right in relating soma to the relationship between Krishna and Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita*, then it appears that the conception of divine inspiration and merge transcend the sacrificial ritual and eventually relate to *dharma*, or upholding the natural order of things. If ingested, soma would inspire one to *act rightly*. In acting rightly, one performs a kind of citizenship in the soma cult. To press and drink soma was part of ritual sacrifice, which seems to have traveled from India to ancient Greece, where the word's meaning changed to represent "body." Many scholars find similarities in the Eleusinian mysteries, but hasty references to the mysteries, such as Wasson's famous claims in the 1950s cited by Leary in his perennial returns to the pre-political, mask the anthropological complexities and unsubstantial evidence present in the field.

In linguistic terms, it is tough to track the word from Sanskrit into Greek, the meaning of soma, as it seems to have moved from Aryan culture into Greek culture. While anthropological evidence is emergent and encouraging, it can only be roughly traced both through mythology, etymology, and philosophy. The scholarly literature then, inadvertently codes the desires of the scholars working in the field. For example, in *The Apples of Apollo: Pagan Mysteries of the Eucharist*, Carl A. P. Ruck, Blaise Daniel Staples and Clark Heinrich discuss soma by focusing on entheogens, particularly the hallucinogenic mushroom, *Amanita muscaria*, which they trace from its usage in the *Rig Veda* through the Indo Aryan and Indo European nomadic cultures which transported both entheogens and ideas about sacrifice to ancient Greece. Ruck et al. discuss the myth of Perseus, the "mushroom picker." They read what other scholars have read as a tiny



detail – Perseus’ picking of a mushroom on the site of the city of Mycenae – as “the culmination of his career,” for plucking the mushroom and decapitating Medusa appear to be “one and the same.” They base their findings on analyses of artistic depictions on a Greek vase from the fourth century BC. Moreover, they note that in the Garden of the Hesperid sisters, Medusa’s head “is equated to the Golden Apples of the tree – and with a pair of mushrooms” (43). This group of scholars has a long history of trying to identify *Amanita muscaria* as soma.

Ruck et al. base much of their research on the ethnobotanical work of R. Gordon Wasson, a banker turned ethnomycologist whose article, “Seeking the Magic Mushroom,” in a 1957 issue of *Life Magazine*, brought the subject to a wide public. Wasson and his Russian wife, Valentina Pavlovna Guercken, were obsessed with different cultural attitudes to mushrooms between Russians and Anglos, developing theses concerning how cultural attitudes toward vegetation parallel other developments in civilization, especially religious practice. In “Seeking the Magic Mushroom,” Wasson recounts a trip to the Catskills with his wife in 1929:

In ecstasy she called each kind of by an endearing Russian name. She caressed the toadstools, savored their earthy perfume. Like all good Anglo-Saxons, I knew nothing about the fungal world and felt that the less I knew about those putrid, treacherous excrescences the better. For her they were things of grace, infinitely inviting to the perceptive mind. She insisted on gathering them, laughing at my protests, mocking my horror.

Wasson’s article influenced many scholars and hipsters to hallucinogenic mushrooms and brought traditional healers like Maria Sabina into the public eye. Sabina’s aesthetic influence on psychedelic poets like Anne Waldman has been noted in Jerome

Rothenberg's collection, *Maria Sabina: Selections*. But Wasson's ongoing research eventually led him from Mexico to India and Southeast Asia during the 1960s, after he heard about soma myths. He believed he could prove the soma plant was a mushroom. In 1969 he published, *Soma: Divine Mushroom of Immortality*. Wasson's work did not go unchallenged, however, due to a lack of the mushroom in present-day India. Even so, in "Historical Evidence: India's Sacred Soma," a 1972 article by Huston Smith, Smith defends the validity of Gordon Wasson's claim to have identified the soma plant as an hallucinogenic mushroom against those who deemed Wasson an amateur, citing the approval of a variety of famous scholars, including Claude Levi-Strauss and Roman Jakobson, a close friend of Wasson and Pavlovna. Wasson's 1986 collaboration with Stella Kramrisch, Jonathan Ott and A. P. Ruck, *Persephone's Quest: Entheogens and the Origins of Religion*, mentions that entheogens "are extraordinarily rare in the Eurasian botanical world, and *Amanita muscaria* was the entheogen of the ancient world. The citations of Soma in the *Rig Veda* are all consistent with this reading" (33). Wasson sees challenges to his theory as evidence of a Eurocentric aversion to mushrooms. He is so sure of his work by 1986 that he claims, "We are well beyond the stage of hypotheses" (16). It is unclear at this point if Wasson is referring to *Amanita muscaria* or if he is referring to the thesis he and his wife first developed about cultural attitudes toward plant life. In any case, a large body of literature now surrounds Wasson and his intellectual peers like Carl A. P. Ruck, Huston Smith, Jonathan Ott, and Albert Hoffman – the discoverer of LSD 25. This group of intellectuals, beginning in the late fifties and

continuing today have made a large impact both on Religious Studies and broader culture as well.

That Huston Smith chose to reprint the article defending Wasson in his self-selected anthology of his own work, *Cleansing the Doors of Perception*, in 2000, attests the author's continuing acceptance of Wasson's claim, despite numerous other hypotheses about the nature of the original soma plant. It is now, for example, generally understood that soma was not a single plant, and as far back as 1978, Mukhopadhyay has asserted this ("On the Significance" 7). Soma, then, in ethnobotanic and religious discourse since the late fifties has broadened in meaning as it has joined a larger discussion about entheogens in general and their relationship to human civilization, and this broadened meaning has itself affected ancient scholarship.

This is evidenced by Huston Smith, who in the same article discussed above, credits Aldous Huxley's *The Doors of Perception* (1954) and *Heaven and Hell* (1956) with "introducing entheogens to the contemporary west" (63). It is strange that Smith, a famous professor of Religious History, would so quickly gloss over William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* – a text that is recurring even in Huxley's own writings, in which the subject is addressed. Therefore, Smith's statement should be read as referring to the popular nature of Huxley's audience and to the perception that the discourse changed in the 1950s. That change is, of course, the nascent psychedelic movement. And it is not surprising, therefore, that Huxley's work also finds resonance in Ruck's *The Apples of Apollo*.

Huxley's *Heaven and Hell* (1956) characterizes the experience of entheogenic drugs and visionary experience as both producing mystic ecstasy and horror. This too can be found in the account Ruck et al. give to soma in *The Apples of Apollo*, and it is this version of soma that is the more conceptual one, developed by scholars since the late fifties. So, along with Perseus, Ruck et al. claim that Prometheus stole soma in the form of spiritual fire (23). They also cite Euripides' *Ion*, which tells the story of Creusa, the Queen of Athens, who receives two drops of Medusa's blood, one which "was intended as the consecrating anointment for the city's dynastic sovereign. The other sprang from the Gorgon's serpents and was a lethal poison" (43). In doing so, these scholars both amplify and transcend the romantic tradition of William Blake within which Huxley has placed his lineage.

Ruck et al. build their definition of soma from the following epithets they attribute to it: "golden apples, an eye, a multiplicity of eyes, golden water, honey, lightning bolts, golden urine, golden semen, golden rain, golden snow, estrual cows, bellowing bulls, golden hides, pelts, phallus, vulva, wings, etc." (41). They also suggest that tracing soma occurs etymologically, and not just as a collection of epithets: "'It rains' in Greek is the impersonal verb *huei*, and if there is a subject, it is Zeus; but the verb is cognate with Sanskrit *sunoti*, which means 'to press out the juice.'" In Herodotus' account of Polycrates' daughter's premonition of his death, Zeus also brings rain on Polycrates' impaled body. The Vedic entheogen Soma is named as 'the pressed one'" (69).

According to Ruck, this concept carries all the way into Christianity with the story of Gethsemane. Gethsemane, in Aramaic, means oil press:

The agony of Gethsemane took place at the Oil-Press, perhaps an element of the mythologizing: for Jesus was the prophesied Messiah, anointed, as it would now appear, with the same amber feverish pharmakon that Apollonius discovered amongst the Brachmanes. This act of pressing is significant, since not only does it yield the oil of chrismation, but also the juice of the grape, the wine that will be transubstantiated into the blood of Jesus. The Soma of the Brahmins was named with the epithet the “Pressed One,” pressed in sacrifice from dried mushrooms soaked in water, to produce the drink of blood. In the Hellenistic age of religious syncretism, it would have been inevitable that Soma be confused with the Greek word for “body,” *soma* (although its cognates are probably to be found in Greek *sus*, and English “swine,” the boar being a common metaphor of fly-agaric). The communion experience of the Eucharist was real and profound. (211)

We can also see the *sus* / swine root in the suovetaurilia sacrifice, which is described by Circe to Odysseus in books ten and eleven of Homer’s *Odyssey* as a sacrifice to Demeter in the underworld.

Ruck et al. suggest a confusion of meaning between the Greek soma as body and the juice / deity in Sanskrit. Rather than confusion, it seems to me that the term went through linguistic narrowing between Homer and Christ, and that this narrowing parallels the burgeoning philosophical discussion of the western state and the citizen’s relationship to governing bodies. While the narrowed term of soma as “body” may have had a more fixed meaning linguistically, it also had philosophical counterparts in Greek culture that maintained some of its contextual aspects of its original meaning, those relating to sacrifice.

Sacrificial ceremonies differ according to culture, and contemporary scholarship surrounding soma has often glossed over those differences in ways that concern scholars

committed to multiculturalism. One brief way to conceive of this is to consider ancient Mesopotamian sacrifice in relation to Semitic and Greek notions. Walter Burkert has written extensively concerning a bias in mythological criticism against “oriental” or “eastern” influence on early Greek culture in *The Orientalizing Revolution* and *Ancient Mystery Cults*. Tzvi Abusch has argued that sacrifice “may serve to maintain a group that is drawn together by, or whose identity is based on, some common characteristic” (46), but also that a comparison between Semitic sacrifice and Mesopotamian sacrifice reveals an important difference. For Mesopotamians, according to Abusch, sacrifices had to do with the temple, which was a storehouse of food. Food was offered to gods as a part of a relationship where the gods created humans to serve and feed them. After the prepared food was offered to the gods, it was distributed to the members of the cult. The Semites, on the other hand, organized their sacrifices around kinship and blood ties:

For the Semites, then, it was the family, the tribe, and the wider tribal territory that defined identity and power. This remained true even of the Semites of northern Babylonia and northeastern Syria. For while they absorbed the culture of the urban Mesopotamians of the south, they did not give up their own identities; rather, they transformed the culture that they had assimilated, introducing new images into it that were consonant with their own background and social situation – images such as the blood that they introduced into the Mesopotamian mythological tradition of the creation of man. (45)

As part of the cultural assimilation then, the Semites introduced blood and liquid aspects of sacrifice, which related to kinship relations and the transference of governance by family lineage. Political theology in its western sense is burgeoning here. It is well known that this appears to have replaced the Mesopotamian, female-centered fertility social structure, but Marvin W. Meyer’s *The Ancient Mysteries* discusses fertility cults

surviving in Eleusinian mysteries. Meyer writes that “the *mystai* participated in rites that performed three types of sacred observances: *legomena*, “things recited,” *deiknymena*, “things shown,” and *dromena*, “things performed” (10). There are similar distinctions between the different *Vedas*. In contrast to this, however, Tzvi discusses the Mesopotamian creation myths where human bodies were formed out of clay and covered in flesh and blood of a sacrificed god. The god’s flesh gives life to the clay. As Tzvi argues,

The addition of flesh and blood reflects a new point of view. While the flesh is the source of the human ghost, the blood, . . . is the origin of the ability to plan, that is, of human intelligence, and is, ultimately, the source and etiology of the personal god or, rather, the family god who is passed down from generation to generation by a male progenitor. The personal god is not simply the god of an isolated individual; rather, he is the god of the individual as a social being. (45)

Still, the liquid aspects of the blood sacrifice are reminiscent of Vedic soma, and it would be worthwhile to more precisely track down the historical diaspora of Aryan and Semitic cultures to see cross-cultural contact. But, as I have said, debates over soma are not settled.

