

HIGH NEW YORK  
THE BIRTH OF A PSYCHEDELIC SUBCULTURE IN THE AMERICAN CITY

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## ABSTRACT

The consumption of LSD and similar psychedelic drugs in New York City led to a great deal of cultural innovations that formed a unique psychedelic subculture from the early 1960s onwards. Historians and other commentators have offered conflicting views on this phenomenon by using either an epidemiological approach or by giving drug users more agency. The present study sides with the latter category to offer a new social history of LSD, but problematizes this topic in a sophisticated way by understanding psychedelic drug use as a social fact that in turn produces meaning for its consumers. It analyses the multiple cultural features of psychedelia through the lenses of politics, science, religion, and art, but also looks at the utopian and radical off-shoots of that subculture. To balance this thematic approach, it historicises the subculture by analysing its early days and discussing its origins, and then by pointing to the factors that led to its metamorphosis towards the end of the 1960s. In order to give LSD consumers a clearer voice, this dissertation is based on memoirs, correspondence and interviews that are used to balance press coverage gleaned from archival collections. With this wide array of primary sources supplemented by up-to-date secondary literature, it argues that the use of LSD and psychedelics led to a rich subculture that can be explained by the inherent complexity of the psychedelic experience. In turn, the plurality of opinions regarding the meaning and purposes of the experience led to tensions and polarisations within the large subculture, as well as with other drug subcultures and outsiders leery of illicit drug use. In doing so, this dissertation contributes to the social history of illicit substance consumption and adds to the fields of urban history and the history of subcultures, and makes a case for understanding LSD and psychedelics as a unique category of forbidden drugs that differ vastly in their cultural meaning from other drugs.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

BDAC: Bureau of Drug Abuse Control

DMT: Dimethyltryptamine

FDA: Food and Drug Administration

IF-IF: International Foundation for Internal Freedom

LSD: Lysergic Acid Diethylamide-25

MDMA: 3,4-methylenedioxy-methamphetamine

NIDA: National Institute for Drug Abuse

NYU: New York University

STP: 2,5-Dimethoxy-4-methylamphetamine

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# Introduction

## Historicizing LSD and Psychedelics

The psychedelic drug Lysergic Acid Diethylamide-25, better-known as LSD, was invented in 1938 by the Swiss chemist Albert Hofmann<sup>1</sup> and soon after used by American intelligence agents hoping to find the ultimate Cold War truth-serum.<sup>2</sup> Psychiatrists saw potential in LSD for treating mental illness and substance abuse.<sup>3</sup> In the 1960s, and particularly in the second part of the decade, a small but increasingly visible segment of Americans experimented with the drug and created a distinctive psychedelic subculture (psychedelia). At its heart were certain influential individuals, such as the one-time Harvard professors Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert (later known as Baba Ram Dass after his pilgrimage to India), whose associations with LSD formed part of what has become known as the “psychedelic movement.”<sup>4</sup> This movement sought to radically revamp American culture by touting LSD as

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<sup>1</sup> Albert Hofmann, *LSD, My Problem Child: Reflections on Sacred Drugs, Mysticism and Science* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980).

<sup>2</sup> John Marks, “Intelligence or ‘Witches’ Potion,” in *The Search for the “Manchurian Candidate”: The CIA and Mind Control: The Secret Story of Behavioural Sciences* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988), 54-130.

<sup>3</sup> Erika Dyck, *Psychedelic Psychiatry: LSD: From Clinic to Campus* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008). For a substantial list of publications on psychedelic therapies, see Torsten Passie, *Psycholytic and Psychedelic Therapy Research 1931-1995: A Complete International Bibliography* (Hannover, NJ: Laurentius Publishers, 1997). For further elements of discussion on the history of psychedelic psychiatry, see Steven J. Novak, “LSD before Leary: Sidney Cohen’s Critique of 1950s Psychedelic Drug Research,” *Isis* 88, no. 1 (1997): 87–110; Matthew Oram, “Efficacy and Enlightenment: LSD Psychotherapy and the Drug Amendments of 1962,” *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 69, no. 2 (2012): 221–50.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Connors, *White Hand Society: The Psychedelic Partnership of Timothy Leary and Allen Ginsberg* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2010); Don Lattin, *The Harvard Psychedelic Club: How Timothy Leary, Ram Dass, Huston Smith, and Andrew Weil Killed the Fifties and Ushered in a New Age for America* (New York: HarperOne, 2011); Chris Elcock, “From Acid Revolution to Entheogenic Evolution: Psychedelic Philosophy in the Sixties and Beyond,” *Journal of American Culture* 36, no. 4 (2013): 296–311.



a magic bullet: given the right environment and psychological circumstances, the drug, they argued, could trigger a blissful and life-changing experience through which users could gain new ontological insights.

The alleged revelatory power of the experience had the potential to create tight bonds between users and formed a broad psychedelic subculture that sometimes openly criticized the American dream and sought alternative ways of life in which LSD use played an important part. For some groups, psychedelic drugs became part of their lifestyle and were understood as having a significant hedonistic, therapeutic, or even spiritual value.<sup>5</sup> Figures, such as the writer Aldous Huxley, left long-lasting and influential cultural traces of their practises and produced literature for the psychedelic culture seeking philosophical and spiritual guidelines for their use of LSD.<sup>6</sup>

Authorities successfully banned LSD in the United States in 1968 and later discredited its main advocates in an effort to quash the burgeoning movement. LSD continued to be used recreationally<sup>7</sup> but the new legislation ended psychedelic research or, in some instances, drove

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<sup>5</sup> Timothy Miller, "The Ethics of Dope," in *The Hippies and American Values* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 23-51. For other elements of discussion on the religious dimension of LSD and psychedelics, see Robert C. Fuller, "Psychedelics and the Metaphysical Illumination," in *Stairways to Heaven: Drugs in American Religious History* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2000), 51-89; Jeffrey J. Kripal, "Mind Manifest: Psychedelia at Esalen and Beyond," in *Esalen: America and the Religion of No Religion* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 115-134.

<sup>6</sup> Aldous Huxley's writings remain arguably the most articulate reports on the psychedelic experience. See in particular Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception and Heaven and Heaven and Hell* (New York: Harper, 2004). For other important classics, see Allan Watts, *The Joyous Cosmology* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1962); Timothy Leary, Ralph Metzner, and Richard Alpert, *The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead* (New York: Kensington, 1992). For a zany and highly iconoclastic example of psychedelic spirituality, see Art Kleps, *The Boo Hoo Bible: The Neo-American Church Catechism* (San Cristobal, NM: Toad Books, 1971).

<sup>7</sup> Leigh A. Henderson and William J. Glass, eds., *LSD: Still with Us after all these Years* (New York: Lexington Books, 1994).

therapists underground.<sup>8</sup> Since the 1990s, however, psychedelic research has shown signs of renewal<sup>9</sup> and several writers are calling for an end of the prohibition on psychedelic substances by arguing that it is a form of religious persecution.<sup>10</sup>

Although psychedelia has a rich and complex history, understanding of LSD use and the psychedelic movement has been plagued by several issues. Many scholars and other commentators examining this topic have been somewhat hasty in their interpretations and assessments of the possibility that LSD was indeed at the heart of a complex social and cultural movement that in some cases sought to radically change American society. Understandings have often opposed those who saw LSD as an embarrassing footnote of the 1960s social movements and dismissed its users as deluded, and those (usually historians of religion) who have taken seriously claims of chemical enlightenment, and thus paid much closer attention to the meaning ascribed to drug use.

Writing almost immediately after the 1960s, the conservative historian William O'Neill, in his *Coming Apart*, painted a negative picture of Sixties psychedelia, equating it with subversion of parental authority, laughing off the notion that “drugs promoted peace, wisdom, and unity with the universe,” and referring to Leary and his close companion Alpert

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<sup>8</sup> See for example Myron Stolaroff, ed., *The Secret Chief: Conversations with a pioneer of the underground psychedelic therapy movement* (Charlotte: MAPS, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> For a lay overview of this renaissance, see Ben Sessa, *The Psychedelic Renaissance: Reassessing the Role of Psychedelic Drugs in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Psychiatry and Society* (London: Muswell Hill Press, 2012). For an anthropological problematization of this phenomenon, see Nicolas Langlitz, *Neuropsychedelia: The Revival of Hallucinogen Research since the Decade of the Brain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> Chris Elcock, “The Fifth Freedom: The Politics of Psychedelic Patriotism,” *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 9, no. 2 (2015), 17-40. Many essays articulate this in Robert Forte, ed., *Entheogens and the Future of Religion* (San Francisco: CSP, 1997). See also the documentary by Rob Mann, “Entheogen: Awakening the Divine Within” (DVD, Critical Mass Project, 2006). The word “entheogen” (that which generates the divine from within) is a fairly recent alternative to the word “psychedelic” (mind-manifesting). It has been used to clothe the use of these substances with religious meaning and move away from the 1960s psychedelic heritage embodied by Leary.

as “propagandists” running a “drug cult.”<sup>11</sup> Granted, O’Neill had limited historical perspective, but even then, he was strikingly at odds with Sixties psychedelia. Upon closer inspection, though, it appeared that O’Neill was repudiating not just the 1960s drug counter-culture, but the whole 1960s decade, which he understood as an era of excess and failures that undermined social order - a widespread trend in the 1960s historiography that sees the decade through the lenses of fracture and disintegration.<sup>12</sup> It is thus not surprising that he saw LSD consumption as a form of licentious hedonism.

On the more liberal side of the political spectrum, social commentators have been just as suspicious of psychedelics and their supposed power to induce a chemical revolution that would change the world for the better. Theodore Roszak, for instance, who was instrumental in popularising the word “counter-culture” in his 1969 book *The Making of a Counter-Culture* that chronicles the rise of a resentful youth-driven counter-culture, became an important critic of modernity, by taking issue with what he called the “technocratic order” that led individuals to embrace a highly mechanized existence dictated by a high level of expertise. Though this expressed some of the sentiments of the psychedelic counter-culture itself,<sup>13</sup> Roszak was clearly at odds with LSD and its hedonistic potential. Indeed, when assessing the role of the

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<sup>11</sup> William O’Neill, *Coming Apart: An Informal History of America in the 1960’s* (New York: Times Books, 1971), 173, [http://www.erowid.org/library/books\\_online/coming\\_apart.pdf](http://www.erowid.org/library/books_online/coming_apart.pdf) (accessed August 3, 2010).

<sup>12</sup> As Michal Heale points out, the title of O’Neill’s book and main theme of “coming apart” has left a durable mark on the scholarship. For another example, see Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). For fuller discussions on 1960s historiography, see M. J. Heale, “The Sixties as History: A Review of the Political Historiography,” *Reviews in American History* 33, no. 1 (2005): 133–52; Simon Hall, “Framing the American 1960s: A Historiographical Review,” *European Journal of American Culture* 31, no. 1 (2012): 5–23.

<sup>13</sup> The relationship between the counter-culture and science, however, is far more complex. Some writers have made the argument that the 1960s counter-culture, partly assisted by LSD, was instrumental in fermenting ground-breaking ideas for science and technology. See for example John Markoff, *What the Dormouse Said: How the Sixties Counter-culture Shaped the Personal Computer Industry* (New York: Penguin, 2006); David Kaiser, *How the*

psychedelic movement within the counter-culture, he compared the drug to a can-opener: something that could be commercialized and presented as a life-changing gimmick, but in the end, that steered rebels away from a genuine revolution.<sup>14</sup> Here too, the hedonistic dimension of the psychedelic experience played a crucial role in how scholars reflected upon it in the aftermath of the various social movements of the 1960s.

The lack of historical context has continued to polarize the scholarship on psychedelics.<sup>15</sup> In a recent account of the Sixties, the historian Gerard DeGroot laments that “the decade has been transformed into a morality play, an explanation of how the world went astray or, conversely, how hope was squandered. Problems with the present are blamed on myths of the past.”<sup>16</sup> This politicization has been felt in the way psychedelic drug use has often been treated in the scholarship. Some Sixties historians, have tried to address this issue. In a book tellingly titled *Making Peace with the Sixties*, David Burner calls on liberals and conservatives alike to stop politicizing the Sixties and sets out instead to examine the decade without repudiating or romanticizing it. Analysis has not merely been clouded by the opposition between conservative and liberal commentators, but by a lack of credit given to counter-cultural messages. The same goes for LSD and psychedelics, even though psychedelic drug use led to extravagant ideas and attitudes on the surface. In his book, Burner does not examine the patterns of drug-use in the Sixties, but at least openly he does invite other historians to do so.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, the political scientist Mark Oppenheimer wonders what made

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*Hippies Saved the Physics: Science Counterculture, and the Quantum Revival* (New York: Norton, 2012).

<sup>14</sup>Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter-culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and its Youthful opposition* (New York: Doubleday, 1969), 160. The term “contraculture” was first coined by the sociologist John Milton Yinger in 1960.

<sup>15</sup> See Heale, “The Sixties as History” for more on this notion.

<sup>16</sup> Gerard DeGroot, *The Sixties Unplugged: A Kaleidoscopic History of a Disorderly Decade* (London: MacMillan, 2008), 1.

<sup>17</sup> David Burner, *Making Peace with the 60s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 11.

the Sixties decade what it was and contends that “your list would probably include civil rights, feminism, free speech, hippies, and drug culture.”<sup>18</sup> Like Burner, he chooses to say very little about psychedelics in the Sixties, but considers them an integral part of the decade.

Although hindsight has allowed the scholarship to move away from its polarized and ideologized memories, contemporary accounts and reflections on the cultural impact of LSD have been just as dismissive when assessing its role in fostering a revolutionary social movement. DeGroot indeed devotes a brief chapter to the psychedelic movement in an account that attempts to move away from the canonical interpretations of the decade by offering a broad series of snapshots, rather than an overarching narrative. He explicitly seeks to transcend the liberal/conservative interpretations that have plagued Sixties scholarship by departing from the classical narratives and balancing them with other events that have often been left out.<sup>19</sup> The greater purpose of this tome is to shatter the myths associated with the period and to ultimately argue that the Sixties have been unjustly romanticized: “Cast aside the rose-tinted spectacles and we see mindless mayhem, shallow commercialism, and unbridled cruelty.”<sup>20</sup> Although his corrective approach is commendable, its provocative and sardonic tone has the unfortunate tendency of often lapsing into cynicism, and it is hardly surprising that he should view the psychedelic movement as nothing short of an embarrassment. Much like O’Neill, DeGroot finds the idea of chemically induced revolution quite preposterous and understands LSD use as a source of falsely-subversive hedonism, as

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<sup>18</sup> Mark Oppenheimer, *Knocking on Heaven’s Door: American Religion in the Age of Counterculture* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2003), 2.

<sup>19</sup> DeGroot, *The Sixties Unplugged*, 208-215. To attack the romance of radical politics and the faith in youthful revolution, DeGroot focuses on international events such as the Six-day war, Sukarno’s rise to power in Indonesia, or the assassination of Patrice Lumumba in Congo. On a domestic level, he does well to balance the impact of New Left politics by alluding to the rise of the New Right embodied by Ronald Reagan. Others still have taken issue with the conceptualization of the Sixties as a special decade. See for instance Tor Egil Førland, “Cutting the Sixties Down to Size: Conceptualizing, Historicizing, Explaining,” *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 9, no. 2 (2015): 125–48.

his final analysis testifies: “Taking LSD was a selfish act which allowed escape from reality.”<sup>21</sup>

Other analysts of the counter-culture have been equally mystified by notions of drug-induced revolution. In *The Rebel Sell*,<sup>22</sup> Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter, allegedly liberal authors, have argued that from the postwar period onwards, critics of the established cultural order have failed to realize that any counter-cultural attempt to find alternatives to the dominant capitalist model is doomed to fail because they do not realize that the greatest strength of capitalism is its capacity to perpetually re-cycle its sternest critics. For example, a Che Guevara t-shirt can arguably display a powerful symbol of revolutionary action, but it likely has been manufactured in a Chinese sweatshop. Their provocative argument, however, is too often forced and ultimately lacks balance and support. Indeed, when discussing Jean Baudrillard's critique of the “gadget” as the embodiment of planned obsolescence and consumerism, and when examining his example of the variable-speed windscreen wipers as a gadget, they merely enquire rhetorically: “Who would buy a car today that *didn't* have variable-speed windscreen wipers?”<sup>23</sup> The shortcoming of their approach, which also descends into cynicism too often, is apparent in their treatment of the psychedelic movement. Indeed, without developing an argument to refute such an idea, they merely point to the obvious absurdity of taking drugs to change society. They equate drug-use with a form of childish civil

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<sup>20</sup> DeGroot, 2.

<sup>21</sup> DeGroot, 214.

<sup>22</sup> Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter, *The Rebel Sell: How the Counterculture Became Consumer Culture* (Chichester, UK: Capstone, 2006). For a similar but more penetrative analysis, see Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1998).

<sup>23</sup> Heath and Potter, 107.

disobedience, and are just as dismissive towards cannabis smokers: “Marijuana users are about the most boring people on earth to talk to.”<sup>24</sup>

It seems that regardless of political bias and in spite of the historical perspective on the assessment of psychedelic drug use, commentators have been at least suspicious of the psychedelic movement and LSD use in some of the literature and have failed to take seriously some of the dominant discourses of psychedelic drug users. These authors have treated LSD use with suspicion and questioned the legitimacy of the psychedelic movement and in some cases have relied on the reader’s common sense, rather than thoughtful arguments, to dismiss it as obvious delusion. Several explanations can be advanced, but the likeliest is the long-lasting suspicion of certain psychoactive substances in the Western world that may have influenced the scholarship. In one of the early social histories of drugs, the late journalist Brian Inglis<sup>25</sup> describes how some of those substances, upon discovery by travellers and settlers in the early colonial stages, were initially condemned by the Church or by the State on religious, social, or economic grounds, only to become integrated by society later on – tea, coffee and tobacco, being the cases in point.<sup>26</sup> Other drugs were less fortunate: the cases of kava-kava in Haiti, “magic mushrooms” in Mexico, peyote cacti in California, Oklahoma and Mexico, or coca leaves in the Andes, along with western use of mandrake, henbane, or

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<sup>24</sup> Heath and Potter, 62. This is of course a rather bold charge against the average user, never mind writers like Charles Baudelaire or Théophile Gauthier.