What we *can* glean from what I have presented here is the possibility that the blood and liquid aspects, which Tzvi claims are the roots of intelligence, merge with the liquid aspects of the Aryan soma, and that the liquid and material aspects begin to diverge in Western culture, eventually becoming the distinction between soma and *psyche*. Hebraic political theology of course shapes western political theology. One can see this with respect to the Yom Kippur festival and the idea of the scapegoat and the sacrificial goat. One goat was offered to the god while the other bore the sins of the

people and was taken out of town by a “prepared man” and thrown off a cliff (Stokl 209). Daniel Johannes Stokl argues, “with the destruction of the temple in 70 CE, the Temple ritual lost its natural geography. The centre of Jewish worship shifted from the destroyed temple to the synagogues, and its ritual was transformed into a bloodless service of liturgical memory” (210). So, while Tzvi sees a connection between the personal god and blood sacrifice, Stokl sees a decentralization of the sacrifice in Jewish and eventually early Christian cultures. While I certainly cannot trace a *direct* lineage of the western meaning for soma back to Aryan ritual, knowledge of how Middle Eastern and Mediterranean cultural mixtures does help to understand how in the West a separation was developing between body and soul. However, that separation, as Tzvi suggests, is in relation to a personalized deity that maintains a unified identity structure for particular groups of people through the development of transcendent religion, which Marcel Gauchet aligns with the idea of the State. But in order to continue the discussion about soma, it is necessary to touch on one of soma’s Greek counterparts: psyche.

According to John P. Wright and Paul Potter, the editors of *Psyche and Soma: Physicians and Metaphysicians on the mind-body problem from Antiquity to Enlightenment*, in the western tradition the concept of soma can be traced historically in the following way:

The soma, which is contrasted with psyche, is seen variously as the shell of a real person, a kind of counter-self with desires and goals of its own, the sensible and affective part of ourselves, the unactualized potentiality of a living being, the ‘nature’ of the organism which carries out the operations of life the community of Christian believers, a mechanical automaton, a mechanism which is in a state of constant corruption. (7)



While Ruck et al. have connected soma to Gethsemane and the Eucharist, Wright and Potter trace it to Christian conceptions of corrupted flesh. This is an inversion of the Mesopotamian idea that it was the fleshy parts of the sacrificed god that gave clay men life. So as the word “soma” changed meaning from Sanskrit to Greek, entering a western discourse based on tensions between mind and body, its meaning narrowed to signify something seemingly more materialistic. In Greek discourse, tension arises between soma (body) and psyche (breath, life, soul). As a result, psyche takes on some abstract, liquid, and vaporous qualities of soma. One cannot understand the concept of soma in the west without understanding the meaning of psyche. Wright and Potter claim that psyche, like soma, means a variety of things:

the life principle of the body, the principle of sensation and purposeful movement, the morally significant part of the human being, the principle of a being which has self-movement, the intellectual part of the self, the ‘form’ of a natural body possessing the potentiality of life, the inner person who can reflect on himself, an intellectual being constantly required for the maintenance of the body, a force that represents the teleological and integrative processes of the living organism. (7)

Beate Gundert discusses how the usage of the word psyche changes throughout the Hippocratic corpus, saying among other meanings “it refers to the male and female seed as the vehicle of life” (33). So, it does retain material qualities. Gundert asserts that

for the Hippocratic physician mind and body are two distinct, yet related aspects of human nature. According to *Regimen*, both *soma* and *psyche* consist of the same substances. The characteristics of both are shaped in a similar fashion by external influences and inheritance . . . the division is not absolute: symptoms change from mental to somatic, and vice versa, as a disease moves from one part of the body to another. (31-32)

This concept had, according to Gundert, changed since Homer, and here again the division between body and soul gets thematized:

For Homer, *psyche* is the life principle that leaves the body [soma] after death and persists as image in Hades . . . Between Homer and Plato . . . *psyche*, while originally meaning ‘life’ – albeit now the *living* person – comes through a fusion with the many specific expressions for perception, thought, and the emotions to denote in addition the mental correlate to *soma*: the pair *psyche* and *soma* stands for the living person in his totality. (13-14)

Even as far back as Homer, then, *soma* designates body or corpse for the Greeks, losing its liquid qualities and becoming static and taking on the physical aspects of sacrifice. It is a *body* that is sacrificed, and we can see this easily with the *pharmakon* and human sacrifice. *Soma* in western culture thereafter takes on more nominative (subjective) or accusative (objective) fixed linguistic meaning, and the linguistic interchange between subjectivity and objectivity as it relates to mysticism and psychedelic writing should be sought here. In contrast, the development of the concept of *psyche*, while never completely separate from *soma*, often relates to the *capacity* for feeling, for sense, and perception.

This capacity for what one “may be” is expressed by Anthony Beavis in *Eyeless in Gaza*. Before he encounters Miller, the character loosely based on Gerald Heard and F.M. Alexander, the body for Anthony is merely what holds one’s place in time. In Anthony’s ultimate acceptance of pacifism, however, the possible death of the body loses its significance as merely a placeholder for being-toward-death.

*Soma* as characterized by Wright and Potter as “unactualized potential” needs *psyche* to activate itself. In this *capacity*, then, are the notions of mind, intellect, and

thought (*nous, dianoia, gnome*) (33). While the totality of the human body is an aggregate of soma and psyche, *aisthesis* (sense, perception) “provides a paradigmatic case-study in relations between soul [psyche] and body: sentience becomes possible only through the interaction of the mutually dependent body and soul, yet it is necessary to both” (von Staden 86). This is especially important for ancient Greek thinkers’ notions of aesthetics, and it has important implications in the twentieth century philosophy and psychedelic aesthetics, as we saw previously with poststructuralist meanings of chora, as discussed earlier.

The beautiful was for ancient Greeks, in a very real sense, attunement of body to soul. It is not until after Christ, when Galen discovered nerves, that sense begins to be more associated with body than psyche, and major Greek philosophers’ – Plato and Aristotle’s – conceptions of the soul driving the body, while still influential, began to change (von Staden 116), eventually becoming much more codified in the modern era after Descartes, when the body became viewed much more mechanistically (Wright and Potter 9). The European Enlightenment can, especially when we consider the concept of soma, indeed be characterized as codifying rather strict relationships between subjects and objects, a result of emerging liberal societies as well. The secularization that occurred in the Renaissance could be characterized in some ways as a recapitulation of the separation in the ancient world between polytheism and monotheism. As Tzvi argues, the blood sacrifice was derivative of Semitic kinship relations and transference of power through patriarchal lineage. This form of governance continued through Europe’s

conceptions of royalty, corporation, and the body politic. Yet even in medical discourse, Francois Aznouvi has argued that the enlightenment distinction between body and soul became a distinction between the moral and the physical. This was then refined in the nineteenth century,

when, as a result of the Cartesian revolution, soul became synonymous with thought and body with movement, the need arose to develop a new term to designate the opposite of material reality, to designate the realm to which we refer to today with the word *psychique* – in English, ‘psychological’ – a new term as indispensable as it is vague. *Moral*, then, would be the ancestor of *psychique*, referring to something non-material, which is nevertheless not pure thought. (270)

The excess aspects of soma, particularly those related to ritual and sacrifice, public and State, thus became an abstract “morality” with the rise of the modern, liberal subject. Morality became synonymous with a version of society with which the liberal subject was always in tension. God’s laws were replaced with civic apparatuses and social contract philosophy. The development of the social sciences, particularly the disciplines of psychology and anthropology, evidence this shift, as does Nietzsche’s genealogical approach to enquiry, which valorized ancient views of the good over and against modern views and influenced both Huxley the writer and his characters. All of this deep political theology is behind the concept that Huxley uses with respect to entheogenic ingestion and citizenship; and while messy, it is a clear rivalry with respect to thinkers like Carl Schmitt. But both early political theologians did not have the benefit of religious studies or more recent archaeology as disciplines to draw from.

Carl Raschke argues in *Fire and Roses: Postmodernity and the Thought of the Body* that “it is not historically coincidental that the advent of the discipline known as *religious studies* in the 1960s coincided both with the Nietzschean “murder of God” and the liberation of body throughout Western culture” (120). Characterizing modernism itself as a kind of faith, Raschke argues that its founding myth is a myth of “the transformative.” Raschke is part of a generation of scholars who criticize – while not discarding – structuralist approaches to mythology and religion. Raschke sees Nietzsche’s “death of God” as a sacrifice itself. Discussing regicide and the Greek idea of the Pharmakon (scapegoat and sacrificial victim) Raschke returns to Vedic ideas of sacrifice. Building from the work of James Frazier, Rene Girard, and Bruce Lincoln, Raschke notes:

The priest slays the king to let lose the transformative energies that he possesses. To put the matter in nonmythological language, we can say that “humanity” as priest sacrifices a vital aspect of itself (i.e. the “king”) to attain a higher state of existence, to be reunited with the three quarters that are “immortal in heaven.” (130)

Raschke sees modernism’s myth of transfiguration as culminating in personal transcendence through an attack on structuralism’s centrality. Poststructuralism and the work of Jacques Derrida thus become especially important for religious studies as they focus on the deconstruction of the state and the body politic. Raschke and poststructuralist thinkers like Derrida and Michel Foucault then evidence an examination of the entrails of the sacrificed body of the state in the wake of psychedelic aesthetics.

But the state is not just a somatic body; it is a psychic one as well, because psyche is what is *inside the body politic*.

Rene Girard's classic *Violence and the Sacred* argues for a view of sacrifice via Freud's Oedipal complex. Raschke echoes this saying, "the sacrifice of the god was the recapitulation historically of, as well as the mythical token of the Oedipal wish for, the murder of god" (156). Freudian psychology continues a long-standing parallel in western medicine between psyche and soma. The Western concept of soma is deeply attached to the concept of the State and bodies of power; thus, a sacrifice on the State itself cannot only occur in terms of institutional bodies – and politics cannot either. In order for the sacrifice to be complete in the west, psyche must be sacrificed along with soma, *and that is what the psychedelic aesthetics have attempted and continue to attempt*.

"Psychedelic," a word *coined* in 1957 in a letter to Aldous Huxley, literally means "mind-manifesting." The search for soma and entheogenic religion thus arises out of this historical situation in which individuals radically assert themselves over and above the out-moded authority of the State. This happened in the 1960s as a performance of aesthetics as the psychic manifestation of exactly what transcended state power determined in the Weberian sense Schneiderman asserted above by means of physical force. Huxley's pacifistic transcendence of such a worldview seems anything but politically complacent in this view. Consciousness changes and paradigm shifts can be understood as the psychic counterpart to the somatic sacrifice of institutional bodies. In searching for the mythical soma and entheogens then, scholars ideologically attempt to

usher in the new age of religion. In experimenting with psychedelic drugs in the 1960s, populaces partook in the sacrifice of the state by reorganizing the notion of citizenship. They did not have to believe they were doing this as individuals.

Yet, as I stated earlier, the affordances that soma allows for certain writers (myself included) creates problems. Take, for example, a more recent book entitled *Soma: the Divine Hallucinogen*, by the ethnobotanist David L. Spess, which argues that soma is based on Indo-Aryan magic, where cosmology overlaps with human soul (breath, *prana*) and the “inner man.” This leads him to claim soma’s influence on the Greek conception of logos and the mystical beginning to *The Book of John*. Spess claims: “The entheogenic soma drink’s inner formation of this body coupled with the soma ritual, not only influenced all Indian religions, but it appears to be the original source of influence upon later Western conceptions of the subtle body” (92). This leads Spess to the grand claim that the soma ritual informs not only all western alchemy and hermeticism, but also Chinese, Greco-Egyptian and Islamic alchemy (161). It is important to see Spess’s claim as continuing a tradition of scholarship into entheogens that is politically fueled by the psychedelic movement in the 1960s.

Soma, in the scholarly discourse I have discussed, is often metonymic for a return to the perennial. As such, it ideologically performs the same criticism of European subjectivity that I claimed psychedelic aesthetics employed in earlier chapters. It is also, however, highly suspect to scholars interested in maintaining distinct cultural identities. What is at stake is the possibility of conceiving a broader definition of humanity that is

global. What is at stake is the possibility of human rights and international legal legitimacy.

Insofar as soma, or more recent studies of molecules like DMT relate to post-1960s consciousness studies of Stanislov Groff, which try to produce psychedelic experiences without the use of drugs, a fundamental structure for human consciousness may indeed be biologically determined. This discourse, if proven, could perhaps take away from the stigma of essentialism inherent in cross-cultural ethnobotanic work as well as help in legal discussions about human rights. The issue quickly becomes biopolitical and theological in nature. But what we learn from psychedelic aesthetics is a growing tradition that criticizes liberal subjectivity from within western cultural frames and habitus. If western notions of subjectivity in terms of law and human rights could be more historically informed, that is, in ways that precede the development of nation-state discourse, we might be better able to create working definitions of human rights and citizenship than current ethnocentric ones. Implicitly, Aldous Huxley explores these issues in his final novel, *Island*, where soma becomes *moksha*, and so now I return to discussing Huxley as a political theologian.

### *Island*

Aldous Huxley's growing interest in psychedelics worried some of his intellectual peers early on. When considering Huxley as not just a theorist of the psychedelic experience but also as a political theologian, it is worth comparing him briefly to the most



well known aesthete and political theologian of the twentieth century, Walter Benjamin. Huxley was one of many intellectuals from abroad, who arrived in the United States as the result of political strife during and between the wars and had tremendous cultural impact on the 1960s. Walter Benjamin, who died trying to get to the U.S. in the late 1930s, has a somewhat surprising affinity with Huxley when we consider Huxley as a political theologian. It is easy to forget that Aldous Huxley and Walter Benjamin were born only two years apart in countries that became political rivals during the first decades of the twentieth century. They were not only contemporaries, but shared similar interests – aesthetic and politico-theological – as well as mutual acquaintances (Murray 402).

While one can only speculate, as Scott J. Thompson does in “From ‘Rausch’ to Rebellion,” as to whether Benjamin and Huxley would have likely met had Benjamin been able to cross the Atlantic, Benjamin was certainly interested in hashish and aesthetic experience. The interest in psychedelics perhaps makes Benjamin’s work less rigidly dialectical than his Eastern European Marxist contemporaries like Gyorgy Lukacs and Thomas Mann. Mann, who succeeded in emigrating to the United States in the late 1930s, had received a copy of *The Doors of Perception* in the 1950s from Ida Herz, was critical of Huxley. Thomas Mann writes Herz in response,

Thank you very much for *The Doors of Perception*, though the book does not excite me with the enthusiasm which it has you. It presents the latest, and, I might add, most audacious form of Huxley's escapism, which I could never appreciate in this author. Mysticism as a means to that escapism was, nonetheless, reasonably honorable. But that he now has arrived at drugs I find rather scandalous.” (qtd in Thompson)

Clearly, Mann is familiar with Huxley's recent work on mysticism, *The Devils of Loudun* (1952) and perhaps his *Perennial Philosophy* (1945). Mann's concerns about drugs were informed by the Nazi regime's human subject testing, which he was able to escape. What he calls Huxley's escapism is a human rights issue. However, as Thompson argues: "Both Huxley and Benjamin were attempting to recover a concept of experience which had become entirely alien to the neoclassicist thinkers of the Enlightenment." While I am unsure that "recovery" is the right term here, Thompson is onto something. It is clear, however, that throughout the Enlightenment there are plenty of examples of Enlightenment critiques, and as I have argued in previous chapters, enchantment never disappears completely. What thinkers like Thomas Mann were unable to see was a significant shift in Huxley's approach to drugs, the State, and religion between *Brave New World* and his works on psychedelics in the 1950s.

The often-made claim against Huxley is his utopianism. William M. Curtis's notes the affinity between Aldous Huxley and Richard Rorty, perhaps the most important theorist of liberal utopia in the latter twentieth century (in Curtis 91). Rorty, as Curtis discusses, is interested in an idea of liberal utopia as "an imaginative extension of our best liberal democratic ideals," where malleability of human nature maintains a kind of optimism. Building off Curtis, I suggest that not only is Huxley's work prescient of the world crises occurring fifty years after his death, but that, through allegory and dialogue, Huxley's literary works provide important venues for deliberations in states of exception. Huxley has not been given enough credit as a thinker in these matters, even though he

was a contemporary of major writers in the discourse, partly because literary works are often perceived as inefficacious in political matters in the United States and partly because the psychedelic aesthetics suggested in Huxley's work (and those he has influenced) takes an approach to character and citizenship that blends private and public spaces with mystic traditions in ways that may initially make proponents of secularism squeamish in traditional public deliberations. The excessive psychic attributes made present in psychedelic aesthetics afford artistic works a more overt presence in terms of politics.

*Island* is a particularly useful choice of study because it presents Huxley's most mature presentation of a working society. Huxley scholars often read his work as a progression between the earlier, satirical English works and the more overtly "spiritual" American novels. *Brave New World*, Huxley's most well known book, sits at the center between the phases of Huxley's writing. Less well known than *Brave New World*, *Island* is sometimes wrongly considered the lesser artistic achievement. In an initial review in *The Nation* (1962), Arthur Herzog wrote, "It is a curious book, more successful as a vehicle of ideas than as a novel. It is written heavily and without the incisiveness of *Brave New World*. The characters are weak and poorly drawn" (74). In contrast, Gorman Beauchamp has argued,

if by novelistic criteria *Island* appears thin and didactic, by utopian criteria it has more than usual complexity of character and plot [...] the extensive attention paid to the process of spiritual enlightenment among the Palanese and the demonstration of its effects on the soul of the cynical Farnaby tip the balance of *Island* more toward the personal than the systemic, the eupsychic than the eutopic.

*Island* is an example of Huxley's "third option," from the essay "*Brave New World Revisited*." This option moves toward an emphasis on self-transcendence by way of an immanent view of the spiritual that accompanies the collapse of Pala's (the island in the novel) government. This immanent view is also embodied in Huxley's theories of the perennial and mysticism. In presenting this option, Huxley helped to shape psychedelic aesthetics as a politically theological motivating force, where a mystical or psychedelic experience obliterates and then re-norms an individual's sense of civic morality and allegiance beyond traditional ideas of the nation state.

This, I believe, is Huxley's vision of social progress. It is performed in his writing, which unifies his characters as different aspects of one Self existing in their own times. Huxley's psychedelic aesthetics perform metempsychosis within the characters in *Island*, but in order to do this it requires more sophisticated reading of Huxley than those normally performed (something closer to Leo Strauss's readings of Machiavelli). While Huxley began formally experimenting with this in *Eyeless in Gaza*, it is his critique of high modernist aesthetics like Proust, Eliot and Joyce that informs his less overtly experimental and certainly less elite style. This comes as a product of his belief in mysticism, which blossomed in him during the 1930s and 1940s. In *Ends and Means* (1937), which can be considered Huxley's non-fiction follow-up to *Eyeless in Gaza*, Huxley says the only way to peace is through the time-proven mystical ideals of non-attachment and charity. He identifies thinkers in various traditions, East and West, as having espoused this. He says,

charity cannot progress toward universality unless the prevailing cosmology is either monotheistic or pantheistic – unless there is a general belief that all men are “the sons of God” or, in Indian phrase, that “thou art that,” *tat tvam asi*. The last fifty years have witnessed a great retreat from monotheism toward idolatry. The worship of one God has been abandoned in favor of the worship of such local divinities as the nation, the class and even the deified individual. (8-9)

Either way it goes, monotheistic or pantheistic, Huxley’s answer is *enchanted*. In his literary work of the period, Huxley tries to perform this charity by writing very simply with multiple simultaneous meanings. He consciously rejects high modernist literary aesthetics as elitist, and while his work seems simpler, what he is really up to is critiquing the self of the European imaginary, just as his contemporaries like Artaud, Benjamin, and Marcuse were doing.

Understanding Huxley’s psychedelic aesthetics requires a literary approach to allegorical reading that I believe constitutes a necessary skill-set for understanding the dynamics of figuration in political discourse in the twenty-first century – hence my attempt to build a bridge between Huxley’s work and Political Theology. I want to give context to current discussions of Political Theology that have difficulty relating spiritual discussions to public discourse, offering a model of cosmopolitanism for discourse concerning spiritual and civic life. This again requires a reading Huxley’s *Island* in light of Richard Rorty’s neo-pragmatism and liberal utopia; that is, as “an imaginative extension of our best liberal democratic ideals” (Curtis 91). This draws upon Rorty’s distinction between “ironist” intellectual elites who utilize the liberal value of free thinking and speech to promote revolutionary ideas to the general public discourse which “will be reformist and pragmatic.” This distinction between the “elite” and the “normal”

recalls Huxley's advisory conditions for the uses of psychedelic drugs. Importantly, Huxley's turn toward compassion does not mean the creation of a platitude between smart people and stupid people, or some kind of land where people are heavily normed. In *Brave New World* the intellectual elites choose a different life outside the World State; in *Island* both must learn to cohabitate.

The social use of psychedelic drugs, for Huxley, was to allow people who could not see a bigger picture access to it. But the spread of drugs – both controlled and uncontrolled – into society since the late fifties captures Rorty's "ironist" who is "experienced" and the "naïve" or unreflective "normal" person (who may perhaps still be on some sort of prescribed antidepressant). One can see this in visions of the hipster or the beat, whose drug-using edginess keeps him or her on the "edge" of society. While Huxley was certainly a social critic of mass society in the United States, he chose to engage with the public and its problems rather than drop out. Controlled use of psychedelics could help even the overly intellectual elite commit to a bigger view of what humanity is.