<sup>25</sup> Brian Inglis, *The Forbidden Game: A Social History of Drugs* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), <http://www.druglibrary.org/schaffer/lsd/inglis.htm> (accessed August 4, 2010).

<sup>26</sup> One of the major contributors to the history of drugs also makes this point. See David T. Courtwright, *Forces of Habit: Drugs and the Making of the Modern World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001). For some works that examine how boundaries that separate licit from illicit psychoactive substance consumption have shifted over time, see Sarah W. Tracy and Caroline Jean Acker, eds., *Altering American Consciousness: The History of Alcohol and Drug Use in the United States, 1800-2000* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004); Jordan Goodman, Paul E. Lovejoy, and Andrew Sheratt, eds., *Consuming Habits: Drugs in History and Anthropology* (London: Routledge, 2007).

belladonna to induce trance states, all spring to mind. Western religious institutions tended to view mind-altering practices as work of the Devil and/or as a form of idle hedonism.<sup>27</sup> Indeed the trance states induced by psilocybin (the chief psychoactive agent of mushrooms) and mescaline (the chief psychoactive agent of peyote) were particularly disturbing to the outsiders. To most settlers, it was impossible that God was addressing heathens, and Inglis contends that “As it was not considered safe to investigate the Devil's handiwork, for fear of falling into his clutches - or, later, the Inquisition's - the opportunity to investigate drug-induced divination was not grasped.”<sup>28</sup>

When the first Westerners started taking interest in exotic substances however, the scientific paradigm of the Western world had increasingly shifted towards positivism and away from religious dogma. The birth of modern social anthropology in the mid-to-late 19<sup>th</sup> century favoured scientific expeditions to study non-Western cultures, some of which were reported as using mind-altering substances. Still, this favourable climate had its limits: reports of shamans and witch-doctors communicating with the world of the dead were met with scorn and ridicule in the scientific community. For instance, Edward Tylor, one of the founding fathers of modern anthropology, believed that publishing reports of divination, supernatural ecstasy, or soul-flight would equate to academic suicide. Added to that, any form of in-depth research was generally hampered by the religious and political hostility of the colonial forces in place that saw such practices as either pagan drug cults or a threat to the authority of the colonial administrators.<sup>29</sup>

But slowly mentalities changed. In the 1920s, anthropologists began to undertake intensive fieldwork: they would stay with a culture long enough to gain the trust of the group

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<sup>27</sup> The case of kava-kava is particularly relevant to illustrate the repression of “hedonism.” See Inglis, 39-41.

<sup>28</sup> Inglis, 7.

<sup>29</sup> Inglis, 10.



they were studying. In his work on the Azande of Sudan published in 1937, Edward Evans-Pritchard gave the analysis of witchcraft and altered states of consciousness more credibility. Simultaneously, Freud's theories on the unconscious mind were gaining wider acceptance, and this lent further impetus to the study of the witch-doctor/shaman complex.<sup>30</sup> More importantly, in 1936, Richard Evans Schultes, considered to be one of the founders of ethnobotany, became the first American to participate in a peyote ritual with the Kiowa Indians of Oklahoma.<sup>31</sup>

But while Schultes's adventures represented a breakthrough in American anthropology, empirical knowledge of those rituals was confined to that field, which since has been the main academic discipline to investigate the social import of psychedelics. Indeed, drug-induced shamanism and witchcraft in non-Western cultures have been the focus of scores of publications in ethnobotany. For example, the Mitsogo of Gabon use iboga (*Tabernanthe iboga*) in a rite of passage;<sup>32</sup> Native American Indians in some Southern states of the US use peyote in religious ceremonies;<sup>33</sup> the Iquitos Indians of Peru use ayahuasca in healing rituals.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the simple fact that psychedelics are used in other cultures should be enough, on the one hand, to examine the patterns of use of LSD in the Sixties, and on the other hand, to thoroughly assess the claims that psychedelics could change society in a meaningful way. Since the cultures that use psychedelics are fundamentally different from the

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<sup>30</sup> Inglis, 11.

<sup>31</sup> Schultes later co-authored a classic with Albert Hofmann, *Plants of the Gods: Origins of Hallucinogenic Use* (New York: McGrath Hill, 1979).

<sup>32</sup> Julien Bonhomme, "Les ancêtres et le disque dur: Visions d'iboga en Noir et Blanc," in *Ethnologie des usages contemporains des substances végétales psychotropes*, ed. Sébastien Baud and Christian Ghasarian (Neuchâtel, CH: Université de Neuchâtel, 2008), 313-336, <http://julienbonhomme.ethno.free.fr/Texts/AncetresDisqueDur.pdf> (accessed August 9, 2015).

<sup>33</sup> Omer C. Stewart, "Peyotism in California," *Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology* 8, no. 2 (1986): 217-225.

Western World, it is perfectly reasonable to listen to the people who thought that these substances could deeply transform American society.

The historical study of LSD and psychedelic drug use has also been plagued by a form of stigma quite similar to the way early anthropological investigators were treated with suspicion for taking interest in drug-induced altered states of consciousness. In her history of psychedelic psychiatry in Saskatchewan, Erika Dyck acknowledges that her interest in the topic was often met with causal suggestions that such an interest could only stem from her personal drug use.<sup>35</sup> During the course of my own research, I too was often asked if I had tried LSD. The implication here is that an interest in and indeed an expertise of psychedelic drug use could only be the logical result of personal experimentation. Thus, it is also likely that the topic has often elicited academic suspicion or conservative analyses of LSD use, from fear of showing too much interest in a drug widely considered as socially unacceptable, unlike the regulated substances of alcohol, tobacco, and coffee.

This issue is further complicated by the contemporary presence of a psychedelic movement that is lobbying to end the ban on psychedelic drug use by referring to the ban as a form of religious persecution or of violation of basic personal freedom. Thus, several publications have been coloured by militant calls to end the prohibition. In his social history of LSD in Great Britain, Andy Roberts openly endorses LSD use and criticizes the existing legislation as the result of public outcry and media panics, rather than serious medical debates.<sup>36</sup> This militant cry echoes other calls found in the psychedelic literature<sup>37</sup> and shows

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<sup>34</sup> Marlene Dobkin De Rios, "Curing with *Ayahuasca* in an Urban Slum," in *Hallucinogens and Shamanism*, ed. M.J. Harner (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 67-85.

<sup>35</sup> Dyck, *Psychedelic Psychiatry*, viii.

<sup>36</sup> Andy Roberts, *Albion Dreaming: A Popular History of LSD in Britain* (London: Marshall Cavendish, 2008). See in particular his final chapter, "Revolution in the Head," 217-229.

<sup>37</sup> See Forte, ed., *Entheogens and the Future of Religion*.

that many authors want a review of the current legislation in the larger context of the psychedelic renaissance. Psychedelic expertise also runs the risk of being forced into a form of bi-partisanship based on one's personal opinion regarding the moral validity of psychedelic prohibition in particular and of the psychedelic experience in general.

Another likely explanation to understand these narrow views is that Western culture has the tendency to make limited distinctions between the various drugs available, when their pharmacological properties often differ significantly. For instance, popular expressions such as “are you on drugs?” or “you’re doing drugs!” capture the way Western culture often refers to “drugs” to designate illegal and recreational drugs. The legislation is also likely to have been an important source of influence: just like heroin or cocaine, LSD has been a schedule I illegal drug since 1970 in the United States, which means it is considered as addictive, dangerous for the health, and presenting no value whatsoever for scientific research.<sup>38</sup> As the social ethicist Richard Miller contends, it seems that society and the law consider drugs as “a monolithic entity,” without being able to “discriminate among heroin, cocaine, marijuana, or LSD.”<sup>39</sup> Louis Lewin's classification of mind-altering drugs in his classic *Phantastica*<sup>40</sup> reviews the five main categories he had devised at the time. Although it is now dated and struggles to accommodate the more recent mind-altering substances, it is nonetheless a starting point to appreciate how psychoactive substances can be made sense of and broken down into different categories:

-*Inebriantia* (Inebriants such as alcohol, ether, or chloroform)

-*Exitantia* (Stimulants such as caffeine, tobacco, cola, or amphetamines)

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<sup>38</sup> In fact, LSD does have a proven medico-scientific potential. It is not physically addictive and the danger it can present to its users can be significantly reduced in a strictly controlled setting. See Annelie Hintzen and Torsten Passie, *The Pharmacology of LSD: A Critical Review* (Oxford: Oxford University Press and Beckley Foundation Press, 2010).

<sup>39</sup> Richard Lawrence Miller, *The Case For Legalizing Drugs* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 1991), 1.

-*Euphorica* (Euphoriants and narcotics such as opiates and cocaine)

-*Hypnotica* (Tranquilizers such as kava-kava or barbiturates)

-*Phantastica* (Psychedelics such as LSD, cannabis, psilocybin, mescaline, ibogaine, or ayahuasca)

But even in the social history of drugs, some writers have overlooked these important distinctions. For instance, Jill Jonnes, in her comprehensive study of American society's relation with illegal drugs uses a chronological approach that begins in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and ends in the 1990s to understand what she calls the three "drug epidemics" of the Progressive Era with the rise of opiate and cocaine use; the post-war years with new sources and markets leading to new patterns of use amongst middle-class Americans and other ethnic minorities; and the 1980s with the rise of cocaine and crack use amongst the middle-class.<sup>41</sup> Adopting an epidemiological perspective to study drug use, she argues throughout her account that illegal drugs have wrecked the lives of thousands of Americans and eroded values of family, work, and devotion to the community in favour of selfish and destructive pleasures. While that might be the case for drugs like heroin and cocaine, she extends her argument to encompass psychedelics by paying more attention to the number of LSD casualties than to the complex and often allegedly positive psychedelic experimentations to illustrate her argument. Jonnes thus clearly sides with DeGroot by dismissing ideas of chemical enlightenment put forth by the key figures of the psychedelic movement as delusional: "It was typical of the

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<sup>40</sup> Louis Lewin, *Phantastica* (Berlin: Georg Stilke, 1927).

<sup>41</sup> Jill Jonnes, *Hep-cats, Narcs, and Pipe-dreams: A History of America's Romance with Illegal Drugs* (New York: Scribner, 1996). For her take on drug use in the Sixties, see "Part III: The Counterculture, 1960-1975," 203-299. Jonnes takes her cue from the drug historian David Musto, who has argued that drug use in the United States goes in cycles. See David Musto, *The American Disease: Origins of Narcotic Control* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

hubris of the Age of Aquarius that the scornful but idealistic leaders of the young believed that once the genie of drugs was unleashed, they would dictate its use and consequence.”<sup>42</sup>

In spite of such conservative treatments, the history of psychedelic drug use has not been altogether neglected. From the mid-1980s onwards, many important accounts have examined LSD use in a much more nuanced way and begun to depart from the judgemental accounts on LSD use. In the 1990s professional historians started to examine the Sixties thoroughly and explore some of its overlooked themes. It is possible that a whole new generation of writers that had not lived through the Sixties could examine the decade with a fresh and unbiased opinion - scholars like Oppenheimer, Doug Rossinow or Michael Doyle fall into that category.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, the new social history, coupled with the rise of cultural studies as an academic discipline, affected the way drug use was understood and scholars have paid more attention to the meaning ascribed to drug consumption by their users.

The broader history of LSD and the psychedelic movement, has also been covered in accounts written by journalists. For instance, Martin Lee and Bruce Shlain's *Acid Dreams*<sup>44</sup> and Jay Stevens' *Storming Heaven*<sup>45</sup> are key readings that complement each other. The former is more comprehensive; the latter has more depth in its historical account. Lee and Shlain build the first complete history of LSD, from its inception in the Swiss labs of Sandoz to the apparent demise of the 1960s psychedelic movement and the counter-culture. Although largely descriptive, their account is good starting point to appreciate the complexity of the social import of LSD. They use freshly declassified material that sheds much light on the

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<sup>42</sup> Jonnes, 239.

<sup>43</sup> Doug Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity and the New Left in American* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle, eds., *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and '70s* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>44</sup> Martin A. Lee and Bruce Shlain, *Acid Dreams: The Complete Social History of LSD: The CIA, the Sixties, and beyond* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1985).

CIA's involvement in Cold War experimentations with psychoactive chemicals to build a parallel narrative that sometimes overlaps with the main one, but this devolves into conspiracy theories such as their speculation that the spread of LSD in the mid-to-late Sixties was a covert operation to render the various protest movements lethargic.

Stevens' account, published only two years later, is arguably more penetrative and avoids devoting too much time analysing the secret experimentation of American intelligence agents. By giving more attention to key figures like Aldous Huxley and Timothy Leary and accurately capturing their intellectual backgrounds which had convinced them of the potential of the psychedelic experience, he sheds much-needed light on the various directions of the movement, opposing Huxley's elitism to Allen Ginsberg's more democratic approach to psychedelic proselytizing.<sup>46</sup> Stevens is rather sympathetic to his characters, though, and like Lee and Shlain, he does not problematize his object of study and resorts to similar journalistic devices to captivate the reader.

On the other hand, some journalists have made important contributions to the field by offering critical analyses of the psychedelic movement and by trying to transcend the liberal/conservative polarization that has plagued it. John Higgs produced a short biography of Timothy Leary that avoids devoting too much time to all the juicy details of his controversial life, and balances his very readable narrative with more critical moments of analysis. For example, where Leary's other biographer Robert Greenfield merely describes Leary's first LSD experience in 1962,<sup>47</sup> but does not analyse how he perceived it as a life-changing experience, Higgs prefers to examine how Leary understood his experience to have revealed

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<sup>45</sup> Jay Stevens, *Storming Heaven: LSD and the American Dream* (New York: Grove, 1987).

<sup>46</sup> On this, see Conners, *White Hand Society*.

<sup>47</sup> Robert Greenfield, *Timothy Leary: A Biography* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2006), 166-7. Greenfield's biography is quite controversial, if only for freely admitting that he has produced a biography that will likely be hated by Leary's fans.

that reality was merely a construct of his brain, and discusses his insights in conjunction with other common ideas supporting the relativist theory of reality.<sup>48</sup> By paying attention to and taking seriously some of Leary's ideas, Higgs also offers some valuable elements of discussion on the cultural legacy of LSD psychedelics,<sup>49</sup> and ultimately more nuanced descriptions of Leary's complex character.

On the surface, then, journalists have been the main drivers of the history of LSD and the psychedelic movement, and have helped move away from conservative analyses and taken some of the more surprising aspects of that history seriously.<sup>50</sup> But professional historians have also made important contributions by paying attention to the multiple discourses and attitudes surrounding LSD use and have thus given LSD users more agency than other historians like O'Neil, Jonnes, or DeGroot had. By taking seriously this controversial chapter of the 1960s, they have created a far more favourable context for scholarly discussion.

One of the earlier attempts came from the sociologist George Lipsitz. In his essay "Who'll Stop the Rain?,"<sup>51</sup> he acknowledges the communal role of psychedelics in the counter-culture. He feels that their purpose was, first, to provide youth with a sense of community that was both subversive and escapist, and second, to experience some kind of individual therapeutic renewal. By focusing more on the way individuals made sense of the psychedelic experience, he successfully moved away from the sometimes moralising take on drug use. But by examining societal patterns of psychedelic drug use in the 1960s, he offers more of a

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<sup>48</sup> John Higgs, *I Have America Surrounded: The Life and Times of Timothy Leary* (Fort Lee: Barricade Books, 2006), 41-5.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 242-250. Higgs, for example, suggests that the biggest impact of psychedelics may be found in the realm of philosophy, with the popularization of post-modernism and post-structuralism.

<sup>50</sup> See also Nicholas Schou, *Orange Sunshine: The Brotherhood of Eternal Love and Its Quest to Spread Peace, Love, and Acid to the World* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2010).

snapshot of drug use than a continuous moving picture of LSD use throughout the decade that was driven by a psychedelic movement made up of intellectuals, artists, and in some cases of clergymen.

David Farber has also paid more attention to motivations behind psychedelic drug consumption and argued that some LSD users were challenging the notion of culturally acceptable drug use. He frames this as a form of cultural re-orientation – if not, plain cultural rebellion. Where counter-cultural analysts such as Heath and Potter have tended to diminish the agency of counter-culturists and overemphasize the power of the structure they were part of (i.e., consumerist capitalism), Farber has analysed how some illicit drug users sought to negotiate an altogether larger cultural re-orientation. Where the researchers into psychedelic psychiatry argued that LSD should remain confined to their laboratories, characters like Leary and the acclaimed writer Ken Kesey re-framed it respectively into spiritual and hedonistic purposes. Farber also argues that by refusing this re-conceptualization and by pointing to the threat LSD posed to the social and cultural orders, scientists added fuel to the media scares. The repudiation of LSD use had the unfortunate side-effect of putting the same label on all LSD users: whether one used it to for spiritual growth, self-medication, personal improvement, or just for recreational purposes, one became part of the counter-culture that was seen to be threatening the fabric of American society.<sup>52</sup>

Other academics have focused on the history of LSD in psychiatry and examined the epistemological problems surrounding this research that epitomize the complexity of the psychedelic experience and explain why LSD attracted so much controversy in the 1960s. In

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<sup>51</sup> George Lipsitz, “Who'll Stop the Rain? Youth Culture, Rock V Roll, and Social Crises,” in *The Sixties: From Memory to History*, ed. David Farber (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 206-234.

<sup>52</sup> David Farber, “The Intoxicated/Illegal Nation: Drugs in the Sixties Counterculture,” in *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and '70s*, ed. Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle (New York: Routledge, 2002), 17–40.