In *Island*, Dr. Robert says that he and his dying wife, Lakshmi, with whom he has recently tripped, have taken *moksha*-medicine – a fictional variation on psilocybin – "once or twice each year for the past thirty-seven years" (169). While this is a more frequent use of psychedelics than Huxley himself took part in, it both blends the experience of reading *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* to his dying wife, Maria (in 1955), and it precedes his own death in 1963 in which he famously took LSD and slipped away

as Laura Huxley describes “like a piece of music just finishing” (266). Huxley, unlike the later Timothy Leary and Art Kleps, thought that psychedelics should be used in controlled situations with guides to encourage the embracing of the “pure light.” Such is the way that *Island’s* protagonist, Will Farnaby, takes the *moksha*-medicine with Susila as guide during the climax of the book. It is here that Farnaby comes to actualize his belief in the political ideals of Pala, which he has learned about through characters who act as travel-guides and the Old Raja’s *Notes on What’s What*. The book lays out Pala’s philosophical ideals blending the best of East and West. At the climax of his trip, Will has an intense awareness of his subjectivity:

This dark little inspissated clot that one called “I” was capable of suffering to infinity and, in spite of death, the suffering would go on forever. The pains of living and the pains of dying, the routine of successive agonies in the bargain basement and the final crucifixion in a blaze of tin and plastic vulgarity – reverberating, continuously amplified, they would always be there. And the pains were incommunicable, the isolation complete. The awareness that one existed was an awareness that one was always alone. (341)

Yet despite this eternal isolation, Will’s trip is a participatory ritual that convinces him that the ideals of Pala are right just as Pala is being invaded by an army that will bring western industrialization and commerce to the island.

Will trips just as Murugan, the young Raja who has been raised and corrupted in the West, allied with the neighboring dictator, Colonel Dipa, invade Pala with plans to use island’s rich oil supply to build a military and “modernize.” Will’s consciousness expansion during his trip both destroys his pre-existing metaphysics and reinstates him into a new moral perspective as he comes down and a new and much scarier reality sets

in – a reality that Will as a political intriguer has helped to bring about. Huxley's destruction of the utopia accompanies Farnaby's enlightenment. His new perspective allows him to navigate himself according to an authority that transcends both religion and State. Nicolas Langlitz correctly notes, with reference to an essay by Reinhardt Koselleck on Carl Schmitt's utopia, "Buribunks: A Historico-Philosophical Meditation" (1918), that in contrast to Schmitt's temporalized utopia, *Island* is spatialized. But if we connect *Island* to psychedelic aesthetics' use of the perennial, it is not spatialized in a territorialized way.

If Huxley is being ironic in Rorty's sense, then it is only in showing that modernization, ruling royalty and colonization are all archaic and destructive and that enlightened individuals must find ways to proceed amid idiotic rulers. But such a clear distinction between the "ironic" elite and the stupid masses is too easy a way of putting things because in *Island* Huxley presents intellectualism as its own sort of handicap. This is the compassion from *Ends and Means* coming in here. It is precisely the subjectivity of the ego that must be transcended, no matter how smart or stupid one is: as Mrs. Rao tells Farnaby, "Pala's the place for stupid people. The greatest happiness for the greatest number – and we stupid ones *are* the greatest number" (228). Will's *moksha*-experience is a transcendence of western transcendence, just as Walter Benjamin's court of the *Trauerspiel* in *Origins of German Tragic Drama* transcends the very idea of sovereignty as transcendent. The sovereign decision here is not in the sovereign as ruler, but in the personal commitment of the individual to come to terms with his or her own state of



consciousness by merging with the transcendent and recognizing a different kind of citizenship. A term like “personalism” is not quite adequate to deal with the psychedelic experience.

If one considers the process of ego death as described by Huxley along with thinkers like Timothy Leary, Richard Alpert and Ralph Metzner, it is clear that in the psychedelic and mystical experience there is a blurring of subject-object distinction, and irony cannot work without an audience for such a distinction. The dialectic between irony and naïve earnestness – the faith of the innocent – Nietzsche’s child after the camel and the lion in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* – moves between the characters in Huxley’s work. *Island* begins with the one liberation of Will Farnaby, the death of his fear of Evil. This process begins with a young Palanese girl using mesmeric first-aid to help Will get over his encounter with a snake at the beginning of the book. As late as the summer of 1963, Huxley writes to Leary who with Richard Alpert had “left” Harvard and started IFIF (International Foundation for Internal Freedom) in Millbrook, New York, that

the idea of a school is excellent . . . one should make use of all the available resources – the best methods of formal teaching and LSD, hypnosis (used, among other things to help people re-enter the LSD state without having recourse to a chemical), time distortion (to speed up the learning process, auto-conditioning for the control of autonomic processes and heightening of physical and psychological resistance to disease and trauma, etc. etc.... (*Moksha* 246)

Will’s time on Pala may culminate in his *moksha* experience, but he is set up by hypnosis, dialogue with the islanders, and the reading of the treatise, *Notes on What’s What*, which summarizes Spinoza:

*The more a man knows about individual objects, the more he knows about God.*  
Translating Spinoza's language into ours, we can say: the more a man knows about himself in relation to every kind of experience, the greater his chance of suddenly, one fine morning, realizing who in fact he is. (43)

This passage analogously situates the subject's experience with God while nodding to the history of Political Theology. While *moksha*-medicine democratizes mystical experience, it does not end there. The expectation is that the liberation the medicine provides helps the society as a whole. The individual subject, "Will," is always part of a larger whole, and the *moksha* experience is a limit-experience, which, like the state of exception defines the norm – the distinction with Carl Schmitt being that for Schmitt, this is the sovereign decision whereas in *Island*, the beautiful young warlord sovereign Murugan is the very person who *refuses* and is disgusted by the *moksha*-experience. Huxley's narrative thus ideologically deposes the sovereign by reoccupying the decision in the enlightened subject, characterized by his participation in a ritual that democratizes the mystical through a sacrifice of the nation-state. Rather than Schmitt's concept of the sovereign who makes a decision in the state of exception, the psychedelically informed citizen communicates with the divine for moral guidance.

Huxley's work is more than a utopia; it is an allegory for disparate character-incarnations that are present throughout much of Huxley's works. It does not project a future imagined space but more of an alternate possible reality. A "midrashic" and typological interpretation of Huxley, like that of Walter Benjamin employs in *The*

*Origins of German Tragic Drama* and Leo Strauss in *How to Read Spinoza*,<sup>30</sup> helps evidence this. Will is a character we see replicated in various ways through Huxley's work. He's the satirist of the early Huxley novels like *Antic Hay* and *Chrome Yellow*, the outsider of Bernard Marx in *Brave New World*, the English script-writer narrator who presents William Tallis's masterpiece in *Ape and Essence*, the internal thoughts of Sebastian Barnack in *Time Must Have a Stop*. Similarly, Dr. Robert can be seen as Bruno Rotini from *Time Must Have a Stop* blended with the worldly wisdom of John Rivers in *The Genius and the Goddess*. Huxley's characters age throughout his novels, as the author himself ages, but he retains atavistic versions of himself in his characters. One sees obvious parallels between Lakshmi and Dr. Robert's marriage and that of Huxley and Maria. But the cynical outsider remains in the form of the flawed character, even if it is also a younger version of Huxley himself. So, for example, in *Time Must Have a Stop* we get the story of a brilliant but bratty youth who gains wisdom through the mentorship of quasi-mystic, Bruno Rotini, and who tells his overly-political father: "peace can't exist where there's a metaphysic, which all accept and a few actually succeed in realizing [unless it is through] direct intuition' he went on; 'the way you realize the beauty of a poem or a woman'" (276). Romantic conceptions are held within "post-Romantic" conceptions. Much of the narrative, we find out later in the story, has been the memory of Sebastian as he's looked back on his foolish youth and romantic misadventures. A certain perspective or way of *being* – call it wisdom or enlightenment – takes narrative

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<sup>30</sup> See my attached appendix, "Notes on Political Theology" for an in-depth discussion of these works.

precedence over both romantic and political action of the linear unfolding of time. This is metempsychosis or reincarnation expressed as psychedelic aesthetics.

Instead of presenting ego expansion through a narrative return to the perennial, as the later 1960s fiction writers discussed earlier did, Huxley solves the problem of linearity in the medium of text and plot by casting a variety of similar characters in dialogical situations. While some have found this stylistically overly transparent, it is the blending and tweaking of characters throughout Huxley's works that displays a reincarnated dynamic between characters that might otherwise seem stock. Keith May, for example, compares Will Farnaby's experience of Bach while taking *moksha* – one that parallels Huxley's own experience on mescaline – with Spandrell listening to Beethoven in *Point Counter Point* and argues that *Island* is Huxley solving a longstanding problem with Plato and idealism:

If Huxley at the time of the earlier novel was tempted by Spandrell's view that the purest music proves the existence of another world, a God who stands apart from His universe, by the time of *Island* he was sure that such music proves the occasional heavenliness of earth itself. Likewise, the purity of the music is no longer regarded as the antithesis of evil (the "Essential Horror") but as the quality that somehow flows into evil. Good and evil are not finally separable. (423)

Huxley's characters are ideas existing on a spectrum, but never just one idea, and that is why he is not just writing thinly disguised philosophy.

Even minor Huxleyan characters are revised in *Island*. Will's impression of Mrs. Rao parallels Sebastian Barnack's relationship with the homely but nurturing librarian, Mrs. Ockham in *Time Must Have a Stop*. The English matron who is a bit thick but so

nurturing as to make the sharper youth feel guilty for despising them transforms in

*Island*. To Will, Mrs. Rao at first

seemed like a browner version of one of those gentle but inexhaustibly energetic English ladies who, when their children are grown, go in for good works or organized culture. Not too intelligent, poor dears; but how selfless, how devoted, how genuinely good – and, alas, how boring! (216)

His perception changes a bit when he finds that Mrs. Rao teaches young adults *maithuna*, “the yoga of love,” which is not just safe sex and preventative measures but a how-to guide for “doing it” (219).

The older Huxley is softer in his approach to non-intellectuals. They have important things to teach. Both Will and Dr. Robert are aspects of Huxley, just as Murugan, the beautiful young despot-in-the-making is also an incarnation of Murugan the fierce and beautiful Vedic deity. The drama that plays out with the island is Shiva dancing, creating and destroying; and Will’s experience is Huxley’s suggestion for us in the face of that, more than it is a warning of the problems of a society that lets technology get the best of it. Though a deity, Shiva is pure immanence, and recognition of this is what provides the groundwork for tolerance among the Palanese.