1995, Stephen Snelders argued that there was not a single, but several meanings associated with psychedelic psychiatry in Holland and predicted that researchers would have to re-capture the lost respectability of psychedelic psychiatry if they were to offer it a valid form of science. To the extent that contemporary researchers seem eager to stay clear from controversy it seems that Snelders' prediction has come true.<sup>53</sup> In Canada, psychedelic research was also affected by negative publicity, when the non-medical use of LSD ultimately led to calls to ban psychedelic substances altogether, because of the cultural subversion they were supposedly causing. According to Dyck, the rise of the psychedelic movement in North America significantly undermined the authority of the therapists because its revolutionary rhetoric clashed with ideas of scientific legitimacy.<sup>54</sup>

But when it comes to taking seriously claims of mystical enlightenment through psychedelic drug use, historians of religions have made some of the most important scholarly contributions. Timothy Miller, who himself took part in Sixties communal experiences, has devoted a whole chapter on drug use in one of his books<sup>55</sup> (chiefly cannabis and LSD). He pays a lot more attention to the meaning ascribed to drugs by users and paints a complex picture of the various patterns of drug consumption. Likewise, Robert Fuller's *Stairways to Heaven* argues that mind-altering drugs have generally played a key role in American spirituality and sheds much light on the spiritual and religious dimension of the psychedelic movement of the 1960s.<sup>56</sup> Finally, Devin Lander has examined New York State's psychedelic churches run by Leary and Art Kleps that treated LSD as sacraments, and suggests that their

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<sup>53</sup> Stephen Snelders, "The Use of Psychedelics in Dutch Psychiatry 1950-1970: The Problem of Continuity and Discontinuity," a lecture delivered at the Conference of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Ethnomedizin, October 1995, in Munich, Germany. Transcripts available at <http://www.serendipity.li/dmt/snelders.html> (accessed August 16, 2012). Snelders examined the negative publicity that the Dutch anarchist group Provo brought to LSD in Holland

<sup>54</sup> Dyck, *Psychedelic Psychiatry*.

<sup>55</sup> Miller, "The Ethics of Dope."

short-lived existence were nonetheless an important cultural substrate for the New Age culture of the 1970s.<sup>57</sup>

Given the wealth of literature in religious studies that has not only taken the psychedelic movement seriously, but surveyed and paid critical attention to the many claims that psychedelics could have a religious import, it is quite possible that the recent and fairly abundant publications have been influenced by this religious paradigm. As Robert Ellwood notes (in a monograph that also examines drugs and spirituality), religious movements often lead to “profound social transition” because of their power to influence the ruling bodies.<sup>58</sup> By understanding the psychedelic movement as a complex religious movement with an agenda for social change, religious scholars have given it more credibility.

In spite of these contributions, there still lacks a social history of psychedelic drug use that draws together the recent trends in the scholarship and simultaneously investigates this topic without bias and with a more rigorously empirical methodology than in many journalistic accounts. This study fills the gap by focusing on the use of LSD and similar drugs, while simultaneously studying how users ascribed meaning to their practises. It pays particular attention to the experiences of psychedelic drug users and makes a case for understanding

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<sup>56</sup> Fuller, *Stairways to Heaven*.

<sup>57</sup> Devin R. Lander, “Start Your Own Religion: New York State’s Acid Churches,” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 14, no. 3 (2011): 64–80.

<sup>58</sup> Robert S. Ellwood, *The Sixties Spiritual Awakening: American Religion Moving from Modern to Postmodern* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 10. For example, the temperance movement, which lobbied for prohibition of alcoholic beverages, had its roots in mainline Protestantism. For more on social movements, religion, and drug use, see Stephen A. Kent, “Religion, Drugs, and the Question of Political Engagements,” in *From Slogans to Mantras: Social Protest and Religious Conversion in the Late Vietnam War Era* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2001), 6-24; Morgan Shipley, “‘This Season’s People’: Stephen Gaskin, Psychedelic Religion, and a Community of Social Justice,” *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 9, no. 2 (2015): 41–92.

psychedelia as a rich, diverse, and sophisticated culture. In doing so, it frames social and cultural history as intimately linked and correcting each other's shortcomings.<sup>59</sup>

This dissertation argues that the consumption of LSD and other major psychedelic substances, which altered consciousness and induced visions, often led to complex life-altering experiences. Some users reported a feeling of transcendence that they understood as spiritual, regardless of their religious upbringing. Others concluded, under the influence of LSD, that the society they lived in and its cultural values were deeply flawed. Others still saw the drug as an important tool to probe the mind and facilitate psychotherapy. Some interpreted the swirling visions as a deep aesthetic experience and claimed to have found a new artistic sensibility through their chemical experimentation. In turn, many of these users reported life-changing experiences that effectively gave new directions to their lives. Some successful artists argued that LSD was responsible for triggering their careers. Others founded religious institutions or turned to Eastern spirituality as a result of their psychedelic religious experiences. Others still decided that LSD should be given to the masses, which would naturally bring about social and political change to American society. Psychiatrists or even lay people used LSD to treat mental illness or to deepen introspection and promote therapeutic renewal.

But even these multiple meanings were rarely hermetic and often overlapped. This holistic understanding is at the heart of this thesis. Some psychedelic artists incorporated Eastern spirituality to their paintings. Other artists invented machines to disorient the senses in an attempt to replicate or amplify the psychedelic experience. Other consumers embarked on a psychedelic crusade to “turn on” the world in a fashion that blended politics and religion. Focusing on these experiences, rather than dwelling on the sensational or understanding LSD

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<sup>59</sup> Paula S. Fass, “Cultural History/Social History: Some Reflections on a Continuing Dialogue,” *Journal of Social History* 37, no. 1 (2003): 39–46.

use as a drug epidemic, gives more agency to all the players of the psychedelic community and, in this way, can deepen and problematize our understanding of what may seem on the surface like some uncanny cultural off-shoots that came about as a result of psychedelic drug use.

This analysis of the psychedelic experience echoes in part the work of Arun Saldanha,<sup>60</sup> who understands the discovery of LSD along the lines of Alain Badiou's philosophy,<sup>61</sup> by framing it as an "event" that led to four movements bringing about science, art, politics, and love - four fields of thought where events can be produced, according to Badiou. Saldanha, however, seems keener to apply Badiou's "event" to a much broader theory, which at times feels forced and unconvincing, particularly when he admits using a "frivolous example" to apply it to this theory - in doing so, he bizarrely contradicts his claim that scholars have long been dismissive towards the cultural history of LSD. Moreover, he relies too much on textual sources written by Leary, Huxley, or Wolfe that are far from consensual and representative of psychedelia in its broadest sense. Notwithstanding these issues, my approach differs from Saldanha by underscoring the connections between these different spheres - politics, science, art and spirituality (rather than love) - when he has framed them as more separate themes.

The psychedelic experience might also be understood through the lens of the anthropologist Marcel Mauss' concept of the "total social fact,"<sup>62</sup> because psychedelia permeated most societal spheres and can be understood from a multitude of perspectives. But as Thierry Wendling points out, Mauss' concept has been too often misinterpreted and used to valorize a social fact (e.g. sport) that can seem trivial to the eyes of many, but not to the

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<sup>60</sup> Arun Saldanha, "The LSD-Event: Badiou Not on Acid," *Theory & Event* 10, no. 4 (2007): 1-51.

<sup>61</sup> Alain Badiou, *L'être et l'événement* (Paris: Éd. du Seuil, 1988).

academic eager to defend her object of research or to justify the choice of an anthropological inquiry. Although multiplicity is an essential factor in Mauss' theory, Wendling contends that those who abuse the concept neglect another key notion: that of social morphology, borrowed from Emile Durkheim. Thus, a total social fact binds all of the members of a given group, affects its institutions, leads to new cultural productions (e.g. literature), and occurs with a great deal of social effervescence. What's more, Wendling argues that the very concept of total social fact is problematic because it does not take into account the multiple identities and experiences that compose a society (which, the concept implies, is unified and monolithic).<sup>63</sup> In the case of psychedelia, LSD may have led to complex experiences that had obvious scientific, political, religious, and artistic import, but to brand it a total social fact overstates the influence of a drug that was mostly confined to a subculture and was made visible in a large part through media coverage.

With this approach that understands the Psychedelic experience along the line of totality and diversity, I build on the scholarship that has departed from the epidemiological or criminological take on psychoactive substance use and paid far more attention to the meaning ascribed to drug consumption<sup>64</sup> and follow the scholars who have attempted to historicize the shifting cultural meanings ascribed to psychedelic drugs. For instance, Stephen Novak has contrasted psychiatric calls for the regulation of psychedelics because of their health hazards in the early 1960s with intellectual claims of mystical enlightenment through LSD use in the

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<sup>62</sup> Marcel Mauss, "Essai sur le don: Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques," in *Sociologie et Anthropologie* (Paris: PUF, 2004), 143-279.

<sup>63</sup> Thierry Wendling, "Us et abus de la notion de fait social total.: Turbulences critiques," *Revue du MAUSS* 36, no. 2 (2010): 87-99.

<sup>64</sup> As well as the aforementioned examples, similar trends can be found in the history of addictive drugs or interdisciplinary studies of illicit drug use. See for instance Catherine Carstairs, *Jailed for Possession: Illegal Drug Use, Regulation, and Power in Canada, 1920-1961* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006); Jordan Goodman, Paul E. Lovejoy and Andrew Sheratt, eds., *Consuming Habits: Drugs in History and Anthropology*, (London:

late 1950s.<sup>65</sup> Roy Baumeister and Kathleen Placidi have looked at the debates surrounding the legitimacy of LSD consumption and have pointed to a shift in the meanings and motivations justifying its use that gradually changed from an experience that could offer insights and growth to one that was “pleasant and pleasurable.”<sup>66</sup> More recently, Sarah Shortall has problematized the psychedelic experience by looking at its contested meanings - whether toxic, authentic, delusional, or freeing. Basing her approach on the work of Jacques Derrida,<sup>67</sup> she argues that “The rhetoric of drugs thus functions to erect boundaries between nature and artifice, essence and accident, interiority and exteriority, but because psychedelics invariably inhabit both sides of these boundaries at once, they can also be used to undermine them. This helps explain why the drugs have been so polarizing, but also so flexible in their capacity to acquire a wide range of cultural meanings.”<sup>68</sup> This study builds upon Shortall’s assessment and illustrates how psychedelic drug consumption led to multiple, complex, and contested meanings, albeit beyond a series of dichotomies.

Indeed, drugs like LSD had the power to trigger a profound ontological shift that often blurred or transcended typical dualistic points of reference. A person could understand the experience as freeing and elevating, whereas another could see it as enslaving and delusional; yet both could appreciate the validity of these conflicting experiences simultaneously. This helps explain in part why so many conflicts surrounding the legitimacy of these substances arose as they gained popularity, but also why scholars have produced such widely different

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Routledge, 2007); Geoffrey Hunt, Molly Moloney, and Kristin Evans, eds., *Youth, Drugs, and Nightlife* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>65</sup> Novak, “LSD before Leary.”

<sup>66</sup> Roy F. Baumeister and Kathleen S. Placidi, “A Social History and Analysis of the LSD Controversy,” *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 23, no. 4 (1983): 34.

<sup>67</sup> Jacques Derrida, “The Rhetoric of Drugs,” in *Points. . .: Interviews, 1974–1994*, ed. Elisabeth

Weber, trans. Peggy Kamuf et al. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 228-54.

analyses of LSD consumption or ignored it altogether. As Shortall concludes, “If the psychedelic drug culture has been deemed relatively insignificant [in the historiography of the 1960s], this suggests that historians have tended to accept dominant cultural narratives defining non-medical drug use as escapist or artificial, and therefore as historically and politically irrelevant.”<sup>69</sup> Here too, this study moves beyond the hedonistic use of psychedelics - without dismissing this dimension - and combines actions and expressions to analyse how psychedelics took root and acquired meaning beyond reductive and simplistic understandings.

Although there is a central paradox on the surface in the conception of LSD as simultaneously a wonder or nightmare drug, this study seeks to transcend this dichotomy by focusing on the multiple meanings ascribed to psychedelic drug use. Presenting a thesis based on notions of holism and multiplicity, rather than on binary oppositions, circumvents some important issues in the broader 1960s scholarship. As Michael Heale notes, some historians have understood the decade in terms of discord: “Fracture or dissolution has remained a central theme of Sixties syntheses [...]” These tensions are indeed present in the social history of LSD use, but as Heale tempers, “Discord may [also] be rewritten as the healthier phenomenon of multiculturalism.”<sup>70</sup> Indeed, psychedelia in its broadest sense deserves to be understood in terms of pluralism, though it is also crucial to bear in mind that it was inherently riddled with tensions and discord, on the one hand, and that, on the other hand, it saw important moments of cooperation and mutual understanding.<sup>71</sup>

Studying the history of illicit drug use leads to other epistemological considerations. In her essay on “The Evidence of Experience,” Joan Scott has argued that historians have taken

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<sup>68</sup> Sarah Shortall, “Psychedelic Drugs and the Problem of Experience,” *Past & Present* 222, no. suppl 9 (2014): 188.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

<sup>70</sup> Heale, “The Sixties as History,” 136–7.

for granted the authority of experience when studying marginal groups. “By remaining within the epistemological frame of orthodox history, these studies lose the possibility of examining those assumptions and practices that excluded considerations of difference in the first place.”<sup>72</sup> Without critically assessing the identities of those studied, she continues, historians run the risk of naturalising their differences and essentialising their identities. Yet, labelling the social history of LSD consumption what Scott refers to as a “history of difference” is not as straightforward, because it reveals a great deal of diversity and pluralism in a supposedly marginal group. One of the key notions for this dissertation is indeed that of multiplicity, which invariably involves debates, tensions, and conflicts. Thus, there was never one, but a myriad of experiences with and opinions of LSD and psychedelics, which makes it impossible to reduce the average LSD user to a unique identity. LSD was used by such a wide pool of people (including stockbrokers, medical doctors, and lawyers, along with college students and counter-culturists), that any essentialist approach to study this topic would do it no justice. Presenting these contrasting experiences and opinions becomes a way of avoiding the issue raised by Scott, even if in the light of her argument this study will also pay critical attention to the way LSD users created their own discourses and attitudes.

Scott’s critique of experience also raises the problem of the role of the historian in determining what counts as valid experience and thus valid historical facts. When experience is invoked as ultimate proof, there remains no reason to question the historian’s decisions to focus on certain elements at the expense of others.<sup>73</sup> While this dissertation is no exception, its central argument also has the advantage of partly addressing the problem of authority in

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<sup>71</sup> For a similar approach that pays attention to the complexity and pluralism of the New Left, see Doug Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

<sup>72</sup> Joan W. Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (1991): 777.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 785.



present-day psychedelia. As stated above, the understanding of the psychedelic experience runs the risk of lapsing into a kind of binary partisanship, where advocates of psychedelic experimentation criticize the current legislation for trampling on civil liberties, and where opponents see claims of chemical enlightenment as delusion and proof of the toxicity of these drugs. With these issues in mind, it is crucial to stress that the evidence gathered here is not intended to give credit to one or the other side, but to further underscore the richness and complexity of the psychedelic experience.

Additionally, this approach departs from another understanding of the 1960s social movements from a political perspective that characterizes these movements as conservative, progressive, or radical. For example, the split that occurred within Students for a Democratic Society in the latter part of the decade and the rise of the Weather Underground reveals how the New Left was riddled with internal conflict.<sup>74</sup> This pattern could be applied to the history of the psychedelic subculture, by re-conceptualising its internal tensions in political terms: medical doctors researching the potential of psychedelics tended to condemn indiscriminate drug use; while the psychedelic subculture and some psychedelic artists tended to favour a more liberal approach to LSD use, but stayed away from utopian or radical fancies; and the psychedelic movement and the psychedelic counter-culture sought to use the insights of the psychedelic experience to bring about peace, love, understanding, and tolerance to the world. Adopting this approach thus acknowledges the richness of psychedelia by dwelling on the different conceptions surrounding LSD consumption and reframing them along political lines.

This understanding and classification, however, is problematic in that it pays too much attention to the politics of psychedelic drug use, when the phenomenon was arguably much

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<sup>74</sup> Irwin Unger, *The Movement: A History of the American New Left, 1959-1972* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974); Edward J. Bacciocco, *The New Left in America: Reform to Revolution : 1956-70* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1974); Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987).

less politicized than many other 1960s groups. If the decade can be remembered as the time when issues of race, gender, or sexual inclinations became more visible and politicized, the politicization of drug use was often muted within the broader psychedelic subculture, as well as a source of contention. Additionally, an overarching pattern opposing the liberal, radical, and conservative voices together leads to a disproportionate focus on the first two categories at the expense of the latter (mostly scientists and MDs can be deemed conservative in relation to LSD use). Finally, examining the multiple aspects of psychedelia by focusing on LSD users' complex experiences and their cultural productions, rather than building a narrative centered on an opposition between liberal and radical drug use and the maintaining of a *status quo* does little justice to the complexity of that culture.

The role that the mass media has played in shaping the 1960s is another major problem in the history of the decade that also dramatically diminishes the agency of all the people who sought to build a more democratic and egalitarian society. Edward Morgan has argued that the American mass media (a product of corporate capitalism) has systematically misrepresented these social movements and thus downplayed and marginalized protesters.<sup>75</sup> The history of LSD in the second part of 1960s is no exception to the trend: the media gave disproportionate attention to LSD-related casualties, violence, and provocative characters rather than on the wealth of allegedly positive experiences, as well as the apparently genuine desires to improve American society through chemical experimentation, even though, as Stephen Siff has recently shown, the early coverage of LSD in popular media was very favourable and helped stimulate public interest in these substances.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Edward P. Morgan, *What Really Happened to the 1960s: How Mass Media Culture Failed American Democracy* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2010).

<sup>76</sup> Stephen Siff, *Acid Hype: American News Media and the Psychedelic Experience*, *History of Communication* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2015).

One way that the marginalization and repudiation of psychedelia occurred was through essentializing labels popularized by the media. By problematizing psychedelic drug use in a way that maximizes attention to personal agency, this study purposefully rejects the term “hippie” that refers to a quintessentially drug-loving, long-haired, flamboyant, and youthful community, and that is too often taken at face value without questioning.<sup>77</sup> While some hippies allegedly presented themselves as such, others were far more uncomfortable with the term. One of the interviewees for this study considers it a “silly word”<sup>78</sup> but even in the Sixties several voices questioned a form of essentialism that only served political<sup>79</sup> and media interests. Kleps also resented the word and pointed to the influence of the media in popularising a reductive designation: “The media and media mongers like Tim [Leary] used the term constantly but the Psychedelians I knew in the 60s almost never used it to refer to themselves.”<sup>80</sup> A reader of the *Village Voice* took issue with the word popularized by the “establishment press” and voiced his concern in much stronger terms: “If you call hip people ‘hippies’ you may just as well call black people ‘niggers.’”<sup>81</sup> Non-drug users were equally suspicious. One woman took issue with the *East Village Other* for creating artificial boundaries between the “squares” and the “hip.” In her letter to the underground New York newspaper, she presented herself in satirical terms: “I am an Establishment Square. That is to

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<sup>77</sup> Such a classification would lead to Scott’s “history of difference” and the epistemic problems that go with it.

<sup>78</sup> Brad (real name obscured at interviewee’s request), interview by Chris Elcock, Interviewee’s Home, New York City, March 16, 2013.

<sup>79</sup> The most infamous example of this is Ronald Regan’s diatribe against this supposedly homogenous group, defining in 1967 a hippie as someone who “dresses like Tarzan, has hair like Jane, and smells like Cheetah.” Quoted in Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle, “Introduction” to *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and ’70s*, ed. Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle (New York: Routledge, 2002), 6.

<sup>80</sup> Art Kleps, “Freemen!,” in *Millbrook: A Narrative of the Early Years of American Psychedelianism, Recension of 2005* (San Francisco: Original Kleptonian Neo-American Church, 2005), page unavailable, <http://okneoac.org/millbrook/> (accessed November 10, 2014).

<sup>81</sup> Ernie Barry to editor, *Village Voice*, July 3, 1969.

say, I live in the Outer Reaches of Darkest Trenton, in a split-level house with my husband and two children. I have never taken (used?) pot, grass, or acid, and I don't intend to. My hair is short; I wear lipstick and high heels. I am faithful to my husband. I enjoy cooking and gardening."<sup>82</sup> Thus, if liberal or conservative reporting was in large part responsible for creating this dichotomy, so was the underground press.

The word is still commonly used in the everyday language often to refer to flamboyant bohemianism, but even in the scholarship, there have been few efforts to call the concept into question or to point to the influence of the media.<sup>83</sup> In part, this is because cultural analysts, social scientists, and academics in general who looked into the so-called "hippie movement" were keen to study what seemed to be a distinct counter-culture that sought to change society.<sup>84</sup> Scholars still use the term as if it was universally accepted that such a social group uniformly existed, which suggests that these early scholarly studies of hippies have been built upon, rather than questioned.<sup>85</sup> This study avoids this essentialism operated through language

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<sup>82</sup> Ann Ward, letter to the *East Village Other* Vol.2 (12), May 15 – June 1, 1967. The hypothetical opposition between a monolithic "mainstream" and the psychedelic subculture will be discussed in chapter 2.

<sup>83</sup> See Stuart Henderson, *Making the Scene: Yorkville and Hip Toronto in the 1960s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011). Although Henderson uses the word himself throughout his cultural history of Toronto's Yorkville quarter, he at least points out that it is a cultural construct and an identity category that is "mutable and [...] subjectively conferred" and that fails "to convey much agency on the part of the actor thus labelled." See note 2 on page 279.

<sup>84</sup> Lewis Yablonski, *The Hippie Trip* (New York: Pegasus, 1968); Stuart Hall, *The Hippies: An American "Moment"* (Birmingham, UK: Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, 1968); Fred Davis and Laura Munoz, "Heads and Freaks: Patterns and Meanings of Drug Use Among Hippies," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 9, no. 2 (1968): 156–64; James L. Spates and Jack Levin, "Beats, Hippies, the Hip Generation, and the American Middle Class: An Analysis of Values," *International Social Science Journal* 24, no. 2 (1972): 326-353.

<sup>85</sup> See for example Lee and Shlain, *Acid Dreams*; Miller, *The Hippies and American Values*; Langlitz, *Neuropsychedelia*. I briefly suggest here that hippies became as subculture after the 1960s and 1970s, through a kind of romantic nostalgia that is largely the consequence of distorted media coverage, as well as through a subsequent commercialization of these codes. As an illustration of this, see Henderson's own childhood recollections in *Making the Scene*, 3-5.

and codifying, and focuses instead on the complex cultural productions that LSD use spawned in the 1960s.

Additionally, this dissertation moves away from the notion that psychedelic drug users were predominantly teenagers, which is part of another simplistic understanding of the 1960s movements and cultures as a “generational quarrel.”<sup>86</sup> As stated above, the rise of LSD consumption in the second part of the 1960s was largely the result of an increasingly youthful use as well as increased media coverage at the same time that created a distorted impression of a youth-driven LSD movement, particularly given the context of postwar baby-boom. But as the following chapters illustrate, there were no stereotypical LSD users, even if they were often White and middle-class. The papers of Timothy Leary that were consulted for this research clearly reveal that in the first part of the decade, a wide pool of Americans were interested in his psychedelic research regardless of age and profession.<sup>87</sup> Henri Luce, owner *Time* and *Life* magazines, and his wife Clare Booth are a striking example of this pluralism: both were socially and politically conservative, but took it under medical supervision and publically endorsed it.<sup>88</sup> As with hip essentialism, then, the idea of teenage psychedelic revolutionaries was largely the product of exaggerated press coverage.

To offer one final semantic consideration, this study had used the word “psychedelic” to qualify the experience that resulted from the use of drugs like LSD, psilocybin, mescaline, DMT (Dimethyltryptamine – a highly potent short-acting psychedelic), or peyote. Where Langlitz has defended the use of the word “hallucinogen” by invoking the number of PubMed

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<sup>86</sup> Morgan, *What Really Happened to the 1960s*, ix.

<sup>87</sup> Timothy Leary papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library (hereafter “Leary papers”). In particular, many wrote to Leary and his associates requesting information about psychedelics or where and how they could get to try these drugs.

<sup>88</sup> Siff, *Acid Hype*, 1-2.

hits,”<sup>89</sup> this study specifically discards the word because of its etymology that implies that the experience is a form of delusion. Some psychedelic drug users found the word downright offensive and saw it as a way for the medical establishment to deny the richness and complexity of the psychedelic experience. As Kleps contended in his typically vitriolic prose, “It remains sleazily dishonest and typical of the American Psychiatric Association to insist on labeling psychedelics as ‘hallucinogens.’ Hallucinations are not among the usual or desired effects and the filthy swine (whom I can see very clearly) know it very well.”<sup>90</sup> Langlitz is right in pointing out that the word “psychedelic,” meaning “mind-manifesting,” is also culturally loaded. But instead of adopting a clinical gaze on the psychedelic subculture by referring to its drug experiences as hallucinations, I underscore the variety and richness of these experiences precisely by qualifying them as psychedelic experiences.

Though this dissertation departs from a wealth of literature that has focused on the hedonistic dimension of psychedelic drug use, I am also aware that in spite of psychedelia’s complexity, it was also at times amorphous. Where scholars like Saldanha have understood the discovery of LSD as an event that led to a great deal of cultural productions, it also appears that a good number of LSD users were drawn to the experience simply for pleasure, fun, or curiosity. They reportedly did not change their ways of living as a result of their drug consumption, nor did they preach the psychedelic gospel for the improvement of humankind. These users formed the core of a large psychedelic subculture that was born in the late 1950s and survived the following decades. This subculture’s codes were used broadly, even if for some users, the psychedelic experience meant more than simple hedonistic satisfaction and

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<sup>89</sup> Langlitz, 267 (note 2). Langlitz preferred the word because he has looked up these words on PubMed and noted that “hallucinogen” and “psychedelic” were the most referred to in scientific publications.

<sup>90</sup> Kleps, “The Yankee in Search of Adventure,” in *Millbrook: A Narrative of the Early Years of American Psychedelianism, Recension of 2005* (San Francisco: Original

thus deserves to be understood along the lines of holism, pluralism and multiplicity, at the crossroads of religion, politics, art, medicine, science, technology, and leisure.

But even though multiplicity and pluralism form the core of this argument, its converse side, which is based on the works of Erika Dyck and Marcel Martel,<sup>91</sup> who have both studied the debates surrounding the use and criminalization of LSD and psychedelics in Canada, is also critical to characterize the history of psychedelic drug consumption - these drugs became indeed a major source of tension. Precisely because psychedelics could induce a complex experience, it is hardly surprising that their use could have led to so much conflict and disagreement. The question of legitimate and authentic drug use surfaced in debates amongst lay users, figures of the psychedelic movement, medical doctors and scientists, politicians, religious figures, and journalists. The psychedelic experience has no inherent ontological outcome; thus, all the groups and individuals who took LSD did not automatically yield their identities to a core psychedelic ethos. For example, Leary remembered in the early Sixties the existence of an international community of psychedelic explorers, who “differed in the temperament, and had widely differing ideas about tactics, but the basic vision was common to all – these wondrous plants and drugs could free man’s consciousness and bring about a new conception of man, his psychology, and philosophy.”<sup>92</sup> Hence, the multiple ontological outcomes of the psychedelic experience created varying views, which could

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Kleptonian Neo-American Church, 2005), page unavailable, <http://okneoac.org/millbrook/ch11> (accessed January 26, 2015).

<sup>91</sup> Erika Dyck, “‘Just Say Know’: Criminalizing LSD and the Politics of Psychedelic Expertise, 1961-8,” in *The Real Dope: Social, Legal, and Historical Perspectives on the Regulation of Drugs in Canada*, ed. Edgar-André Montigny (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 169-96; Marcel Martel, “Setting Boundaries: LSD Use and Glue Sniffing in Ontario in the 1960s,” in *The Real Dope: Social, Legal, and Historical Perspectives on the Regulation of Drugs in Canada*, ed. Edgar-André Montigny (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 197-218.

<sup>92</sup> Timothy Leary, *High Priest* (Berkeley: Ronin, 1995), 110.

sometimes be source of debates, contentions, and tensions – the natural consequence of pluralism.

To further problematize psychedelia, I also add an extra layer of analysis by probing the concepts of subculture and counter-culture along with the dominant cultural order to understand how various discourses created boundaries between these spheres. In contrast with the psychedelic subculture whose members used LSD and psychedelics quite liberally, the psychedelic counter-culture touted LSD and similar substances as wonder drugs to revamp the human mind and realize the bankruptcy and corruption of the American way of life. By channelling the insights of the psychedelic experience into allegedly positive socio-political productions, some LSD users distinguished themselves from the psychedelic subculture that was much more static because it was more content to use psychedelics for recreational purposes. Their counter-cultural sensibilities were apparent in their discourses that attacked or re-conceptualized core values of work, family, and country, as well as in the utopian enclaves they created to lead a life in conjunction with the use of drugs or in accordance with the insights they had gleaned as a result of their chemical experimentations. This counter-culture was strongly influenced by the politics of the psychedelic movement, which differed from the counter-culture in that it was far more organized, visible, and systematic in the promotion of psychedelics as a cure-for-all. But although the psychedelic counter-culture often felt that the psychedelic subculture was wasting the power of LSD by using it for mere hedonistic satisfaction, it was in many ways a dynamic off-shoot of the psychedelic subculture. The cultural codes, such as the slang or visible apparatus like clothes, were quite similar in both cases.

Although it seemed that psychedelia was on the decline towards the end of the Sixties, a closer inspection reveals a more complex picture. I argue that the psychedelic subculture had become so visible as a cultural force that some of its elements became commodified and



assimilated into non-psychedelic cultural phenomena in the latter part of the Sixties. Though this form of cultural cooptation was expressed in a new form of psychedelic business embodied by “head shops”<sup>93</sup> that dispensed psychedelic apparatus like clothes, posters, or beads, it also found fertile breeding grounds in the arts, with theater, film, and multimedia light-shows changing as a result, as well as in the entertainment industry, where crafty night-club managers reasoned that psychedelia could be incorporated into discothèques to create ground-breaking total environments. All this formed a visible subculture with clearly identifiable codes, which shows that users of LSD and psychedelics were not automatically part of a counter-culture that pitted itself against the so-called mainstream and sought radical cultural changes.

The psychedelic subculture also deserves to be analysed in conjunction with a much broader illicit drug subculture. Both subcultures created their codes and sometimes revealed overlaps or conflicts between them. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the underground drug subculture did not always discriminate between psychedelics and addictive drugs like heroin and amphetamines. The Beat Neal Cassady, for instance, had a voracious appetite for illicit or otherwise obscure substances. These overlaps seemed to decrease in the mid-Sixties, under the influence of the psychedelic counter-culture, which had itself largely come about as a result of the psychedelic movement’s proselytizing. Both spheres emphasized the need to clearly discriminate between good consciousness-expanding drugs (like LSD or cannabis) that were understood as assets to improve society and bad physically addictive substances (like heroin or amphetamines). This distinction led to what Timothy Miller has dubbed the “ethics of dope.”<sup>94</sup> Although it is crucial to understand the mechanisms behind the psychedelic counter-culture and the psychedelic movement and in some cases the psychedelic subculture,

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<sup>93</sup> A head is a member of the psychedelic subculture, who uses psychedelic drugs.

<sup>94</sup> Miller, “The Ethics of Dope.”

it is not a flawless concept. Indeed, even during the golden days of the psychedelic counter-culture, some users occasionally turned to “bad drugs,” but even key figures of the psychedelic movement had addictive habits: Leary, Kleps, the Zen popularizer Allan Watts, and less-known writer Peter Stafford all had severe drinking problems that contrasted greatly with their rhetoric of psychedelic liberation.

Though a broad psychedelic ethos seemed to impregnate both spheres in the mid-Sixties, it waned in the latter part of the decade. As the consumption of LSD peaked around 1967 and gained increased media exposure, a shift began to operate away from these ethical guidelines. Users became younger and younger and often lacked an experienced mentor<sup>95</sup> to take LSD under “safe” circumstances, but also ceased to discriminate between good and bad drugs. With the influx of psychedelics, several drug dealers saw this as a lucrative business and were content to sell any product vaguely resembling LSD. Though there is no denying that LSD and psychedelics can lead to difficult experiences, any utilitarian assessment of these drugs must bear in mind that the quality and purity of LSD generally waned throughout the Sixties. In 1966, Sandoz Pharmaceuticals – the only legitimate supplier of LSD – severed all contracts with ongoing researchers out of concern for its image, given all the controversies surrounding the drug and ceased production, a week after a brutal murder loosely associated with LSD made the headlines. This opened up the illicit drug market for underground chemists to sell fake LSD or to mix it other chemicals – a trend that was already underway. Thus, it is ultimately difficult to evaluate the damage it caused, when what seemed to be LSD was often something else.

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<sup>95</sup> This was the case for other drugs like cannabis. In his seminal study on deviant behaviour, the sociologist Howard Becker revealed how cannabis smokers needed the guidance of peers to learn how to smoke and experience the drug. See Howard S. Becker, “Becoming a Marihuana User,” in *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York: Free Press, 1973), 41-58.

What's more, heroin and later cocaine dealers treated psychedelics with suspicion and began pushing their materials in a much more aggressive way to oust psychedelics. It made far more economic sense to sell addictive drugs and create a craving for them, than to offer non-addictive substances that could be easily used once in a lifetime without ever risking addiction. Heroin dealers were even helped by exaggerated government and medical warnings surrounding psychedelics. In 1966, for instance, the MD and president of the New York State Council on Drug Addiction Donald Louria infamously claimed that "Gram for gram, ingestion for ingestion, LSD is far more dangerous than heroin"<sup>96</sup> – a blatantly misleading and irresponsible contention, given that the highly potent LSD is dosed in micrograms and is not physically addictive. Those who paid attention to these warnings reasoned that heroin was milder than LSD. But for the better-informed drug users, this was nothing less than propaganda. As Eric Schneider points out in his history of heroin use, if authorities had lied about psychedelics, then perhaps they had also lied about heroin. In certain bohemian enclaves where psychedelics had been plentiful, heroin consumption increased accordingly when many psychedelic drug users realized that they had yet to try the "king of drugs."<sup>97</sup>

To illustrate these arguments, this thesis offers a social history of psychedelic drug use by focusing specifically on New York City. By choosing this object of study, it moves away from the San Francisco Bay Area that has received most of the media and scholarly coverage at the expense of the Big Apple<sup>98</sup> and makes a case for appreciating a rich psychedelic

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<sup>96</sup> "New York Medical Unit Says LSD More Dangerous than Heroin," *Jamestown (N.Y.) Post-Journal*, March 31, 1966.

<sup>97</sup> Eric C Schneider, *Smack: Heroin and the American City* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 149–50.