Dialogue between both characters and texts maintains underlying social value throughout Huxley’s works. Huxley’s characters are always expressing opinions as if they are manifestos, even despicable characters like Colonel Dipa or the Rani desire to explain themselves to Will, to *convince* him that their way is best. The underlying foundation for the text is perhaps a liberal-democratic one. Language serves deliberative political ends. But dialogue and tolerance are also temporal qualities that change,

progress and digress over time, like Shiva dancing. A whole approach to society manifests in a whole citizen who instantiates citizenship in a variety of ways. In the end, Will is convinced through the summing up experience of liberation catalyzed by the medicine he takes that temporarily destroys his ego, literally destroying “Will,” the character Huxley referred to as “the serpent in the garden” (in Watt 169). The medicine is both scientific and spiritual – and his trip is *sponsored* and guided by citizens of a dying nation state. Like Spinoza’s subject, Will recognizes, even if belatedly, evidenced by his choice in taking the “sacrament” *moksha*, the continuance of his own power in the interest of the community. Insofar as the *moksha* experience is state-sponsored, the psychedelic experience disseminates sovereignty into the liberated citizens.

This is also similar to Spinoza in his *Theologico-Political Treatise*, who has a vexed relationship between theology and politics, especially concerning scriptural interpretation, which he does not separate from politics. Religion in Pala is neither separate from the State nor controlled by the State. The society is regulated by a philosophy that has recognized the necessity for symbolic spiritual activity but has done away with what Huxley identifies as the perverse contradictions of European religion and embraced a kind of Mahayana Buddhism. The society of Pala, again like Spinoza, recognizes the usefulness in religion for social commitment, especially with the “less rational” among the citizens, but also with the overly intellectual characters like Will Farnaby. There is a spectrum of modes of worship for all.

But the thing about Pala is that most of the citizens tend to “naturally” choose a subordination of religion to philosophy, following an almost Epicurean notion that religion need not be based on fear. Instead it can be a motivating force for hope, and that having passions is not the same as being evil or corrupt. The citizens of Pala have thereby chosen a post-secular society. This is partly why Will has to overcome the binary of the evil snake as his first initiation to the island. This is again tempered and fulfilled through the state-sponsored *moksha*-medicine, through which Huxley is very deliberate about unifying the material and the spiritual. He had been exploring the idea for at least thirty years.

Will, who has injured himself while infiltrating the island for the business prospects of a rich oil man, is cared for by locals who, in pure Huxleyan curatorial fashion explain the intricacies of their post-industrial society. As in *Brave New World*, the society helps maintain emotional balance by having liberated views of sexuality and drug usage. The binding nature of religion here is tempered by the liberating *moksha*-medicine. Huxley’s views on drugs had indeed changed significantly since *Brave New World*.

Huxley’s civic religion in *Island* is immanent, and he is quick to criticize transcendent religion. He seems to have come to a more firm decision since *Ends and Means*. Dr. Robert tells Will,

I have a theory that, wherever little boys and girls are systematically flagellated, the victims grow up to think of God as ‘Wholly Other’ – isn’t that the fashionable argot in your part of the world? Wherever, on the contrary, children are brought up without being subjected to physical violence, God is immanent. (139)

Will is quick to point out that child-beating has gone out of fashion in the 1950s to which Dr. Robert responds with a short lecture on Humanism's positive effects on Christianity, resulting in the birth of New Thought and New Age religion "gathering momentum ever since" William James (140). This is also apparent in *The Perennial Philosophy*, where Huxley claims that

rites, sacraments and ceremonials are valuable only to the extent that they remind those who take part in them of the true Nature of Things, remind them of what ought to be and (if only they would be docile to the immanent and transcendent Spirit) of what actually might be their relation to the world and its divine Ground. (262)

Huxley's thought is radically materialist and follows a trajectory of immanent religion that develops in Enlightenment and especially in American thought. While Huxley's non-fiction, especially *The Perennial Philosophy* discusses this directly, Huxley thought that, rather than abstract philosophy, ideas should be grounded in "case studies" such as *The Devils of Loudon*. In an interview from the early 1960s in which Huxley refers to *Island* as a "utopian fantasy" he has just written, Huxley is asked about his thoughts on the supernatural and says, "What people call the natural in our western tradition is in fact our projection of concepts on the world. The genuinely natural world . . . is the world of immediate experience without all these concepts imposed upon it" ("Huxley Interviewed"). Huxley thus moves from a disenchanted view of religion toward a religious view of culture and art as binding forces. Culture's fabrication itself produces enchantment.



This interpretive approach to culture can be seen in *Island* with the public performance of *Oedipus in Pala*. In the Palanese version, Oedipus is talked out of blinding himself and Jocasta talked out of hanging herself by a boy and girl from the island. The young Mary Sarojini explains to Will that both the play and Freud's interpretations of it do not work well in Pala because their family relationships, strikingly similar to Margaret Mead's interpretations of Samoan women's sexuality in *Coming of Age in Samoa*, do not allow for strict biological relationships of authority between parents and children. However awkward it may seem, the performance maintains a didactic quality for Palanese society and suggests a different aesthetic sensibility. The category of 'literature' itself is in question in Pala, but it is also clear that young children are familiar with both Freud and Sophocles. But Mrs. Rao tells Will earlier on in the book, "what trouble we have with books in this climate! The paper rots, the glue liquefies, the bindings disintegrate, the insects devour. Literature and the tropics are really incompatible" (217). Aesthetics in Pala lose a sense of the tragic but maintain a participatory role. Performance-based drama replaces physical books. (One wonders if they would have Kindles in an updated version.) In any case, Huxley's move emphasizes an immediate experience that overlaps with the island-culture's immanent sense of religion. It is with this trend that Huxley offers something to discussions of Political Theology and the role of religion in current liberal democracies.

If we speculate cursorily on religion in the United States, even since Huxley's death, during the generations after the permissive society of the 1960s we see a trend

toward immanence, a moving away from transcendence. This is characterized by a return to “natural” religion, which distorts a linear view of history of civilization as “evolving” away from religion and New Agism. Of course, the ‘Wholly Other’ view is still with us, as Marcel Gauchet’s work attests, as well as Kass and Fukuyama’s views above. But Huxley’s Pala is essentially an inversion of transcendent religion. If modern states rely on document-centered laws and constitutions, Pala abides by the Old Raja’s more colloquial *Notes on What’s What*, which Will reads as he becomes acculturated to the island. *Island* implicitly asks: is transcendent religion necessary for postmodern states? And it answers, No! The implication is not that transcendent religions should go away but that the civic sphere of the post-secular must negotiate both transcendent and immanent religion.

Even so, western culture, for Huxley, cannot escape Catholicism and Calvinism – the religion of the punished, according to him. Again, Nietzsche’s Zarathustra seems just behind the scene asking, “Don’t [they] know God is dead?” The Overman is the maker, the poet who has companions instead of followers. Yet unlike Nietzsche’s Overman, Huxley’s man is not a “bridge” between beast and Overman. It is not such a linear progression. He knows his evolutionary theory well enough to know it is not as simple as having one Pithecanthropus Erectus. Instead of a linear trajectory away from religion, Huxley’s State is comfortable with mysticism and faith over belief. Ironically, it is presented as the evolution of mixing East and West, a kind of globalization. This “evolution” occurs in the liberal subject who is able to transcend subjectivity and then

return to self *informed by religious metaphysics*. There is nothing atavistic about religion for Huxley – though he might declare that unreflective attachment is dangerous. This is performed by the Palanese children who go rock-climbing before being initiated by *moksha*:

Danger deliberately and yet lightly accepted. Shared consciously, shared to the limits of awareness so that the sharing and the danger become a yoga. Two friends roped together on a rock face. Sometimes three or four. Each totally aware of his own straining muscles, his own skill, his own fear, and his own transcending of the fear. (202)

Huxley leaves us with the idea that consciousness change may be the only way for humanity to survive itself. The change involves inter-subjectivity. But how does this happen?

Huxley's transcendence does not move only in one direction. It is dynamic and it strikes a balance between form and formless. Huxley relates this again to the image of Shiva dancing. Dr. Robert explains to Will:

“Dancing in all the worlds at once,” he repeated. “In *all* the worlds. And first of all in the world of matter. Look at the great round halo, fringed with symbols of fire, within which the god is dancing. It stands for Nature, for the world of mass and energy. Within it Shiva-Nataraja dances the endless dance of becoming and passing away. It is his *lila*, his cosmic play.” (205)

Because it moves in more than one direction, Huxley's transcendence is timeless, the perennial. Explaining the effects of *moksha*-medicine to Will, Dr. Robert says,

you will know in fact what it's like to be what you are, what you have always been. What a timeless bliss! But, like everything else, this timelessness is transient. Like everything else, it will pass. And when it has passed, what will you do with the experience? (208)

Dr. Robert here sounds like Ken Kesey appealing to a graduation from acid tests. Clearly informed by Vedic sciences where the human mind is a microcosm of the same design of the universe, Dr. Robert continues to discuss the State's role:

all that Pala can do for you with its social arrangements is to provide you with techniques and opportunities. And all that the *moksha*-medicine can do is to give you a succession of beatific glimpses, an hour or two, every now and then, of enlightening and liberating grace.

But it is within those couple of hours of grace that the subject seems to merge with the divine and then reemerge as self in the world, and it is from this fundamental psychedelic experience that one learns to navigate in the world. In this transcendence, one must overcome all cynicism and sense of irony. Rather than Rorty's elite ironist then, it seems that Huxley's vision calls for a different kind of political action. In order to understand it, I will now move to integrating Huxley's version of transcendence with the discussions of Political Theology and the challenges surrounding secularization.

### *Huxley and More Recent Discussions of Political Theology*

Huxley's *Island* attempts to make a relevant political contribution through an emphasis on the obliterated and re-normed self through the psychedelic *moksha* experience. In such an experience, "redrawing" identity boundaries works as a form of authentication and insulation of identity, maintaining a certain necessarily violent representation. What remain important about Huxley's contributions are his approaches to Nature and temporality. As stated above, Huxley's view of the natural is that of immediate experience. Such experiences conflict with architectonic notions of history as

“development” or as “cultured” in the Roman sense of cultivation. Indeed, Charles Taylor has argued that, regarding development, “it has become difficult for us to conceive human society and history without this concept. It almost seems that we wouldn’t know what to do, or how to define the social good, without it” (129). This fits into Taylor’s larger narrative challenging traditional secularization narratives, which he characterizes with the term “buffered self,” which “is the agent who no longer fears demons, spirits, magic forces. More radically, these no longer impinge; they don’t exist for him; whatever threat or other meaning they proffer doesn’t ‘get to’ him” (135). The buffered self is normed and disciplined as opposed to the prior “porous self.” Taylor’s porous self would be similar to “primitive” and immanent religion as described by Gauchet. It is this “buffered” self that must reconcile with the continuance of and even recent increase in immanent religion in the United States, and that is why a thinker like Huxley is important. This is not to argue against Taylor’s buffered self. I think he is right, but there must be an account for both continued enchantment and re-enchantment. In *The Re-Enchantment of the World*, Landy and Saler claim that “the world must be enchanted anew – human flourishing requires it – for those who wish to be consistent in their adoption of secular rationality” (14). While Weber for them “got it wrong,” they still see re-enchantment as a variety of strategies with “the common aim of filling a God-shaped void.” This is what Taylor has characterized as the Immanent Frame.