<sup>98</sup> An exception to the trend is Carlo McCormick's short history of New York psychedelia. Though he makes a case for appreciating the complexity of that subculture, his celebratory tone is uncalled for, as is his dismissal of the San Francisco scene, which he sees as "backward" because the work of one New York multimedia art group was dismissed by art critics there. See "The Urban Trip: New York's Psychedelic Moment," in *Summer of Love*:

subculture elsewhere. As Stewart Home has argued, “To date most assessments of the psychedelic sixties have been curiously one-sided and over-influenced by the most superficial media representations of that decade.”<sup>99</sup> Other historians have taken issue with the disproportionate focus on the West Coast and in particular on the role Kesey played in the formation of a psychedelic movement. In his recent biography of Kesey, Rick Dodgson argues that the psychedelic happenings Kesey organized on the West Coast in 1966 have been remembered in the popular mind as uniquely influential because of Tom Wolfe’s hyperbolic account.<sup>100</sup> Dodgson also contends that the supposed West Coast figurehead of the psychedelic movement never saw himself as an acid prophet or a counter-cultural hero – “mostly just a talented writer who liked to get high and have fun with his friends.”<sup>101</sup>

In spite of the lop-sided coverage of the psychedelic movement, a closer look at the psychedelic subculture in NYC suggests that not only did that city cultivate its own movement, but examining it carefully points to a deeper history of psychedelics. Psychedelic happenings were not an isolated phenomenon in the west, but were in fact rivalled by New York’s own art scene, which also featured seminal painters.<sup>102</sup> Moments of psychedelic bohemianism that have been explained by San Francisco’s tradition of tolerance towards non-conformists were just as present in its Haight-Ashbury enclave as they were in New York’s

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*Psychedelic Art, Social Crisis and Counterculture in the 1960s*, ed. Christoph Grunenberg and Jonathan Harris (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), 228.

<sup>99</sup> Stewart Home, “Voices Green and Purple: Psychedelic Bad Craziess and the Revenge of the Avant-Garde,” in *Summer of Love: Psychedelic Art, Social Crisis and Counterculture in the 1960s*, ed. Christoph Grunenberg and Jonathan Harris (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), 123.

<sup>100</sup> Tom Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (New York: Picador, 2008).

<sup>101</sup> Rick Dodgson, *It’s All a Kind of Magic: The Young Ken Kesey* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2013), 140.

<sup>102</sup> See for instance Robert E. L. Masters and Jean Houston, eds., *Psychedelic Art* (New York: Grove Press / Balance House, 1968).

Greenwich Village that has a similar – if not greater - tradition of bohemianism.<sup>103</sup> But even more to the point, the Swiss firm Sandoz that held the patents to manufacture LSD had set up a plant in Hanover, New Jersey – a stone’s throw away from Manhattan. As early as 1957 the drug trickled out and reached New York’s bohemian enclaves in Greenwich Village, long before California.<sup>104</sup>

Comparing both cities and their relation to psychedelia further underlines some of their unique characteristics and suggests that the setting of a psychedelic subculture is important to understand its identity. In most narratives focusing on the Haight-Ashbury scene, the acid rock band Grateful Dead, Ken Kesey, or the LSD manufacturer cum psychedelic philanthropist Owsley Stanley are key characters that gave it an aura of free-wheeling egalitarianism.<sup>105</sup> As a major hub for finance, big business, television, advertising companies, and artistic productions, New York City gave birth to a markedly different psychedelic subculture. Timothy Leary’s campaign to promote the drug in the city would not have been the same without the support of New York millionaires, theater producers, or local jazz musicians. Business people saw a lucrative potential in the psychedelic subculture and set up psychedelic stores and night-clubs. Psychedelic artists – arguably the sole survivors of New York psychedelia – sold their paintings to art galleries and acquired a certain degree of cultural legitimacy, when their work had been the product of illicit drug experimentation. Some of them even went into advertising, when companies realized that the code of psychedelia could be used and recycled to confer an aura of hipness to commercial goods.

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<sup>103</sup> Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt & Company, 2000); Ross Wetzsteon, *Republic of Dreams: Greenwich Village, the American Bohemia, 1910-1960* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002).

<sup>104</sup> Peter Stafford, *Psychedelics Encyclopedia* (Berkeley: Ronin, 1992), 42.

<sup>105</sup> Charles Perry, *The Haight-Ashbury: A History* (New York: Random House, 1984); Stevens, *Storming Heaven*.

Furthermore, the urban context in which LSD was disseminated is also critical to understand this history. From its arrival in the late 1950s to the mid-1960s, it was an obscure drug that became gradually popular amongst bohemian circles. Although certain factors, which will be explored in the opening chapter of this dissertation, also explain its acceptance, the population density of New York City was also responsible for its promotion by simple word of mouth. When Rachel and Isaac Abrams organized the first ever psychedelic art exhibition in 1965, they had no explanation for the sheer number of psychedelic drug enthusiasts that turned up, when they thought that LSD was largely confined to a select few. The power of the drug to induce unusual states of consciousness and its potential for life-changing experiences conferred it an aura of wonder chemical and further facilitated its popularization. This study uses a broad range of primary materials such as newspaper and magazine articles, correspondence, diaries and autobiographies, scholarly and lay publications. I have consulted several archival collections, but none were as resourceful as the Peter Stafford Papers located at Columbia University, which contain a wealth of primary material.<sup>106</sup> Furthermore, it relies on interviews with past LSD users of various backgrounds, which were contacted using the “snowball technique.” Using interviews adds a qualitative approach to study psychedelic drug consumption, which is often lacking in textual sources such as newspapers, and which gives a much clearer voice to the psychedelic subculture. The data offered not only valuable information on drug use in the Sixties and beyond, but also some insightful comments that helped reflect upon that topic. Moreover, discussing this

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<sup>106</sup> Peter Stafford Papers, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York (hereafter “Stafford Papers”). The late Stafford authored several books on LSD and psychedelics, edited the underground magazine *Crawdaddy!* and was an avid collector of psychedelic ephemera. The collection contains scores of newspaper and magazine cuttings, both from orthodox and underground publications, letters, posters, and books. The collection is critical to undertake any form of research on the cultural history of illicit drugs or the history of the American counter-culture of the 1960s.

matter with women who experimented with psychedelics in the 1960s gives them clearer voices, when they have often been left out of social histories of psychedelic drug use.

Some of the sources are memoirs that were written long after the 1960s and deserve to be read with caution. Indeed, some of the accounts used here point to a deep polarization between “hip” and “straight” society, when it is unlikely that the split was so acute. A good illustration of this phenomenon can be found in Nina Graboi’s autobiography.<sup>107</sup> A woman who gradually became involved in Leary’s psychedelic movement, she regularly pitted herself and the psychedelic counter-culture against the hegemonic culture of the times. Graboi – a middle-class woman from suburban New York – described the world she found in the psychedelic counter-culture as “removed from the predictable world of the suburbs,” which had “two cars in the garage of the split-level home filled with consumer goods, none of which brought happiness to the families who live in them.”<sup>108</sup> As Home cautiously points out, “[...] living memory tends to be influenced by media representations, and is not necessarily any more reliable than newspaper accounts of events.”<sup>109</sup> While I have ultimately used Graboi’s valuable account as a major source for this study, I realize that she may have exaggerated certain aspects of her journey through the Sixties; however, I also feel such a possible exaggeration is a testimony of the cultural climate of the era and says much about the nostalgia for the decade that has prevailed.<sup>110</sup>

To better understand how a psychedelic experience could be influenced by environmental variables, I pay a great deal of attention to New-York City’s geographical

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<sup>107</sup> Nina Graboi, *One Foot in the Future: A Woman’s Spiritual Journey* (Santa Cruz, CA: Aerial Press, 1991).

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>109</sup> Home, “Voices Green and Purple,” 123.

<sup>110</sup> One possible explanation for this phenomenon is that Graboi went on to lead a life fairly close to the ideals she had in the Sixties. By contrast, some of those interviewed for this study had allegedly moved on from the psychedelic scene or its supposed counter-cultural ideals.

spaces. Several locations became key for the psychedelic community because they offered the supportive environment necessary for the experience to unfold without difficulties or dangers. The notion of “set and setting” popularized by Leary is primordial to understand the mechanisms behind the psychedelic experience. This refers to a psychedelic drug user’s psychological circumstances (both immediate and long term) and to the environmental variables surrounding the user. Set and setting are considered to be critical to the way a psychedelic experience may unfold. For instance, a person who has repressed trauma (long-term set) or who has just heard some bad news (short-term set) is likely to be affected by these factors during the course of the experience. Likewise, taking LSD in a noisy or stressful environment, rather than a calm and serene atmosphere, is likely to amplify those negative elements. Furthermore, the experience was also concomitant to the quality and purity of the drug, as well as its dosage.

The historical scope of this study is intended to be broad. It seeks to look at psychedelics beyond the 1960s to further problematize the history of psychedelic drug use as a phenomenon of that decade alone. As the seminal psychedelic painter Isaac Abrams contends, “[...] from 67 and so on, into the 70s, was really where a lot of things were happening. Suddenly, there was a lot of it. It really spread out [...]. And I don’t think it ever ended. [...] I think people were probably taking more acid in the 70s, than they were in 65, definitely. So the 60s happened in the 70s, really.”<sup>111</sup> Although some evidence supports these claims,<sup>112</sup> one of the reasons why they are difficult to assess is that there is a significant dip in the quantity and quality of media coverage in the 1970s, when it lost interest in LSD.<sup>113</sup> With all the major

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<sup>111</sup> Isaac Abrams, interview by Chris Elcock, Montceaux, FR, May 22, 2013.

<sup>112</sup> Erich Goode, *Drugs in American Society* (Boston: McGraw-Hill College, 1993), 254-5; John R. Neill, “‘More Than Medical Significance’: LSD and American Psychiatry-1953 to 1966,” *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs* 19, no. 1 (1987): 41. As referenced in Siff, *Acid Hype*, 13.

<sup>113</sup> Siff, *Acid Hype*, 3.



players of the psychedelic movement retired or sidelined, the assimilation of psychedelic spirituality into new religious movements and cults, or the disintegration of counter-cultural hotspots, the media had far fewer sensational elements to feed upon and was content to simply mention LSD in the occasional drug raid report.

In doing so this dissertation sides with a major trend in Sixties historiography. The “Long Sixties” scholarship<sup>114</sup> challenges the “rise and fall” or “declensionist” narrative that understands the decade as an era of unfulfilled promise that was ultimately crushed by the “Establishment,” co-opted by ruthless capitalism, or discredited by internal radicalism.<sup>115</sup> Just like second-wave feminism or the civil rights movements, psychedelic drug use and psychedelic utopianism seemed to slow down in the Seventies, but certainly did not disappear.<sup>116</sup> It is tempting to point to the late 1960s as the demise of psychedelia. As Arthur Marwick observes, many have understood the year of 1968 as pivotal and often ended their narratives at that particular moment; yet he sees 1968 as “a moment of high drama but not of

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<sup>114</sup> As examples of this trend, see John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c.1958-c.1974* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Marwick, “1968 and the Cultural Revolution of the Long Sixties (c. 1958-C. 1974),” in *Transnational Moments of Change: Europe 1945, 1968, 1989*, ed. Gerd-Rainer Horn and Padraic Kenney (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 81–94; Richard L. Hughes, “‘The Civil Rights Movement of the 1990s?’: The Anti-Abortion Movement and the Struggle for Racial Justice,” *Oral History Review* 33, no. 2 (2006): 1–24; Tom Hayden, *The Long Sixties: From 1960 to Barack Obama* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2009); Simon Hall, *American Patriotism, American Protest: Social Movements since the Sixties* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011). For a recent debate on the continuity and discontinuity of the 1960s and 1950s decades, see “The Sixties Reconsidered: A Forum,” *Historically Speaking* 9, n°3 (2008): 8-18.

<sup>115</sup> John McMillan has suggested that the rise-and-fall argument has its origins in the underground press that first popularized the notion that the prevailing Sixties idealism was brutally crushed in the final years of the decade. In particular, the alternative newspapers first framed the tragic 1969 Altamont rock festival, where four people died, as the “end of an era,” long before historians built their narratives along similar lines. See John McMillan, *Smoking Typewriters: The Sixties Underground Press and the Rise of Alternative Media in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 2-3.

<sup>116</sup> Elcock, “From Acid Revolution to Entheogenic Evolution.”

significant long-term change” and adds that “the transformations still affecting the lives of ordinary people at the beginning of the twenty-first century must be attributed to the entire Cultural Revolution of the Long Sixties.”<sup>117</sup> Indeed, the end of the 1960s saw the passing of new federal legislation that prohibited LSD and psychedelics in 1968; the arrests and sidelining of Leary and Kesey, as well as of the tremendously influential underground LSD manufacturers Owsley, Tim Scully, and Nick Sand; the purity and quality of LSD wane dramatically; or the rise of a New Age culture, partly designed to help psychedelic enthusiasts move beyond drugs into alternative forms of spirituality. But all these factors were not enough to effectively put an end to the psychedelic subculture in its broadest sense. All its facets were either forced underground or resurrected in some way or another by the more contemporary psychedelic renaissance.

This social and cultural history of New York City’s psychedelic moment will be narrated in the following chapters. Chapter 1 pays attention to the cultural context in New York at the turn of the 1950s. It traces the origins of the psychedelic subculture by looking for its antecedents in other illicit drug subcultures as well as other Bohemian movements. Chapter 2 looks at the maturation of the psychedelic subculture and presents its codes and some of its users. Chapter 3 conceptualizes the psychedelic counter-culture as a dynamic off-shoot of the psychedelic subculture. Chapter 4 studies the political import of psychedelia, discusses Leary’s involvement in NYC, and looks at the campaign against LSD as a political crusade. Chapter 5 focuses on psychedelics as technologies and their use in psychiatry, which were source of major contentions amongst various players. Chapter 6 scrutinizes psychedelic spirituality, the establishment of churches to provide supportive settings and the psychedelic movement’s critical attempts to legitimize the psychedelic experience as a valid part of

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<sup>117</sup> Marwick, “1968 and the Cultural Revolution of the Long Sixties (c. 1958-C. 1974),” 92. Though his essay does not focus on the United-States, these comments are also

American spirituality. Chapter 7 analyses the artistic dimension of New York psychedelia and its quest to find legitimacy. Finally, chapter 8 departs from this thematic approach and historicizes the psychedelic subculture by paying attention to the latter part of the Sixties, which saw several aspects of the subculture change as a result of various competing forces. The concluding chapter chiefly examines what happened after the Sixties and connects part of this history with the ongoing psychedelic renaissance in scientific research.

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relevant for the present case.

# Chapter 1

## The Genesis of the Psychedelic Subculture

When LSD entered the illicit drug scene in the latter part of 1950s, it became a catalyst for new cultural productions, and for a critique of the American way of life that climaxed in the 1960s. But as Robert Ellwood contends, this did not happen in a cultural vacuum and without a favourable cultural substrate: “Standard interpretations of the Sixties tend to emphasize the drab, fearful, conformist nature of the preceding decade in order to showcase against it the rebel yells and psychedelic hues of the successor. But all revolutions have a need to justify themselves by painting what went before in the bleakest colors; memory and some reference to the literature of the times suggests a Fifties decade with at least some variety.”<sup>1</sup>

In order to better contextualize the appearance of LSD in New York City, it is thus necessary to look at the broader sociocultural factors at the turn of the 1950s that facilitated its subsequent acceptance. Long before the more widespread consumption of psychedelics, particularly in the second part of the Sixties, there existed several illicit substance subcultures whose members centered their lives on drug use. At the same time, some Greenwich Village bohemians perceived mind-altering drugs as important assets to change their perspectives on American society. Gradually, they became an important cultural force that attracted like-minded individuals eager to subvert the postwar American Dream, as well as intellectuals looking to probe the depth of the mind by experimenting with psychedelics.

### Beats and Early Drug Subcultures

The writers, poets, or marginal figures who formed what has been remembered as the Beat generation,<sup>2</sup> had sown some early seeds of cultural discontent, long before the high-profile protest movements of the 1960s. In the postwar context of affluence and consumerism, and after the atrocities of World War II, they engaged in deviant or otherwise illegal activities, and formed a cultural movement that revolved around literary experimentation, alternative spirituality and sexuality, and the consumption of illicit or obscure recreational drugs, as a challenge to conformity. As Isaac Abrams contends, “[psychedelics] were very important, because there was an attachment through drugs with the underworld and the underclass, with jazz, with blackness, and a lot of people who were trying to move out, you know, of their bourgeois way and will. There were also some people there who were like criminals, who were like robbers, thieves, and stuff like that. It was all coming from the same place.”<sup>3</sup> For the Beats, then, using illicit drugs was not just deviously hip: psychedelics and their ability to alter consciousness and revisit social norms offered a way of culturally deconditioning the individual to attain a form of authenticity.<sup>4</sup>

After World War II, seminal Beat figures like the writer Jack Kerouac, the poet Allen Ginsberg, and their friend Neal Cassady - famous for driving Ken Kesey and his friends across

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<sup>1</sup> Ellwood, *The Sixties Spiritual Awakening*, 40. For more on this, see Robert S. Ellwood, *The Fifties Spiritual Marketplace: American Religion in a Decade of Conflict* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> The Beat phenomenon has mostly been analysed as a literary rather than a social phenomenon. For some exceptions, see Barry Miles, “The Beat Generation in the Village,” in *Greenwich Village: Culture and Counterculture*, ed. Rick Beard and Leslie Berlowitz (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 165-79; Wini Breines, “The ‘Other’ Fifties: Beats and Bad Girls,” in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 382-408; Mel van Elteren, “The Subculture of the Beats: A Sociological Revisit,” *Journal of American Culture* 22, no. 3 (1999): 71-99.

<sup>3</sup> Isaac Abrams, interview.

<sup>4</sup> For more on this notion, see Farber, “The Intoxicated/Illegal Nation: Drugs in the Sixties Counterculture.”

the country - attracted like-minded people in Greenwich Village and soon built a small, but visible community. The 1957 publication of Kerouac's *On the Road*, along with the trial for obscenity caused by the publication of Ginsberg's poetic masterpiece *Howl*, gave the Beat phenomenon tremendous publicity and caused "weekend beatniks" to flock to the Village, even if the founding Beats were long gone – Ginsberg moved to the Lower East Side in 1958 with his lover Peter Orlovsky.<sup>5</sup> The Beat subculture soon drew all kinds of illicit drug subcultures into the area, which became the city's hotspot for both drug distribution and consumption. That the scene blossomed in this particular area was not surprising. Housing was still cheap, but more importantly, the Village had a long tradition of multiculturalism that went back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when a wave of Italian, German, and Irish immigrants settled there and helped foster a spirit of tolerance that attracted a minority of bohemians. In the interwar period, gays, socialists, Dadaists, poets, writers, artists, or eccentric socialites were attracted to the Village, which became the best-known bohemian neighbourhood in the country.<sup>6</sup>

As early as the 1940s, illicit drug use was present in that area. The lesser-known Beat poet Gerd Stern moved to the East Village around that time. There he shared his first apartment with a regular heroin user and witnessed the problem of addiction: "There were policemen, and when there were not enough drugs there were physical symptoms of trying to kick the habit."<sup>7</sup> After having his first experience with cannabis and following a brief spell in California, Stern found himself without support and checked himself into a mental institution in order to survive. There he met the Beat poet Carl Solomon and Ginsberg, and gave the

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<sup>5</sup> Miles, "The Beat Generation in the Village," 177-8.

<sup>6</sup> Rick Beard and Leslie Berlowitz, eds., *Greenwich Village: Culture and Counterculture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993).

<sup>7</sup> Gerd Stern, "From Beat Scene Poet to Psychedelic Multimedia Artist in San Francisco and Beyond, 1948-1978," interview by Victoria Morris Byerly, 2001, 6, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, Regional Oral History Office.

latter his first smoke in 1947.<sup>8</sup> In the 1950s, cannabis-smoking became integral to the Beat way of life and was considered hip and vaguely subversive.<sup>9</sup> Ed Rosenfeld, who also admits being drawn to the Beat subculture in his formative years, recalls his cannabis use and was seduced by its deviant power in the late 1950s:

I was a beatnik when I was 14. I was going to Greenwich Village and I had drum over my shoulder and I would go with people play drums all night. As a matter of fact, when I was in my first year of high school, the assistant headmaster of the school accused me of going to Greenwich Village and I said: “Yes” and accused me of hanging out with beatniks and I said: “Yes” and accused me of smoking marijuana and I said: “I tried it once, but I don’t smoke marijuana.” He says: “You can’t fool me; you’re just like a marijuana smoker; I can tell a marijuana smoker!” And I left that meeting thinking: “Well maybe I ought to give it another try!” [laughs]<sup>10</sup>

For the light-show artist and self-described beatnik Jeff Perkins, it was very much the precursor of LSD. Many of those who went on to take LSD did so because they had tried cannabis before: “We knew [LSD] was a drug because we had smoked pot. And pot was kind of similar – but LSD had this ultra-perception associated within the physical experience. [...] You could buy little nickel bags of pot. Five dollars. Brown little bags. Couple of joints in them.”<sup>11</sup> Likewise, a 20-year old female singer and actress became interested in LSD after sampling cannabis in Greenwich Village - even if she initially grew tired of other smokers who used it for recreational purposes only.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Gerd Stern, interview by Chris Elcock, Greenwich Village apartment, New York City, March 5, 2013.

<sup>9</sup> Though the drug is a lot milder than LSD or peyote, it is technically a psychedelic. See Martin Booth, *Cannabis: A History* (New York: Picador, 2005); Martin A. Lee, *Smoke Signals: A Social History of Marijuana - Medical, Recreational and Scientific* (New York: Scribner, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> Ed Rosenfeld, interview by Chris Elcock, Cooper Square apartment, New York City, April 4, 2013.

<sup>11</sup> Jeff Perkins, interview by Chris Elcock, Upper West Side apartment, New York City, April 12, 2013.

<sup>12</sup> Melinda Parks to Timothy Leary, December 26, 1963, folder 1, box 49, Leary papers.

Perkins also consumed amphetamines (the father of one of his friends was a pharmacist), which were a choice staple in the New York drug subculture and had been available for quite a while.<sup>13</sup> According to Ginsberg, this type of drug was also prevalent in the Lower East Side: “Since 1958 it’s been a plague around my house. People that I liked or who were good artists, have gotten all screwed up on it, and come around burning down the door, stealing.”<sup>14</sup> Don McNeill of the *Village Voice* newspaper thought that Americans had mostly accepted the drug as a legitimate stimulant in accordance with the Protestant work ethic and pointed to the paradoxical separation between the legitimate and deviant use of amphetamines.<sup>15</sup>

The peyote cactus<sup>16</sup> can also be seen as a precursor of LSD, in that its effects are far more potent than cannabis. As early as 1914, the eccentric socialite Mabel Dodge Luhan had hosted her secret “peyote party” in her Greenwich Village apartment – the same year Congress passed the Harrison Narcotics Act to suppress the non-medical use of drugs.<sup>17</sup> Those who knew about it could purchase the peyote buttons through mail order or even in pharmacies. Other reports indicate that peyote cacti were available in Greenwich Village coffeehouses – where one could simply ask for coffee or peyote at the counter. In June 1960, for example, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) raided a cafe and seized approximately 310 pounds of

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<sup>13</sup> For a history of amphetamine use, see Nicolas Rasmussen, *On Speed: The Many Lives of Amphetamine* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Allen Ginsberg, “Contra Speedamos Ex Cathedra and Other Subjects,” from *Electric Newspaper*, Liberation News Service, folder “Drugs Crackdown (2),” box 5, Stafford Papers.

<sup>15</sup> Don McNeill, “The A-Heads,” *Village Voice*, February 2, 1967, folder “Amphetamines,” box 1, Stafford papers.

<sup>16</sup> While the history and anthropology of peyote use amongst Native American Indians has attracted a great deal of scholarly attention, a study of peyote use amongst non-Native populations would be a valuable contribution to the social history of drug use.

<sup>17</sup> For an account of Luhan’s experience, see Mabel Dodge Luhan, excerpt from *Movers and Shakers*, in *Shaman Woman, Mainline Lady: Women’s Writings on the Drug Experience*, ed. Cynthia Palmer and Michael Horowitz (New York: William Morrow, 1982), 113-118.



peyote and 145 capsules of a peyote preparation. The owner was charged with illegal sale of the drug (without a doctor's prescription). The capsules were manufactured in a basement by soaking the peyote in water, removing the liquid and injecting the resulting substance into capsules with a grease gun.<sup>18</sup>

The better-informed psychedelic enthusiasts also heard about the obscure "morning glory" seeds (or *ololiuqui*) that contain an alkaloid with a chemical structure close to LSD, but their preparation was even more fastidious than peyote and their bitter taste and nauseous side-effects were not to everyone's liking. One New Yorker tried it with one of Leary's friends in May 1963 and initially reported "the most wonderful sensations of color," but the pleasurable experience then made way for one of self-contempt. This was something he often went through with other drugs like cannabis or peyote, but that he tried to counter by taking tranquilizers in advance. Under the influence of the seeds, however, he felt far more insane and tortured and ended up in Bellevue Hospital, where he received treatment.<sup>19</sup>

If peyote and cannabis can be seen as the precursors of LSD, both drugs also had in common an aura of deviance and crime. In 1952, amidst the Red Scare, there were sensational reports of peyote use in New York that drew parallels with cannabis as a nightmare drug.<sup>20</sup> In 1957, the former J.P. Morgan banker turned amateur ethnographer Gordon Wasson covered the use of mind-altering mushrooms amongst the Mazatec Indians in what became a historic *Life* article. As a direct result, some New Yorkers became interested in psychedelics as part of a broader quest for mystical enlightenment.<sup>21</sup> But Wasson's piece also elicited strong reactions from the magazine's readership. Though one reader was appalled that the magazine devoted

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<sup>18</sup> "Habit-forming Drug Sold by N.Y. Beatnik Coffee Shops," *Washington Post*, June 19, 1960. Peyote, though, is neither habit-forming, nor a stimulant, as the article claims.

<sup>19</sup> Puckett Johnson to Timothy Leary, May 20, 1963, folder 11, box 47, Leary papers.

<sup>20</sup> Willis DeJacques, "America's Newest Dope Horror," *Man to Man* vol.3(6), July 1952, folder "Peyote," box 11, Stafford Papers.

time and space to such matters, another took the opportunity to mention that she had been using the similar peyote cactus for three years, as a direct result of reading Huxley's "Doors of Perception."<sup>22</sup>

According to the writer Chester Anderson, the early psychedelic subculture rallied around the synthetic drug mescaline - one of the chief psychoactive alkaloids contained in peyote - in the summer of 1958, as an alternative to the foul-tasting cactus that had been hitherto available.<sup>23</sup> A female medical student at Columbia tried it in the early 1960s and though she admitted that the conditions under which she took the drug were terrible, she nonetheless claimed to have acquired a new aesthetic sensibility: "Afterwards, I began seeing all kinds of relationships between the drug experience and everyday life experiences: from sunlight on the water to children's toys to a paper I hope to write someday on the visions of the romantic poets."<sup>24</sup> One White saxophone player from Long Island once told Isaac Abrams about the powerful effects of mescaline as early as 1956. This made an impression on him, even if his first psychedelic experience did not come until six years later. He worked at a music store with this man and went to several jazz venues in Manhattan. This allowed him to hear more about psychedelics, which were still obscure substances back then, but available to a select few.<sup>25</sup>

The New York jazz scene was also an important one to help the psychedelic subculture blossom. In June 1961 the writer and art critic Bernard Friedman, who had befriended Leary and gotten involved with his research, hosted a jazz party in his garden for about 90 people.

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<sup>21</sup> Keith Angier to International Foundation for Internal Freedom. October 29, 1963, folder 9, box 51, Leary papers.

<sup>22</sup> Jane Ross to editors, *Life* Vol.3(22), June 3, 1957, 16.

<sup>23</sup> Warren Hinckle, "The Hippie Ethic," *Ramparts*, March 1967, 18, folder "Ramparts," box 29, Stafford Papers.

<sup>24</sup> Annette Hollander to Timothy Leary, November 20, 1966, folder 1, box 47, Leary papers.

<sup>25</sup> Isaac Abrams, interview.

He had smoked a lot of cannabis and drank a great deal of scotch in order to handle the crowd, when he was given some psilocybin mushrooms. He reported no visions, insights, or physical reactions, but “an extreme sense of detachment and distance.” As a result, he realized the futility of entertaining so many people: “I stopped playing host, I stopped bothering to make introductions, I was alone, having a very good time, not needing anyone else, certainly not ninety anyone elses [*sic*].”<sup>26</sup>

The Canadian jazz musician Maynard Ferguson and his wife Flo were also critical players for the early psychedelic subculture by hosting psychedelic parties in their home. In September 1961, Friedman took some mushrooms with his wife Abby, Flo, Leary, and the influential New York theater producer Van Wolfe. After ingesting them, other people – including some Chinese women - turned up at the party, but did not partake, as they had run out of mushrooms. The hostess simply offered more drinks and food for her guests, and spread out cushions for everyone. Friedman later conversed with Leary, who admitted that he was already disillusioned by his work in academia, some two years prior to his Harvard dismissal. The next day Friedman reflected on his experience and marvelled at a feeling of unity and oneness with the universe: “Mushrooms have affected my vision: I can see through bullshit. Even bullshit has become part of the clear glorious ocean of phenomena. I love every ripple caused by every grain of sand.”<sup>27</sup>

The Fergusons, however, were more than just week-enders and soon became part of the burgeoning psychedelic movement led by Leary. Unlike other scientists looking into this potential, Leary was a psychologist, rather than a medical doctor. But he was so impressed by the psychedelic experience that he shrugged off his lack of medical credentials and began to probe the depths of the human mind. As he studied the effects of psilocybin at Harvard, he

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<sup>26</sup> B.H. Friedman to Timothy Leary, June 28, 1961, folder 19, box 45, Leary papers.

was already thinking beyond the realms of academia and wondered if the experience could have a valid social import: should it remain secretive and be used exclusively by the American elite, as the early psychedelic enthusiast Aldous Huxley wanted, or should it be freely distributed to the public? The answer came from Ginsberg in December 1960, when he took mushrooms at Leary's house in Cambridge, Massachusetts and reasoned that they should start a peace and love movement to change the world for the better. At that time, Leary was still an academic, so to speak. His interest in psilocybin was scientific and he was a different character from the LSD guru that he became in the second part of the decade. Thus, Ginsberg's plan to initiate several influential New Yorkers to bring about the psychedelic revolution, which was mostly political in nature, appealed to him, because it allowed him to study the effects of psilocybin on artists and musicians.

Around that same time, Cassady visited Leary. He had experimented with a great deal of substances and was intrigued by Leary's project, because he had never sampled synthetic psilocybin. In the early Sixties, however, when Leary had not yet tried LSD, the Harvard professor was keen to conduct his research under far more rigorous auspices than he would later, aware that his object of study had the potential to spark controversy. This clashed with Cassady's own vision, who equated the psychedelic experience with ecstasy, mystic freedom, or spontaneity – some of the key Beat tenets.

To persuade Leary that drugs should not be held captive by academic research, Cassady invited him to his apartment in New York. There he found Cassady along with two other women named Salinas and Patty-Belle. The sociological differences between the Harvard professor and the Beats became even more apparent in the way they spoke. Leary explained to Salinas his scientific approach to psilocybin: "I'm particularly interested in how

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<sup>27</sup> B.H. Friedman mushroom report, September 6, 1961, 38, folder 11, box 34, Leary papers.

psilocybin measures relative to other drugs you've taken. Psychopharmacologists haven't yet been able to collect this kind of comparative phenomenological data." To which Salinas answered: "You mean, man, you want us to get high on your drug and then compare it with other stuff we've done?"<sup>28</sup> Cassady tried the drug under Leary's supervision and gave the Harvard professor a comparative description of the effects that underscored this experience with illicit substances: "This combines the good sides of every other drug with none of the bad. [...] More mellow and cozy than heroin, but you don't nod out. I feel more alive and wired and energetic than with speed, but not jangly. It's got the blast of cocaine, but it lasted ten times longer."<sup>29</sup>

It is quite likely that this meeting was an important moment when Leary realized that these substances held greater power than he initially expected, as well as a spiritual potential. In particular, he noticed how the Beats' approach to the use of psychedelics differed from his own. During his experiments at Harvard with several subjects, he had been used to "the giggling nervousness, the uneasy rationalization, the tightfaced panic." But with these new subjects who were the product of urban bohemia, he was surprised to see a much greater reverential attitude to these drugs that departed greatly from Ivy League sensibilities: "I was fascinated to witness the calm devotion, the almost religious commitment of the beatniks to the moment of ingestion." Beyond this dimension, the Beats had a great deal of experience that impressed him even more: "They were connoisseurs, experienced space-travellers approaching a promising new planet."<sup>30</sup> Of course, Cassady had already become familiar with other psychedelics, which led him to appreciate similar substances that might expand his consciousness. But his religious approach to the drug likely came from the Beat culture's

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<sup>28</sup> Timothy Leary, *Flashbacks: A Personal and Cultural History of an Era* (Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher, 1990), 54.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

interest in Eastern spirituality - Leary was greatly intrigued when Cassady “folded his body into an oriental meditation posture and seemed to be concentrating on his breathing.”<sup>31</sup>

The convergence of Eastern religion with drug use became increasingly apparent in the 1960s, when psychedelic drug users looked for frameworks to channel the spiritual awakening provoked by the psychedelic experience. These early signs, though, can be attributed to the growing popularity of these non-Western religions in the 1950s, partly thanks to the Beats, but also to some prominent scholars like Alan Watts, who was instrumental in bringing Zen Buddhism to the United States, and who authored the first best-seller on the topic.<sup>32</sup> Huxley was also interested in Eastern spirituality (particularly Hinduism) and also wrote a seminal book just after the war that synthesized the mystical literature of many religious traditions and speculated that there existed a universal mystical reality.<sup>33</sup> His classic essays “The Doors of Perception” and “Heaven and Hell,”<sup>34</sup> in which he discussed his psychedelic experiments with mescaline and LSD, were strongly influenced by his Hindu background and were just as influential writings.

These non-Western religions seemed to have influenced peyote use in Manhattan. For instance, one man interested in Eastern spirituality and drugs acquired a peyote capsule in 1958 in an East Side coffee shop and claimed to have “benefitted from the insights and deeper understanding” of the experience and then acquired some more peyote through a friend in Texas.<sup>35</sup> Another peyote experimenter acquainted with Leary once took the drug and reported visions of the Buddha: “The very first image was of a stone Buddha picking me up, later after

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid. For more on this, see Carl T. Jackson, “The Counterculture Looks East: Beat Writers and Asian Religion,” *American Studies* 29, no. 1 (1988): 51–70.

<sup>32</sup> Alan Watts, *The Way of Zen* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989).

<sup>33</sup> Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2009).

<sup>34</sup> Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception and Heaven and Hell* (New York: Perennial Classics, 2004).

several other images passed before me I came back to the stone Buddha. He picked me up further and kissed me on the brow. I was relaxed and smiling. Towards the early part of the experience I sat up and saw myself as a stone Buddha. My last image of the experience was of seeing the great Buddha in Japan which has a white streak down it.”<sup>36</sup>

Although this spirituality certainly helped the acceptance of psychedelics, there also existed a body of western literature that dealt with unusual states of consciousness. For Perkins, it was the Canadian psychiatrist Maurice Bucke’s *Cosmic Consciousness* that sparked his interest for altered states of consciousness.<sup>37</sup> For Rosenfeld, Robert De Ropp’s *Drugs and the Mind* made a strong impression: “I remember the De Ropp book in particular being one that my friends and I talked about and referenced and read, because that seemed to be the only basis for authentic information.” At the time (in the late 1950s), he and his friends smoked cannabis and learned about other psychedelics like psilocybin mushrooms courtesy of Wasson’s 1957 *Life* magazine article.