I wonder, however, what Huxley would think of this, particularly with regard to works like *The Devils of Loudun* or his 1949 “Introduction” to Marion L. Starkey’s

history of the Salem witch trials, *The Devil in Massachusetts*. In it, Huxley refers to the 1486 version of *Malleus Maleficarum*, claiming that “toward the end of the Middle Ages the old vague notion – that what feels like magic and possession – was worked up into a coherent system,” that European folklore was “organized by scholarly ecclesiastics into a pseudo science” (xvii-xviii). For Huxley, it seems that Early Modern rationality tactically installed something similar to what Landy and Saler want, but in the form of something they want to disavow as atavistic. This is perhaps a strain of occultism in Huxley. In *The Birth of Modernism: Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats and the Occult*, Leon Surette claims

Aldous Huxley catches the essence of the occult very well with his term “empirical theology,” by which he means a clear and immediate sense of “ultimate reality.” The central occult claim, then, is that all of the world’s religions are partial, popularized, or even corrupt versions of a revelation, gnosis, or wisdom that is fully possessed only by a few extraordinary mortals – if indeed, mortals they be. (26)

My reading of Huxley emphasizes a poetics based on multiple incarnations of self and character existing simultaneously but separated through dialogical interactions. He does not seem to be interested in mortality or immortality but in what we are to do with experience, albeit couched in implicit reference to a higher, perhaps unperceivable reality. And clearly, historical temporality remains important to him. Huxley’s relationship to evolutionary thought is an intimate one, and thus we should pay particular attention to moments in his texts where the “supernumerary nipple,” a signifying mark of the devil in *Malleus Maleficum*, shows up on Loola, one of his characters in the novel (or screenplay in the novel) *Ape and Essence*, set in 2108.

In the novel, Loola is the love interest of Dr. Poole, who overcomes his Calvinist upbringing by falling in love with a wild, post-apocalyptic American woman with three nipples. One could say, in other words, he falls in love with a Salem witch. Huxley suggests that the

the 18<sup>th</sup> Century never evolved a satisfactory explanation of the odd psycho-physiological happenings which, in the past had been explained in terms of demonic possession and magic. In the first decades of the 19th century, students of mesmerism discovered that most of these phenomena could be experimentally produced in the laboratory or consulting room by what is now called hypnotism. (in Starkey xx)

For him, re-enchantment is a kind of rediscovery of phenomena that rationalism could not account for during the Enlightenment. It is with this in mind that I think Huxley has much to offer current thinkers concerning Political Theology and the role of religion in the public sphere.

Pala's religion is both state-sponsored and openly liberal in its emphasis on the individual's natural right to self-enlightenment. Huxley's vision of religion in the state, however, is based upon a deep engagement with the problems of European religious history. As early as *Ape and Essence*, one of his Belial-worshipping characters speculates from the year 2108:

“What if they'd made the best!” squeaks the Arch-Vicar. “Eastern mysticism making sure that Western science should be properly used; the Eastern art of living refining Western energy; Western individualism tempering Eastern totalitarianism.” (137-8)

This of course is a prefiguring of *Island's* content. In *Island*, Huxley expands on the New Thought, saying that immanent religion has been “gathering momentum” since the

nineteenth century. He distinguishes this, however, from the Rani's spiritualism, which is reminiscent of Madame Blavatsky and Theosophy. As early as 1917, Huxley had written his father with his take on Theosophy:

Except for the bunkum about astral bodies, spiritual hierarchies, reincarnation and so forth, theosophy seems to be a good enough religion – its main principles being that all religions contain some truth and that we ought to be tolerant, which is the sort of thing to be encouraged in an Anglican stronghold like this. A little judicious theosophy seems on the whole an excellent thing. (*Letters* 136-7, also cited in *Washington* 312)

Huxley's main disagreements tend to be addressed toward Madame Blavatsky, who was a frequent critic of his grandfather, T. H. Huxley,<sup>31</sup> and this shows up in the character of the Rani in *Island*, who claims to receive messages from the divine and that the role of Pala under her son Murugan will be to help usher in a spiritual revolution. Even though Huxley is not exactly dawning the age of Aquarius, he still shares more with New Thought than he disagrees with it; and he also anticipates environmental and neuro-theological concerns that develop widely after his death. What remains consistent with him is an all-at-once approach to social, political, and behavioral problems that combines training in the sciences and a kind of Vedantic spirituality.

Today we are familiar with the popular and commercial dissemination of these ideas. From yoga studios to television shows like *Lost* and *Fringe*, New Thought's mixture with psychedelic aesthetics is part of our social fabric. What is troubling is that such an obviously present part of our culture is such a sticky issue for both academics and

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<sup>31</sup> Of course, Aldous Huxley famously befriended Jiddu Krishnamurti, who was raised by Theosophists, though his departure from the group (or at least Annie Besant) remained amicable.



politicians in the United States due to a lack of aesthetic awareness. If religion is a touchy subject, just try linking it to the aesthetics of glorification as Giorgio Agamben has done (*The Kingdom and the Glory*). Huxley's literary work the psychedelic works in his lineage have been presenting ideas about how to fuse spirituality and common citizenship for over half a century, yet only in the past decade or so has it become a hot enough topic to try and renegotiate a relationship between spiritual and so-called secular politics. This has accompanied the discussion of sovereignty and the role of political decision-making concerning who decides.

Whether it is a figuration of an "Axis of Evil," trumped-up claims of biological weapons, addressing natural disasters or redefining what constitutes a war or conflict in Libya, political decisions in the U.S. under a state of emergency require halting dialogue in for immediate action. A non-cynical view of sovereignty in the United States rests on the ability for people in charge to act on behalf of the "people." Even for Huxley, this seems to work best at a local level in theory. The reality, however, as it is presented in *Island*, is that power-hungry "Peter Pans" will continue to exercise their lust politically. The only potential for hope, if we are to keep Rorty's liberal utopia in mind, is in the character of Will transcending himself through a psychedelic experience.

Much has been written about the social and political failures of the psychedelic movement. We know that Timothy Leary's attempt to democratize mystical experience had dark side effects, but Huxley of course never went so far as Leary. He always advocated for controlled environments and guides. Nevertheless, we are culturally

saturated with post-psychedelic art, music and literature totally unaware of its place within a critique of western liberal subjectivity. This lack of historical awareness can indeed lead to outlandish and even violent arguments couched in the guise of “freedom.” Psychedelic works demand highly interactive and affective relationships with their audiences and attentive hermeneutic criticism. As with the turn to drama in *Island*, psychedelic aesthetics are participatory in a way that obscures audience and performer, thus obscuring the efficaciousness of irony. Similarly, what Huxley’s characters learn in the “temporary timelessness” of *moksha*-medicine is the ability to distinguish the immediate temporality of the beyond subject-object and the “rational,” left-brained temporality of narrative and subjective experience.

Liberalism inherently relies on and values this experience. Liberalism requires a subject, but subject to what? Increasingly, with the demise and crises of liberal nation states, such nominal imaginaries become less geographic and more virtual. Literature physically manifests these virtual spaces, allowing for communication of ideas. Its role in democratic societies should at least partly be filled by being a realm for potential ideas, especially those ideas that prevent the tendency for us to allow technology, in Huxley’s words, “to take us by surprise” (“Huxley Interviewed”).

Obviously, accompanying such literature must be some sort of hermeneutic apparatus. I have suggested that such a hermeneutic practice with regard to Huxley be modeled on Leo Strauss and Walter Benjamin’s “midrashic.” This means an inter-textual analysis of the thinkers work in its historical context. Carl Schmitt, like Murugan in

*Island*, is nostalgic for a sovereign, and the only way for citizens of a liberal democracy to keep such a sovereign in check is to disseminate power through a ritual of participation. Such a sovereign would retain all decision in terms of legal interpretation. In *Island*, civic participation with *moksha*, based on ancient Vedic practices. It is not the taking of the psychedelic but the appeal to spirituality made accessible by *moksha* that founds citizenship (not that people are required to take the sacrament as in *Brave New World*). Both Huxley and Strauss want to include a wider scope of human history than Schmitt does, and Strauss in particular presents his work in a hermeneutic fashion that is a secularized derivative of midrash. Huxley (Vedic) and Strauss (Judaic – though secularly so) are both able to add religious perspectives to liberal and secular discussions of society that do not rely on transcendent religions' claims to statehood. In this they exemplify Habermas's citizens who "play their part in the endeavors to translate relevant contributions from the religious language into a language that is accessible to the public as a whole" (*Dialectics* 52). Huxley's characters in *Island*, perhaps to an unrealistic extent that I would cede to certain of Huxley's critics, display remarkable cosmopolitanism. The coming violence of industrialization brought about by Murugan's oil-dependency does not take place diagetically in the text, but is an impending fate if nothing can be done.

Huxley's use of dialogue deliberately focuses on a cosmopolitan commitment to education and to discursive environments. However, they are more than simply philosophic dialogues. By using similar characters as figures – Will being both an

allegory for “will” while simultaneously holding a middle name of Asquith, the famous liberal Prime Minister of England and simultaneously a young cynic and writer like Huxley himself, for example – Huxley merges various forms together (17). Will’s transcendence in *Island* is a combination of his own intellectual disillusionment with his life as a journalist in England, his discussions with his new friends and healers as a patient in Pala, his reading of the Old Raja’s *Notes on What’s What*, and his *moksha*-medicine experience. Huxley gives us a discursive platform for discussing immanent religious practice as a positive contribution to liberal democratic society, but he unquestioningly relies on a robust educational system capable of providing a holistic approach to mind-body health and a set of texts throughout the ages of human history as an important tool for tracking progress and avoiding catastrophe. Perhaps this is what we have yet to achieve.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION: RE-ENCHANTMENT AND PSYCHEDELIC  
AESTHETICS

*When secularized citizens act in their role as citizens of the state, they must not deny in principle that religious images of the world have the power to express truth. Nor must they refuse their believing fellow citizens the right to make contributions in a religious language to public debates. Indeed, a liberal political culture can expect that the secularized citizens play their part in the endeavors to translate relevant contributions from the religious language into a language that is accessible to the public as a whole.*  
(51-2)

Jurgen Habermas, *The Dialectics of Secularization* (2006)

*And I dreamed I saw the bombers  
Riding shotgun in the sky,  
And they were turning into butterflies  
Above our nation.*

*We are stardust (million year old  
carbon)  
We are golden (caught in the devil's  
bargain)  
And we've got to get ourselves  
Back to the garden.*

Joni Mitchell, "Woodstock" (1969)

How do we determine the superficial? When people feel deterritorialized, when they lose a sense of place or home, they often re-orient by appealing to the invisible in the form of enchantment. Strict secularist commitment has traditionally seen this as regressive, but that thinking is changing with the questioning of secularization as a grand narrative and what is increasingly being referred to as "post-secular" society. Nation

States have a long history of entanglement with transcendent religions. In “Rethinking the Secular and Religious Aspects of Violence,” Mark Juergensmeyer argues that a rise in religious extremism, “from Islamic jihadist militants to Jewish anti-Arab activists to Christian militia in the United States – the activists involved in these movements are parts of communities that perceive themselves to be fragile, vulnerable, and under siege from a hostile secular world” (185). But at the same time, globalization threatens nation-states with unregulated international space and no existing legal apparatus. Juergensmeyer draws on both Tocqueville and Ninian Smart to make the claim that secular nationalism is itself a religion based on “doctrine, myth, ethics, ritual, experience, and social organization” (198). Secular nationalism’s competition with religions lies in creating the affective conditions to create citizens willing to die or kill for their country. So long as there is no big threat to the State’s need for self-protection, multiplicity of faiths can flourish. But globalization’s threat to nation-state creates the conditions for religious radicalism and nationalism to join forces if necessary. Juergensmeyer writes:

The Frankenstein of religion created in the Enlightenment imagination has risen up to claim the Enlightenment’s proudest achievement, the nation-state. The tragedy is that the challenge to the secular order that emerges from this kind of religious nationalism shakes the foundations of political power in ways that are often strident and violent. (199)

People who are genuinely religious may be turned off by such a ‘worldly’ account of religion as this. Yet from a different angle, R. Scott Appleby, in “Rethinking Fundamentalism in a Secular Age” and relying on Charles Taylor, writes: “Those religious actors who might properly be called fundamentalists cannot be said to be in the

grip of an enchanted world any more than others who are participating in the ongoing construction of modern societies” (236). The idea that enchantment is something atavistic, that it is the pre-modern past coming back to haunt us, I believe, is misguided.