If Eastern religions seemed better equipped for psychedelia, orthodox Christianity appeared far more ambivalent towards these ideas of mystical revelations. In the fall of 1960, Ginsberg arranged psilocybin sessions in his apartment on the Lower East Side for Jack Kerouac. For Leary, this was another landmark session, in that it became his first negative experience. One of the main reasons, he felt, was Kerouac, who resisted the experience by drinking heavily throughout the session and embarking on endless streams of consciousness. Leary, who by then had taken psilocybin with over a hundred people, had never seen such resistance from a subject, which greatly affected his own trip: “He was imposing his saloon

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<sup>35</sup> Herbert Scheidt to International Foundation for Internal Freedom, February 28, 1964, folder 6, box 56, Leary papers.

<sup>36</sup> Harold Naiderman to Timothy Leary, January 4, 1963, folder 5, box 47, Leary papers.

<sup>37</sup> Perkins, interview.

style on [the experience], and for me it was simply too much.”<sup>38</sup> This plunged Leary into his first bad psilocybin experience, which was filled with religious thoughts. While he had also been raised as a Catholic, it was probably “Kerouac’s French-Catholic gloom” that influenced him the most: “No kidding around, the world was a dismal dreary place. [...] It *was* folly trying to change human nature. Who was I to eliminate suffering when now, from my own soul, oozed a pus of despair. Yes, the Catholic nuns were right. This world was a vale of suffering.”<sup>39</sup> Fortunately, Ginsberg’s soothing presence lifted his spirits, when the poet found him agonizing in the corner of the apartment. This led Leary to realize that emotions could be modulated so as not to get trapped by the intensity of the experience.

Before that session, Kerouac had openly derided Leary’s promotion of psychedelics and clearly demarcated authentic religion from his chemical ersatz. The drunken Kerouac asked him: “So what are you up to, Doctor Leary, running around with this communist fagot Ginsberg and your bag of pills? Can your drugs absolve the mortal and venial sins which our beloved savior, Jesus Christ, the only son of God, came down and sacrificed his life upon the cross to wash away?”<sup>40</sup> Later on, the writer concluded bitterly: “Walking on water wasn’t made in a day.”<sup>41</sup> This moment, then, was one of the early signs that psychedelic spirituality was to face strong opposition from orthodox religion.

Following that session, Ginsberg, his partner Orlovsky, and Leary moved uptown to initiate the Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Robert Lowell - an old-line Boston Brahmin from a well-to-do family. Ginsberg, however, realized that Lowell was not the ideal candidate for the experience. His poetry betrayed a gloomy and disturbed mind and the chances were that psilocybin might be too much for him to handle (so Leary gave him a weakened dose).

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<sup>38</sup> Leary, *Flashbacks*, 65.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.



Ginsberg felt that nonetheless the experience would be beneficial not only for Lowell, but also for the psychedelic movement: “We hope to loosen him up, make him happier. And on the political front, if [...] Lowell has a great session, his product endorsement will influence lots of intellectuals.”<sup>42</sup> The session went smoothly. Lowell saw the experience as a valid way of revising the original illumination of his religion: “Now I know what Blake and St. John of the Cross were talking about. [...] This experience is what I was seeking when I became a Catholic.”<sup>43</sup> Ginsberg concluded that even a troubled mind like Lowell’s could undergo the experience in a supportive setting, but perhaps more to the point, it contrasted greatly with Kerouac’s Catholic take on psychedelic spirituality.

Leary and Ginsberg then turned to the highly influential publisher Barney Rosset. The then owner of Grove Press, famous for publishing the works of William Burroughs, Jean Genet, Samuel Becket, and Henri Miller,<sup>44</sup> presented a much sterner challenge. Rossett had indeed a long history of mental illness that potentially posed a serious threat to the unravelling of the psychedelic experience. Following his ingestion of psilocybin mushrooms, Rosset ended up “in the gloomy thoughts department,”<sup>45</sup> worrying about politics, religion, his family and career.

After initiating Kerouac, Lowell and Rosset, Leary and Ginsberg realized that they had not witnessed any radical personality change and wondered whether higher doses might have led to more favourable results. But back then, they were navigating in uncharted territory and their experiments posed strong ethical dilemmas. The three men they had initiated had to various degrees resisted the experience and they were ultimately the only ones who could

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>44</sup> For more on Grove Press, see Loren Glass, *Counterculture Colophon: Grove Press, the Evergreen Review, and the Incorporation of the Avant-Garde* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 69.

decide whether to go further. They speculated that a series of personal variables like age, race, class, gender, or religious inclination could be important factors that hindered the experience and the chances of witnessing long-lasting and positive personality changes.

As the Fifties became the Sixties, then, there was not only a psychedelic subculture that was experimenting with drugs like peyote or cannabis, but also a burgeoning psychedelic movement that organized psilocybin sessions in a more secretive way. Though Leary and Ginsberg's venture was purposefully democratic and egalitarian, in practise, they realized that they needed to give the drug to influential New Yorkers, who would then endorse their product and - possibly - their revolutionary ideals, and in some cases provide funds for them. They believed it was only a matter of time before the cultural elite and the average drug user would converge to create a sweeping psychedelic movement.

### **Enter LSD**

When LSD entered the drug scene, it quickly became the choice substance of the psychedelic subculture. The drug had no physical side-effects; it was tasteless, odourless, and therefore easy to smuggle when it became illegal; and a minute dose was enough to produce a long and colourful psychedelic experience. Hence, there remained little incentive to use the foul-tasting peyote cactus, "because of the awful, bitter taste of the button, and also the nausea felt after taking it."<sup>46</sup> Ed Rosenfeld, who had purchased a box of peyote through mail order, concurred: "Cleaning the peyote buttons, cutting off the buttons, taking the strings out, chopping them off, getting them down - LSD was much simpler."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> H.S.K., letter to the *East Village Other* Vol. 2(15), July 1 - July 15, 1967, folder "Drugs Crackdown," box 4, Stafford Papers.

<sup>47</sup> Rosenfeld, interview.

The historical context of the time also partly explains the acceptance of LSD. Post-war America embraced psychedelics because, as the writer Anaïs Nin put it, this was “a scientific culture, a technological culture. It was logical that they would believe in drugs, drugs of all kinds.”<sup>48</sup> Other observers suggested that the acceptance of LSD should not come as a surprise, given the post-war context of widespread drug consumption. Synthetic drugs like LSD were embraced because, as one journalist put it, they seemed “to jibe so nicely with a respect for science and technology. [...] If Americans have a pill to induce sleep, a pill to prevent pregnancy, a pill to prevent sea-sickness, why not a pill to help them to find the truth?”<sup>49</sup> Moreover, the appeal for LSD may be linked to the United-States’ economic situation of the time. The context of post-war economic prosperity and renewed consumerism offered more room for leisure, which could include recreational drug use, as well as watching a movie at a drive-in.

Additionally, baby-boomers had grown up familiar with new media - television and radio - whereas their elders were more accustomed to newspapers. As Stewart Home argues, “One of the boons of the psychedelic revival of the sixties was the way it boosted the importance of the ocular within popular culture, in particular in the form of light shows at rock concerts, posters and art work for record sleeves.”<sup>50</sup> The swirling and shape-shifting visions triggered by the LSD experience were thus less likely to appeal to those who were less familiar with moving pictures. One journalist seemed to marvel at the possibilities television

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<sup>48</sup> Anaïs Nin, *The Diary of Anaïs Nin*, edited by Gunther Stuhlmann (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), 332.

<sup>49</sup> J. Anthony Lukas, “The Drug Scene,” *New York Times Magazine*, January 8 through 12, 1968, 6, folder “Drugs,” box 4, Stafford Papers. For more on this, see David Herzberg, *Happy Pills in America - From Miltown to Prozac* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

<sup>50</sup> Stewart Home, “Voices Green and Purple: Psychedelic Bad Crazy and the Revenge of the Avant-Garde,” in *Summer of Love: Psychedelic Art, Social Crisis and Counterculture in the 1960s*, ed. Christoph Grunenberg and Jonathan Harris (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), 137.

offered to psychedelia: “Hell, television is emphatically a head gimmick, all of the best features of strobes and lights and hallucinations in one box – is there any reason it should not become the religious art of the New Consciousness?”<sup>51</sup> When the artist collective USCO (the Company of Us) performed their multimedia happenings, one observer wrote that “the show finds its most receptive audiences at colleges. Young people who grew up with TV and transistor radios and who take electronic equipment for granted have no difficulty in attuning themselves to the audio-visual bombardment. Older people who prefer what is called a rational sequential experience, *i.e.*, just one movie or a single radio station at a time, tend to freak out.”<sup>52</sup>

More importantly, the drug had no legal status. This meant that users could have access to the drug through any channels and not be troubled by the law. The previous three decades had witnessed an anti-drug campaign spearheaded by the Federal Bureau of Narcotics’s first commissioner Harry Anslinger, who had made sensational and unsubstantiated claims that a drug like cannabis was a gateway to crime, insanity, and harder drugs, and crucially tied its use to ethnic minorities and the criminal underworld, which further tarnished its reputation. While this did not stop cannabis consumption, the arrival of a new psychedelic drug unknown to the public and to regulators was certainly a strong asset that gave the community of peyote, psilocybin, or cannabis users a new impetus.

LSD circumvented not only legal technicalities, but also cultural barriers. The drug appeared against a backdrop of extreme censorship that prohibited the depiction of the effects of mind-altering drugs like heroin, cannabis, and cocaine. But when Huxley - widely considered one of the most brilliant minds of his generation - narrated his chemical musings in such eloquent and convincing terms, even the most vicious opponent to drug use had to sit up

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<sup>51</sup> D.A. Latimer, “Chanel One,” *East Village Other* Vol. 2(16), July 15 – 30, 1967.

<sup>52</sup> “Psychedelic Art,” *Life*, September 9, 1966, 65.

and listen. Huxley's meditations were important to promote LSD and mescaline, but they also created a breach for journalists eager to cover astonishing drug stories after decades of restriction. Combined with the gradual waning of obscenity laws, they could now regale their readers with the wonders of the psychedelic experiences and ethnographic reportages of exotic drug rituals. As Stephen Siff concludes in his media history of LSD and psychedelics, these drugs "arrived as marvels of science rather than artifacts of crime."<sup>53</sup>

One of the chief facilitators of this transition was the media magnate Henri Luce, who contributed to the popularization of LSD through the pages of his *Time* and *Life* magazines. Luce was a conservative Protestant, advocate of free enterprise, and a patriot at heart, who resented the antiwar movement of the 1960s. He exerted a strong influence on his magazines right until his death in 1967, and his personal enthusiasm for LSD was reflected in these widely read magazines – he reportedly gave copies of a book on psychedelics to the managing directors. Even when LSD became more controversial in the second part of the decade, *Time* and *Life* offered balanced coverage by cautioning its readers against the indiscriminate LSD use, while simultaneously extolling its benefits. For the radical political activist Abbie Hoffman, Luce's role has been underestimated: "I've always maintained that Henry Luce did more to popularize acid than Timothy Leary." He allegedly first tried the drug "just about the time a *Life* magazine cover story was touting LSD as the new wonder drug that would end aggression."<sup>54</sup>

Examining the history of psychedelia through the lens of media not only sheds light on the complex origins of its dissemination, but also fittingly illustrates Ellwood's emphasis on historical continuity - rather than a radical transition - between the 1950s and the 1960s. LSD

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<sup>53</sup> Siff, *Acid Hype*, 41.

<sup>54</sup> Siff, *Acid Hype*, 115-6.

may not have become so popular (and later associated with deviance and utopianism), if such figures as Luce and Huxley had not openly endorsed the drug.

The Britton Michael Hollingshead became a key player in the history of New York psychedelia thanks to the English intellectual, whom he first contacted in his home in Los Angeles to obtain some mescaline in 1960. Huxley mentioned LSD, which Hollingshead acquired thanks to the medical doctor John Beresford. Alone in his apartment close to Washington Square, he underwent a powerful and life-changing experience; having manipulated the LSD solution with his fingers, he inadvertently ingested a heavy dose: “What I had experienced was the equivalent of death's abolition of the body.”<sup>55</sup> In the aftermath of the experience, he suffered a profound existential crisis and visited Leary at Harvard in 1961, following Huxley's recommendation. After treating his interest in LSD (rather than psilocybin) with suspicion, the professor finally accepted and underwent a life-changing experience on much greater scale than that with psilocybin.

If Hollingshead's first LSD trip can be considered a landmark in the social history of the drug because of the chain of events that followed, it also illustrates how critical the geographical setting was for psychedelic experimentation and explains in part why several LSD users left the city towards the end of the decade to pursue their psychedelic way of life. Under its influence, they could find the traffic fumes even more aggressive or find the iron and concrete of the sky-scrapers downright scary: “I beheld a city of 10,000 angry streets, and giant buildings fingered the sky; from a thousand throats the giant screams. A hundred trash-cans tumble lids and litters across the sidewalks, a siren goes hooting past, and all is CHAOS.”<sup>56</sup> Likewise, during a psilocybin session in Ginsberg's apartment in 1960, Leary

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<sup>55</sup> Michael Hollingshead, “A Lovin' Spoonful,” in *The Man Who Turned on the World* (New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1973), page unavailable, <http://www.psychedelic-library.org/hollings.htm> (accessed September 6, 2012).

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

wondered why his experience was mostly a negative one: “Maybe it was the drabness of the slum, so different from our carefully prepared session rooms. Perhaps it was the jittery New York itself, never a town for serene philosophers.”<sup>57</sup>

But at the time, the drug was still obscure and was not associated with negative experiences, as it was in the second part of the 1960s. Mostly, it was confined to the Beat circles in Greenwich Village and, according to Hollingshead, “a few wealthy Manhattan cats.” He felt that the post-war consensus of conformity and consumerism had not yet come under visible attack. Thus, the select few who indulged in the drug saw it as something risky and vaguely avant-garde: “LSD was still something of an ‘exotic’ whose effects could not be taken for granted. LSD involved risk. It was anarchistic; it upset our apple-carts, torpedoed our cherished illusions, sabotaged our beliefs. It was something you had to guard against, or you might explode.”<sup>58</sup> Ed Rosenfeld was one of those who tried the drug when it first appeared. Much like Hollingshead, he remembers that “There was a little coterie of people who were interested in exotic drugs.” Sometime around 1962-3, he got a loft in the East Village and became a lot more involved in psychedelics.<sup>59</sup>

Isaac and his then wife Rachel Abrams first tried psilocybin in 1962 courtesy of the New York artist Jerry Joffin. Isaac, who had just turned 23, does not remember much about the experience, other than enjoying it: “it was definitely nice for opening the door.”<sup>60</sup> Later, Rachel and her husband experimented with Sandoz-produced LSD in Joffin’s loft, along with a psychologist, who was interested in using the drug as an adjunct in his therapies, and other people. Back then, the LSD available to them was renowned for its quality, as Rachel acknowledges: “It was very pure and I think that’s basically one of the reasons we had good

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<sup>57</sup> Leary, *Flashbacks*, 65–6.

<sup>58</sup> Hollingshead, “A Lovin’ Spoonful.”

<sup>59</sup> Rosenfeld, interview.

<sup>60</sup> Isaac Abrams, interview.

trips.”<sup>61</sup> Isaac describes Joffin as a very bright, but troubled and self-destructive figure. Even though he seemed to find comfort in drugs including amphetamines and opiates, Joffin had told him to stay clear from heroin. But even without his advice, he had already reached this conclusion: “And right away, I seemed to have made the differentiation between the two classes of mind altering substances, one which I call drugs, and another I call psychedelics. And that is because in part, the nature of the experiences and what they did were very different. And I saw the destruction to people was obvious.”<sup>62</sup> LSD, then, seemed like a unique substance amongst the battery of illicit drugs available in New York, and prompted its users to discriminate against addictive drugs.

Writing in 1970, David Walley remembered the early years of the psychedelic drug subculture. The use of drugs and the discrimination between good psychedelic drugs and bad physically addictive drugs was not as clear as in the middle of the decade when the psychedelic movement’s influence peaked, along with LSD’s stature as a wonder drug. Members were often referred to as “heads” and used psychedelics like cannabis, peyote, and the still obscure LSD - although an “A-head” could also be a consumer of amphetamines. Being a head conferred an aura that could increase according to one’s level of hipness: “A head was someone you could always count on for some sort of enlightenment ...and of course there were different grades according to whatever the particular head was into drug-wise.”<sup>63</sup>

This language suggests that drug use in the early 1960s was attractive in part as a form of status-seeking. The sociologist Sarah Thornton’s useful concept of “subcultural capital” (itself a spin-off of Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital) helps to make sense of drug expertise and hierarchy amongst drug users to further illustrate how drug use can riddled with

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<sup>61</sup> Rachel Abrams, interview by Chris Elcock, Hotel La Louisiane, Paris, May 18, 2013.

<sup>62</sup> Isaac Abrams, interview.



internal competition. Focusing on clubbing in the UK in the early 1990s, she remarks for instance that there is a difference between using pure MDMA (3,4-methylenedioxy-methamphetamine - for those in the know and with the connections) and its impure counterpart Ecstasy (for the average clubber). Using the former will give its user a higher subcultural capital, which Thornton understands as the sum of insider knowledge and personal possessions within a given subculture, which positions its members within the larger group.<sup>64</sup>

But even in these early days the subculture showed signs that it had the potential to become more subversive and develop counter-cultural sensibilities. Long before the explosion of LSD use in the mid-1960s, or before the psychedelic movement's vocal promotion of LSD consumption to make the world a better place, the drug's ability to alter perception and distort reality spurred feelings of alienation with American society. Under its influence, benign and mundane activities could seem futile or even insane. When the blues singer Ronnie Gilbert underwent psychedelic therapy in New York, she once went to Central Park after ingesting the drug and witnessed what she first believed were savage beasts fighting in a cage: "After a minute, I saw that this insane sight was really players on a tennis court slamming the balls at one another. But as I looked at their faces and saw the intense, ugly, competitive expressions, I thought it was really sad they couldn't share a bit of my happy, demented world."<sup>65</sup> This is not to suggest that Gilbert later became part of the psychedelic counter-culture, but rather that the psychedelic experience had a potential to induce states of awareness that could lead to the suspicion of trivial routines and conformity.