We have been living with the dead alongside us for some time; we have just been refusing to listen. Spectrum based views of the spiritual continue to exist in religions around the world, giving them local identities that are particular and maintaining an enchanted view of the world. The problem is that enchantment itself has not been taken seriously in public discourse dominated by secular habitus *at all gradations of religious experience* – and this is as true with regard to aesthetic study as it is to religion. But enchantment never ceased to exist despite the invention of so-called secular public space.

That said, it is still remarkable that when both “faithless” and “religious” citizens feel their homeland or civil rights are questioned, they quickly find appeals within religious enchantment, as did radicals like Art Kleps, Timothy Leary, and Ram Dass did in the 1960s and 1970s – and certainly also with established religious groups and leaders like the Catholic Workers and the American Friends Service Committee, Thich Nhat Hanh, and the Dalai Lama. Undoubtedly, an appeal to religion in a legal setting is an appeal to self-definition, and the United States has a long history of self-determined religious practice as a civil right, so it makes sense that even at a mundane (that is, for those who really do not want to believe there is such a thing as enchantment) level that United States citizens would turn to enchantment for self-definition. I have argued here that psychedelic aesthetics arise as a way to renew a sense of citizenship beyond the

boundaries of the nation-state. I hesitate to call this a “secular” enchantment. It seems more appropriate to think of enchantment as a necessary balancing force in human affairs – almost a force of nature. As such, psychedelic aesthetics do the affective and cognitive work to establish a sense of place in a deterritorialized reality. Often they manifest as enchanted, but besides the few religions using entheogens regularly, these aesthetics are not institutionalized. They are interstitial, and they come to redefine human life in terms of metempsychosis or reincarnation through a “return” to the perennial. More than ideological, these aesthetics constitute a texture for a habitus that promotes a more porous rather than buffered self in their ongoing critique of modern subjectivity.

Bland critiques of consumerism forget that materialism is both destructive and creative. It is true that crass consumerism feels empty and alienating, and that one-dimensional society has proved to be a threat to liberalism itself. In *Shall the Religious Inherit the Earth?* Eric Kaufmann points to sociologist Daniel Bell’s warning in *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* that

the individualist ethos of modern consumerism would corrode the system [of liberal capitalism] from within, producing a ‘great instauration’ of religion to renew social cohesion and economic productivity. However [Kaufmann notes] modern liberal societies have withstood the breakdown of the family, consumerism and rising crime rates without degenerating into anarchy. (252)

Religion here is a threat to liberal society, but an approach to the issue from an aesthetic perspective where a return to poetics allows for “supreme fictions” to regenerate a sense of civic religion that is *not watered down secularism, but rather seriously attuned to*



*enchantment* gives another answer. “False” gods are as real as “false” consciousnesses, but that is by no means the end of the story.

As the anthropologist and aesthete Michael Taussig has argued with regard to extreme plastic surgery fads in South America and paramilitary groups, calling it “cosmic surgery” (instead of cosmetic surgery), the basic human ability to change “nature” structures consciousness and reality through enchantment. The excessive fascination with the limits of the body that Taussig documents, with drug-lords who wipe their asses with toilet paper that has their initials imprinted in gold on each piece, what is produced is merely an extreme version of an aesthetics that performs itself as an attempt to use technology to merge with nature – a desperate attempt to be one with the divine through excessive signification. In his brilliant earlier work, *The Magic of the State*, Taussig gives a striking account of this with regard to metaphor in relation to aesthetics and citizenship:

Metaphor is, in other words, essential to the artwork by which the sense of the literal is created and power captured. As to the nature of this artwork, the great wheel of meaning is here not only state-based but based on an artistic death in which metaphor auto-destructs giving birth to literality whose realness achieves its emphatic force through being thus haunted. The real is the corpse of figuration for which body-ritual as in spirit-possession is the perfect statement, providing that curious sense of the concrete that figure and metaphor need – while simultaneously perturbing that sense with one of performance and make-believe in the “theatre of literalization.” (186)

This process is determined more by habitus than it is by belief. As Simon Critchley and others have sought a “faith of the faithless” or “supreme fiction” that knows itself to be a fiction, a serious approach to aesthetic enchantment remains constantly necessary in an

age where, as Taylor says, God is one choice among many (as if religion were only about believing in God). Psychedelic aesthetics seek through transfers to performance and self-sacrifice to perform such a ‘theatre of literalization,’ but also a continuation or transmigration of the soul. The “dead corpse” of the “real” releases spirit through making or *poiesis*. But secularists, in their attempt to disengage with spiritual lose their ability to see the power of art as enchanting and, as in the roots of the psychedelic experience, therapeutic.

The quotation I opened this chapter with comes from a dialogue Jurgen Habermas had with the soon-to-be Pope Benedict XVI, then Joseph Ratzinger in 2004. What Habermas calls for in the quotation above is an “ought” after the fact. It is strange to use the language of potentiality for something that happens and has been happening regularly if one chooses to listen at a cultural level aesthetically. Despite any difficulty within the realm of aesthetics to speak in terms of “movements,” the act of interpretation – especially the interpretation involved in translating – remains one of the most useful heuristic strategies for communicating labor (meaningful or not). Interpretation is an ongoing act of political responsibility and deliberation. As a translator of so-called religious language, the so-called “secular citizen” becomes a self-ordained priest and heretic – an officious augur who has lost the ability to read entrails. What would a “post-secular citizen” be?

Habermas’s dialogue with Ratzinger is on the topic of “The Pre-political Moral Foundations of the Free State.” That dialogue speaks to an exigency to come to better

terms with how to deal with the longstanding tension between the faithful and the secular regarding governance and citizenship. Americans will read in this tension much of the motivating force for the foundations of the United States. Despite its “official” secularity, the United States maintains a high percentage of faithful citizens, and faith-based groups play significant roles in political life. Though secular, civic institutions, especially universities, mediate between secular and religious values, it is largely done within an outmoded metonymy or dead metaphor. The “academy” or “university” has until recently stood for a secular institution that embraced modern rationality and scientific reason since the European Renaissance. Thus, when Habermas speaks of the duties of secular citizens, he is speaking simultaneously of the role of the university and the educated as a stronghold of secular knowledge. The university has been the domicile of rationality, in other words. Yet, since postmodern perspectives challenged more traditional notions of rationality, the foundations of the academy have been shaken. Habermas here shows both his ongoing commitment to reason as well as his implication that academic professionals are those “secularized citizens [who ought] play their part in the endeavors to translate relevant contributions from the religious language into a language that is accessible to the public as a whole” (52).

But the fact that both Habermas and Ratzinger maintain a fairly rigid distinction between secular and non-secular or faith-based shows a rather conservative stance with regard to modernity and the role of reason in modernity. For others, postmodernism’s critique of rationality aided the advent of what is being currently called the ‘post-secular.’

This term can have multiple meanings of which two are important here: 1) The perspective that the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have revealed the ways secular politics have continued to rely on theological claims and constructs at the most fundamental levels of laws and states despite claims to separations between politics and religion despite claims to separations between politics and religion. This is Carl Schmitt's claim in *Political Theology*. 2) That because of this, liberal societies should either: A) re-engage at the level of public discourse with religious language (Habermas above) or B) give up on the project of liberalism for not being able to deliver on its original promises. This is by no means a claim that "secularism never happened," nor is "secular" a useless or vacant term. In any case, there has arisen among certain academics a renewed interest in the topic of secularization, particularly with attention to complicating traditional narratives given to it. From an historical vantage point, secularism might be thought of as a mode of practical decision-making that at some point turned a blind eye to deep-seated metaphysical notions. Thus, the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century claims concerning the death of metaphysics come to be seen as an indication of hubris, the kind that historically accompanies the demise of a civilization.

From demographic studies, it seems that Daniel Bell is partially correct. Eric Kaufmann's extensive demographic research shows, at least from a social science perspective, that secularism is on its way out:

Around the world, secular individuals are in the forefront of the shift to below-replacement fertility rates which have swept the West and East Asia and, on UN projections, will encompass the entire planet by 2085. As the sea of humanity

drains away, it will expose resistant fundamentalist well-springs – the future of our species. (252)

If “the sea of humanity” is draining away, then humans (who apparently are “other” to fundamentalists for Kaufmann, although I think he is referring to humanism’s relationship to liberalism here) need an account of their death and perhaps an account of their rebirth or life after death. Psychedelic aesthetics do not fulfill this, but they offer a starting-place for deliberation about humanity’s future, particularly as legal definitions strive to figure out just exactly what humans are, when life begins and ends, and humanity’s place in nature.

The boldest claim I will make, then, as I end this preliminary study is that psychedelic aesthetics can help us to realize that, in terms of emerging international law, which is currently held back by the resistance of nation-states to face their own inhumanity, what defines the human is expanded beyond logos and the capacity to reason and language, and so we must attempt to legally define human life in terms of metempsychosis and reincarnation. This requires that we take enchantment seriously in whatever form it exists in the post-secular era, but that we also give attention to the ways it works in aesthetic works of the past. For what does a legal definition mean in a space with no “law”? I believe *the answer is an aesthetic one*, although recent research in brain science with regard to psychedelics may offer more fact-based and less hermeneutic answers, more inartistic proofs.

To a post-secular perspective, a reconciliation between scientific knowledge and faith has no particularly reassuring appeal, however, because secularism never completely broke away from metaphysics in the first place. Cognitive and disciplinary divides between the “humanities” and “sciences” are thus archaic and regressive. At the same time, a post-secular perspective need not deny social progress occurring as a result of beliefs in secular politics. Acknowledging enchantment gives a fuller picture rather than marking an attempt to simply return to the pre-modern. To use the terms of psychedelic aesthetics: every trip ends, and the question is what to do with the information you learned. In other words, embedded in the notion of post-secularity is a possibility to deliberate on how things could be better. Like the “post” of postmodernism, post-secularism is not a complete rejection of secularism; it is both an extension and a deep critique of the dogmatic slumber that accompanies the unexamined acceptance of secularity. It is this perspective, combined with Habermas’s charge for academics to adopt a communicative response regarding religious language and the public, which has in large part motivated this project. However, this project also takes issue with exclusively institutional approaches to perspectives. It does not work, for example, to speak in terms of a binary between religious and secular, or church and state, just as it does little good to speak broadly in terms of Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, or Judaism. Liberalism continues to affect such notions. In *Shopping for Faith*, Don Lattin claims that in the twenty-first century,

for many Americans spirituality has become a private affair. Rather than gathering in religious congregations, millions of seekers curl up at home with the

latest self-help book or inspirational tome. Instead of coming together Saturday at the synagogue or Sunday at church, they pray and meditate in their own private temples. Private religion and our dizzying array of spiritual choices can put us all in “little boxes,” isolated from one another. (5)

But clearly, religion is not just a “private issue” either. Public and private do not work as a binary any more than sacred and profane. Religious enchantment must be thought anew, with attention to humans’ aesthetic ability to transport out of themselves and to return from that transport. Even if this is only done figuratively, through artistic works, that sensibility will, if Taussig is correct, appear in the “theatre of literalization.” We have a cultural archive of this with respect to the 1960s and psychedelic aesthetics.

The second quotation above from Joni Mitchell’s “Woodstock” illustrates a popular and secular perspective that presents a value-laden call to action. The speaker of the song comes upon “a child of God” while walking down a road. She asks him where he’s going and he responds, “I’m going on down to Yasger’s farm / I’m gonna join in a rock and roll band / I’m gonna camp out on the land / I’m gonna try to get my soul free.” She joins the traveler and because, “I’ve come here to lose the smog / and I feel to be a cog in something turning.” As the famous song goes, “by the time we got to Woodstock, we were half a million strong and everywhere there was song and celebration.” Each narrative event is punctuated by the refrain (or chorus): “We are stardust, we are golden, and we’ve got to get ourselves back to the garden.” Refrains work in songs to deterritorialize space. As Peter Doyle writes, “for Deleuze and Guattari, the creation of territory is the very function of the refrain, and the disconnection of refrains from their territory – their deterritorialization – is what they call music” (17).

Mitchell's songwriting, and that of many of her peers, already evidences a post-secular engagement with religion and citizenship, but their cultural status occupies a space of public vacancy even as their music continues to broadcast on airwaves, iTunes and the web. It is not their status as low or popular art that prevents public meaning; it is a lack of belief in the enchanting power of aesthetics and art as a whole. Artists like Mitchell and the writers I have discussed here have been doing the work that Habermas points to for quite sometime, and it is the inability of the academy to really account for the kind of worship-leading these artists did, especially in a non-nostalgic way. In other words, I am not saying we should just turn on some tunes and relax (nor, let me be frank, am I suggesting we get high).

Because many accounts of the 1960s have come from people who lived through them, existing studies tend to take on a self-referential quality at the expense of more "serious" scholarly approaches. The writer's nostalgia becomes easily conflated with the romantic nostalgia inherent in the aesthetic products. When examining Joni Mitchell's "Woodstock" we notice the perennial theme of returning to the garden. In itself the biblical allusion is diluted by the secularity of the context. But if we take the song seriously, we must look at the political message. Mitchell's song is messianic. It is a knowledgeable return, a way of escaping being "caught in the devil's bargain." In joining the traveler to Yasger's farm, a Gnostic knowledge arises and then spreads. A similar return occurs in the Beatles' "Get Back": "Jojo was a man who thought he was a loner, but he knew it couldn't last. Jojo left his home in Tucson, Arizona, bought some



California grass.” Like Mitchell’s “Woodstock,” we see a leaving home to overcome alienation, a deterritorialization to find a more primordial home; “Get back to where you once belonged.” Both songs evoke a special kind of nostalgia. In the literary analysis we can transcend the fact that Joni Mitchell wrote “Woodstock” because she herself could not attend the event or that Paul McCartney may have been writing about leaving his own Arizona home for his native England. These are popular songs that enchant space. That is what songs do and how art works across multiple mediums.

And so I have implicitly pointed toward the next phase of this project, a musical accompaniment. But in a way here I have attempted to interpret literature as a kind of listening. At the level of the literary, there is a transcendence of the personal experience of the author into the space of culture. In psychedelic aesthetics, as Joni Mitchell plainly states, this means a return to the perennial. This means reading literature with a sense of hearing – and I am not talking about beat poetry or projective verse, though they may be informed by this – but rather the associative and allusive reading that I presented with regard to Huxley in my last chapter. I have compared this kind of reading to the “midrashic” qualities expressed by Walter Benjamin and Leo Strauss (which expressed more fully in my appendix). It is a reading of literature as enchantment itself – a space where divination occurs, when there is nothing left to do but draw straws. Literature read as metempsychosis can help organize the “lawless” space of the international, a hermeneutic space of ordering in states of exception.

There is certainly precedence for this reading in existing literary criticism. Earlier, I addressed poststructural criticism as being informed by psychedelic aesthetics. For so many of these thinkers, writing and death are intimately connected. In Roland Barthes' famous "Death of the Author" essay he calls for the birth of the reader and "scripter" or "writer" replaces author – an abdication of sovereignty of meaning, this is as intentional an immersion into the perennial as dropping 250mgs of acid. But it also implies a hermeneutic. Like Roland Barthes, Umberto Eco's *The Open Work* concerns itself with a collision between reader and "work" in the sense that "every reception of a work of art is both an *interpretation* of it and a *performance* of it, because in every reception of the work takes on a fresh perspective for itself," and even though this does not exactly define an "open work" in Eco's definition (his more formulated conception of the open work is better suited for musical analysis), what is important here is the emphasis on the audience, on reception as a recurring move in the psychedelic era. In their attempts to resist closure, "the open work" and the process-oriented works of the indeterminist composers and, for example, the New York School poets<sup>32</sup> are psychedelic in the sense that they challenge liberal subjectivity with respect to open form.

In Marjorie Perloff's seminal study of *The Poetics of Indeterminacy* (1981), she emphasizes contrast over continuity between modernist or symbolist poets like Eliot with New York School poets like John Ashbery and Frank O'Hara, arguing that the distinction has been glossed-over by American critics who had not given sufficient attention to

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<sup>32</sup> I have an analysis of process poetry in *Toward an Ethical Aesthetic*.

European thought. Tracing a distinct lineage from Rimbaud to John Cage, she argues that “the symbolic evocations generated by words on the page are no longer grounded in a coherent discourse, so that it becomes impossible to decide which of these associations are relevant and which are not. This is the ‘undecideability’ [or indeterminacy] of the text” (18). Again here we see transference from meaning grounded in the text (or the author’s intentional system) to the gaze of the reader, yet Perloff attributes the decision to the text itself. This is a thinly disguised “enchanted view” of texts that also happens in deconstructive criticism where the text decenters itself without even the necessary gaze of a reader. Such personification is not problematic with regard to psychedelic aesthetics. Perloff’s reading performs the text’s participatory call that more open and psychedelic works evangelistically make. It is not that previous works do not do this, but there is an intensification of the necessity to participate with texts from the 1960s.

Perloff also reviews the work of Roger Cardinal’s historical narrative of modern art moving toward mysteriousness (29) and Northrop Frye (39) on associative verse, eventually using the terms “language art” and “word system” to replace “poetry.” All of these moves break open a metaphysical grounding either in the text or in the author’s mind, allowing for intertextuality between writers over time not based on a “center” of literary allusion or symbol, freeing text from the constraint of meaning, and requiring heightened participation by the reader in the ethereal space presented. There is a movement from a unified perspective or “I” that overcomes its distinction with the world as other. The “non-I” dissimulates into a cultural ether of intertextuality with which the

reader participates, thereby dissimulating his or her “self” through the act of participation. This is equivalent to the space of the perennial I have discussed with respect to psychedelic aesthetics.

This necessitates thinking of aesthetics beyond meaning simply “of the senses,” which again is essentially what Perloff argues in *The Poetics of Indeterminacy*. It requires regarding form in the sense of its artificial and fictive qualities, as an imposition of measure itself that leads to the rupture of such measurement. In this sense we can begin to re-invoke the spiritual or enchanted qualities of reading as a kind of channeling. In this way we can more readily understand Maurice Blanchot in *The Space of Literature* while claiming that both creating the work and interpreting it are kinds of channeling.

A work is only a work when it becomes the intimacy shared by someone who writes it and someone who reads it, a space violently opened up by the contest between the power to speak and the power to hear. And the one who writes is, as well, one who has ‘heard’ the interminable and incessant, who has heard it as speech, has entered into understanding with it, has lived with its demand [...] He has mastered it by imposing measure. (37)

The reader too, in the psychedelic sense, hears the call and imposes measure after the “violent contest” accompanying the return to a “state of nature” through the process of dissimulation and de-territorialization. The reader too imposes measure, but it is not isolated to the particular text. It exists in the vortex of human culture.

The imposition of measure is the temporary and unstable, fragile necessity of life. It is indeed an ethical task to draw limits, and we must “beware of Mad John” whether he is the New Age beatnik in the Small Faces song or an enchanted Baptist in the desert. As I noted in my introduction, religious theorists like Carl Raschke in *The Interruption of*

*Eternity* have warned of the dilution of history by 1960s New Age Gnosticism. As we look to psychedelic aesthetics in order to decipher their contributions to a “supreme fiction” of final belief, we return from the “trip” and try to make sense of it after the fact. We are, as Martin Heidegger says, “thrown” into this life, but it is a life surrounded by, shaped by, and informed by the dead among us. But he also says that culture helps us forget our own death. For Heidegger, being-toward-death is anticipation, fore-running, scouting out up to my death to project myself into my “ownmost” possibility of being. Therefore, anticipation shows itself as the possibility of authentic existence, seizing hold resolutely of my possibilities as my own – the possibility of being ripped away from “the they” and individualized. My death would then be my most prized possession in the uniqueness of its experience. But we all die...and some of us more than once.

Gone are the days of Stonehenge and the valley of the Kings, where sacred and profane, death and life could be separated. And as it appears that the nation-state’s affinity with transcendent religion must, in the phrase of Bishop Spong, “change or die,” something else must be accounted for. The dead are among us and hover in the enchanted and immanent space of culture, which fabricates and constructs us and our bodies in incarnations over time until we all go home. But life here need not, and should not be confined to a being-toward-death – if only because this world goes on, because most of us will *not* reach enlightenment in this life. Psychedelic aesthetics point to a perennial, ongoing hum, an “Om.” In this space, listening is necessary.

At this point I perhaps sound sufficiently “enchanted,” and yet as I revise I am aware that last week the United States Department of State announced the formation of a new office of “religious engagement.” A wide collection of differing scholars’ views on this currently headlines *The Immanent Frame*, a blog inspired by Charles Taylor’s *A Secular Age*. Opinions span the entire spectrum. Many are concerned that there is no agreed upon working definition for religion. Others applaud it as a way to create more religious tolerance and awareness. In any case, we live in an age where enchantment is being negotiated at the level of the state. It appears to me that many mistakes will be made regarding interpretation and agreement on terms and policy decisions. In these discussions, as with aesthetic interpretation, my suggestion can only be that we allow a mental space for people to try again after they have failed, and that this conception be regarded with our definitions of ourselves as a species – not as a metaphysics so much as practical deliberation.

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