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<sup>63</sup> David Walley, "Heads and Dopers: A Continuing Saga," *East Village Other* Vol. 5(24), May 12, 1970.

<sup>64</sup> Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1996).

<sup>65</sup> Bob Gaines, "LSD: Hollywood's Status-Symbol Drug," *Cosmopolitan*, November 1963, 81, folder "Hollywood," box 7, Stafford Papers.

In Leary's case, LSD led to a much greater ontological shattering than psilocybin and helped him further realize how reality could be the product of a social consensus. After his initiation, he furthered his mission with an even greater zeal and continued to give LSD to key characters. Early in 1963, the novelist Alan Harrington met Leary and Alpert in a Manhattan apartment, where the pair were discussing the benefits of the psychedelic experience and explaining the goals of their International Foundation for Internal Freedom (IF-IF) - an organization dedicated to the study of psychedelics and the expansion of consciousness. He underwent the psychedelic experience accompanied by Ralph Metzner and under Leary's supervision. After taking a dose of LSD, the writer, known for his black humour, came to realize the absurdity of the world surrounding him and found the whole universe so bizarre that "It was almost humourless." Later, they talked about psychology and discussed Leary's notion that every individual is blinded by ego "games" that make everyday life full of unnatural and codified relations.<sup>66</sup>

Though Leary has been remembered as a counter-cultural icon who urged Americans to "drop out" of their cultural conditioning to lead a more authentic life, his ideas should not solely be associated with the result of his experimentation with LSD and psychedelics but deserves to be understood as expressions of his early academic years, when he had not heard of all these exotic substances. Before becoming notorious for his proselytizing, he was regarded as a professor with a bright future ahead of him. In 1957, he published his seminal *Interpersonal Diagnosis of Personality*,<sup>67</sup> a complex book designed to categorize patients according to their personality type and a major source for contemporary personality tests. As John Higgs observes, some of the arguments developed throughout the book were novel and

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<sup>66</sup> Alan Harrington, "The Pros and Cons, History and Future Possibilities of Vision-inducing Psychochemicals," *Playboy*, November 1963, 168, folder "Playboy," box 28, Stafford Papers. His trip also had moments of discomfort, tension, and fear.

radical. In particular, he dismissed the concept of “normal” behaviour as the mere projection of White, middle-class attitudes. Instead of branding patients abnormal or mentally ill, psychologists should pay far more attention to their environmental circumstances, such as their family history or their socio-economic background.<sup>68</sup> Thus, when Leary discovered the psychedelic experience, many of his ontological reflections were consistent with his academic past.

Questioning the societal norms and normality became an important tenet of the psychedelic counter-culture. One of its earlier manifestations was a short-lived act that had travelled across the country in search of new experiences. In 1964, Ken Kesey and a group of friends known as the Merry Pranksters set off from California on a cross-country trip with Cassady as driver. They refurbished an old school bus and carried with them a liberal supply of LSD (the drug was still legal then). Upon arriving in New York in July, the Pranksters noticed how dire the city was and felt somewhat alienated from the rest of society: “The town was full of solemn, spent, irritable people shit-kicking their way down the sidewalks. A shit kicker is a guy with a frown on and his eyes on the ground, sloughing forward with his shoes scuffing the pavement like he’s kicking horseshit out of the way saying oh that this should happen to me.”<sup>69</sup> Thus, they engaged in one of their trademark activities: to point to the mental conditioning of society through acts that were incomprehensible to those watching, but made perfect sense to them. Kesey and Ken Babbs climbed onto the roof of the bus and started playing the flute. “This tootling had gotten to be a thing where you [...] *played people* like they were music, the poor comatose world outside. If a guy looked at you fat and pissed off,

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<sup>67</sup> Timothy Leary, *Interpersonal Diagnosis of Personality: A Functional Theory and Methodology for Personality Evaluation* (Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2004).

<sup>68</sup> John Higgs, *I Have America Surrounded: The Life of Timothy Leary* (Fort Lee, NJ: Barricade Books, 2006), 18–9.

<sup>69</sup> Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, 101.

you played on the flute in dying elephant tones. If a woman looked up nervous and twittering, you played nervous and twittering.”<sup>70</sup>

Later, they met with Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, hoping that a get-together with the Beat veteran would provide a fruitful counter-cultural event. As Tom Wolfe comments, “Kerouac was the old star. Kesey was the wild new comet from the West heading Christ knew where.”<sup>71</sup> But the meeting turned sour, with Kesey and Kerouac having little to say to each other. In many ways, this stellar but anti-climactic gathering epitomized the internal disagreements of psychedelia and the multiple conceptions of the psychedelic experience. Kesey had embraced psychedelics and made them part of his life, whereas the author of *On the Road* had taken them irreligiously and laughed off notions of chemical enlightenment. Kesey’s larger psychedelic encounter with New York City was also ominous. It further illustrates how LSD had the potential to subvert the established cultural order and created room for a counter-culture that was to become more visible in the second part of the Sixties. But it also preceded the exodus that occurred towards the end of the decade, when several psychedelic drug users became weary of taking drugs in the city and looked for safer places in the countryside.

## Conclusion

In the early 1960s, then, many signs indicated that LSD was becoming popular amongst a broad pool of New Yorkers. It allowed the psychedelic subculture to blossom in Greenwich Village (before spreading out to the East Village), where an already eclectic and tolerant bohemian population made for a favourable substrate. When LSD users embraced an artistic

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 102.

career as a result of their experimentation, they saw the Village as the best location and furthered a much longer tradition of avant-garde painters, who made it a point to live there amongst other artists, but also intellectuals and creative people, always interested in new cultural trends.<sup>72</sup>

But crucially, it appeared at a time when some Americans were questioning the *status quo* and had already touted illicit drugs as an antidote against conformity. When that drug entered the scene, though, it did far more than just sharpen those sensibilities: as LSD use increased throughout the decade, it helped the psychedelic community blossom into a rich subculture that permeated the various spheres of New York society. In doing so, it sought to gain recognition and legitimacy and offered a multiplicity of discourses intended at a surprisingly wide audience. This led to unique episodes of exposure, but inevitably to moments of discord and conflict. In spite of this, it survived the 1960s, albeit without several of its salient characteristics.

Additionally, Leary's burgeoning psychedelic movement became a catalyst for the psychedelic drug enthusiasts looking to make the best of these substances. One Ph.D. who claimed to have successfully experimented with peyote as early as 1955 with some friends was thrilled to hear about Leary's research and asked him how he could become involved with his group.<sup>73</sup> Another was equally delighted and claimed that the official incorporation of Leary's IF-IF and its commendable purposes such as prisoner rehabilitation or the establishing of enlightened communities was "almost too good to be true." Tellingly, the supporter warned

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<sup>72</sup> Irving Sandler, "Avant-garde Artists of Greenwich Village," in *Greenwich Village: Culture and Counterculture*, ed. Rick Beard and Leslie Berlowitz (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 320-323.

<sup>73</sup> Ronald F.S. Forbes to Timothy Leary, April 26, 1963, folder 8, box 53, Leary papers.

that controversy would never be far away, despite the stellar endorsement of Huxley and Watts.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Ron Hewson to George Litwin, March 22, 1963, folder 29, box 53, Leary papers.

## Chapter 2

### The Psychedelic Subculture

When LSD entered the illicit drug scene and joined the other psychedelics, it was the catalyst that turned the burgeoning psychedelic subculture into a complex community. Though it helped create a radical counter-cultural fringe that openly criticized the American way of life, a sizable majority of LSD users became part of this large community through shared codes and values. “Almost everybody I know who took LSD at that time dropped out of their previous lifestyles and social group,” Graboi noticed. “But this did not isolate us. Acid use was restricted to such a small circle of ‘heads’ that we became instant members of a tribe, and we recognized each other wherever we went. It wasn’t the clothes we wore, or the length of our hair. It was in the eyes, a far-away look, a look of having seen much.”<sup>1</sup>

The notion that the LSD experience fostered an inherently revolutionary sensibility and led to counter-cultural activities was as much the consequence of vocal members of the psychedelic movement, who touted the experience as a cure-for-all, as the product of sensationalistic and simplistic reporting that fuelled fears of anarchy and corruption of youth. For instance, the *Nation* portrayed the subculture as if it was following Leary’s revolutionary precepts: its members only worked when they absolutely needed it, because they refused to surrender to what Leary had conceptualized as “games” that society followed blindly: “The preoccupations of most people – educational, professional, political – are ‘games’ to them. There is the ‘Vietnam-administration game,’ the ‘Hitler-Jewish game,’ the ‘McCarthy-ADA

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<sup>1</sup> Graboi, *One Foot in the Future*, 200.

game,' and the like."<sup>2</sup> The article implied that LSD users claimed to find authenticity and freedom through their choice substance, when in fact only a minority conceptualized the drug along such idealistic and utopian lines.

Instead of taking this coverage at face value, this chapter aims to problematize LSD consumption by explicitly discriminating between the more amorphous psychedelic subculture and the far more dynamic psychedelic counter-culture. To do so, it deliberately shuns the sensational reporting to underscore the characteristics of the subculture by examining a broader range of primary sources, as well as more neutral press coverage - for instance, the *New York World-Telegram* offered a more accurate assessment of the psychedelic subculture, whose members in Greenwich Village "talked as members of a teen-age subculture with a vocabulary grown up around the use of pills, mind-altering drugs, and narcotics."<sup>3</sup>

New Yorkers could be attracted to LSD for a number of reasons, but were for the most part curious to sample this new wonder drug. One 17-year-old from Forest Hills was drawn to it because he wanted to experience ecstatic visions: "I'd heard so much about it, that you could see all the wonders of the world right in your own mind, and I figured I had to try it."<sup>4</sup> Not all of them enjoyed the aesthetic experience, however. Some claimed that "hallucinations are rare and often unpleasant." Instead, it seemed to offer them new insights and capabilities to a point where some claimed to have improved their grades in school thanks to psychedelic drug use. One youth argued that "It helps you think better [...]. It, like, clears away everything

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<sup>2</sup> Mervin B. Freedman and Harvey Powelson, "Drugs on Campus: Turned on and Tuned out," *Nation*, January 31, 1966, 126, folder "College Drug Scandals," box 3, Stafford papers.

<sup>3</sup> Edward Edelson, "For \$5, Teen-Agers Buy Drugs in Greenwich Village," *New York World-Telegram*, November 29, 1965, folder "College Drug Scandals," box 3, Stafford papers.

<sup>4</sup> Jay Levin, "LSD in New York," *New York Post*, June 8, 1966, folder "LSD - NY Post," box 8, Stafford Papers.



that doesn't matter, so you can get close to things. It makes you see what the truth is."<sup>5</sup>

Another 19-year-old student from City College of New York took LSD because he "wanted to find some meaning to life – find the direction in which [he] was going." He also reported having emotional blocks and following therapy, before taking LSD: "I wanted to get deeper into myself. I gave my therapist a new description of myself, with such clarity that he was amazed."<sup>6</sup>

Thus, this subculture was not particularly interested in taking the drug to bring about world peace and understanding. Instead, its members stayed clear of any form of psychedelic activism. In his own words, Ed Rosenfeld sums up the difference between belonging to the subculture and being part of its more active fringe: "I would say I was in it but not of it. So I wasn't trying to be part then of the psychedelic scene."<sup>7</sup>

Yet, one-time or occasional users did not always adopt these codes and did not see themselves as being part of a broad psychedelic community. If LSD consumption was mostly associated with youth, fringe populations, or counter-cultural tendencies, the drug was also present amongst "straight" New Yorkers, who were intrigued or seduced by the drug, but considered to be outside the psychedelic subculture. LSD may have been associated with deviance and dissidence, but it was not enough to discourage people from trying it.<sup>8</sup> Looking at this (out-) side of the subculture is a way of avoiding an important dichotomy opposing mainstream and subculture. Sarah Thornton has criticized the use of the concept of "mainstream" in cultural studies for being "abstract and ahistorical" and for further developing the dichotomies established by subcultures that pit themselves against the mainstream. Some texts have relied too much on this concept "as the yardstick against which

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<sup>5</sup> Edelson, "For \$5."

<sup>6</sup> Levin, "LSD in New York."

<sup>7</sup> Rosenfeld, interview.

youth's 'resistance through rituals' and subversion through style is measured." Furthermore, the concept can too often be simply substituted by the bourgeoisie and its cultural values, against which subcultures are championed for their avant-garde nature.<sup>9</sup>

Ultimately, this chapter aims to strengthen one of the larger purposes of this dissertation: to downplay the causal links between the pharmacology of LSD and the behaviour of its users, and instead to give them more agency by showing the various patterns of drug consumption.

### **Locating Drugs**

Some key areas in Lower Manhattan, such as Greenwich Village, the East Village, and SoHo (South of Houston Street), became the psychedelic hotspot of the City. One LSD user and former Ivy-Leaguer living in that area claimed that "you can't walk down the street without bumping into a head. From my own experience I can tell you of four large universities where at least 40 percent of the student body has a nodding acquaintance with LSD, if they haven't already tried it. [...] Don't undersell the widespread use of LSD. Most of it is underground, but it is there, make no mistake about that."<sup>10</sup>

Still, it is hard to get the bigger picture in terms of LSD distribution. As Eric Schneider has shown in his social history of heroin use, the distribution of physically addictive drugs like heroin tends to be correlated to the poor socio-economic background of whole suburbs.<sup>11</sup> One New York narcotics agent concurred: "With heroin or the pills you can find them on corners, or at least in certain areas. They stay together near the supply, which is usually in Harlem or in

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<sup>8</sup> To use a contemporary analogy, many Internet users download material illegally, but do not see themselves as Internet "pirates" or "hackers."

<sup>9</sup> Thornton, *Club Cultures*, 93.

<sup>10</sup> John Cashman, *The LSD Story* (Greenwich, CT: Fawcett, 1966), 82.

Brooklyn or maybe in the Village.” Where the use of heroin was correlated to geography and socio-economy, the use of LSD, if anything, was correlated to class – a much more difficult parameter to take into account to track down suppliers and users. The agent continued:

“Where do we look? We can’t stake out all the colleges and high-rent apartments. And more than that, who is taking the LSD? It could be anybody. People out in Queens as well as the Village crowd.”<sup>12</sup>

In spite of this unpredictable distribution, a great deal of LSD could be found in the East Village, particularly in the second part of the 1960s, when the psychedelic scene gathered momentum and attracted many youthful middle-class Whites from the suburbs. Back then, that part of NYC was diversely populated, with Puerto Ricans, Poles, Blacks, Russians, Italians, and Ukrainians. An article in the *East Village Other* – a local newspaper largely sympathetic to the psychedelia - summed up how the eclectic mix managed to cohabitate. “The unifying factor of the East Village is that every one of its inhabitants are [*sic*], in fact, drop-outs, if in no other area than that of the escape from high rents. Not one of them could honestly live strictly legal, true-blue, red-blooded American lives.”<sup>13</sup>

In practise, however, cohabitation was a lot trickier. Another reporter found that the arrival of a youthful White middle-class and psychedelic paraphernalia had led to tensions with the locals who were unimpressed by this new bohemianism. A lifestyle of voluntary simplicity, albeit for the more idealistic LSD users, was perceived as an insult to the Puerto Ricans or Blacks who were born in the area and had no choice but to stay there. They were dismayed by the increase of rents, panhandling, and the ever-growing presence of illicit drugs. Tompkins Square Park, for instance, was a popular place for the psychedelic subculture, but it

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<sup>11</sup> Schneider, *Smack*.

<sup>12</sup> Cashman, *The LSD Story*, 119.

<sup>13</sup> Lionel H. Michel, “Look at Down There,” *East Village Other* Vol. 2(14), June 15 – July 1, 1967.

had also been the theatre of gang violence between the Blacks and Puerto Ricans, who had reclaimed it from the Italians and the Poles in the early Sixties - many members of the psychedelic scene were beaten up and robbed in the park.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, some Puerto Rican gangs disapproved of psychedelic drugs, which they saw as a threat to their narcotics business.<sup>15</sup> As another journalist sums up, “kids from middle-class backgrounds, are rejecting television and cars and suburban homes – the very things the people in the ghetto want. It’s like an insult.”<sup>16</sup>

Still more problematic was the inflow of a new population that opened a market for drug dealers and led to further conflict between the competing drug subcultures. These tensions climaxed in October 1967, with the brutal murders of James Hutchinson (better-known as “Groovy”) and Linda Fitzpatrick in the East Village. The press revealed that one of the suspects Don Ramsey had reportedly taken LSD at a party prior to the slayings, but more to the point was the suggestion that the murder was the result of a conflict surrounding the ethics of drug dealing. One counter-culturist known as “Galahad” blamed it on greedy “Pushers from uptown,” who did not like the idea that Hutchinson was “letting the kids have stuff (drugs) at cost price.” For Galahad, the murder was part of a greater strategy: “They want to take over this territory and they can’t stand people like Groovy because he cut into their business.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The park had a long tradition of urban tension and conflict. See for example Herbert G. Gutman, “The Tompkins Square ‘Riot’ in New York City on January 13, 1874: A Re-examination of Its Causes and Its Aftermath,” *Labor History* 6, no. 1 (1965): 44–70; Neil Smith, “‘Class Struggle on Avenue B’: The Lower East Side as Wild West,” in *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1996), 3–27.

<sup>15</sup> John Kifner, “The East Village: A Changing Scene for the Hippies,” *New York Times*, October 11, 1967.

<sup>16</sup> Anthony Burton, “Why the Children of Love Are Victims of Hate,” *Daily News*, October 10, 1967, folder “Drugs Danger,” box 5, Stafford Papers.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

Heroin users formed an important and long-lasting subculture whose existence can be explained in part by the drug's pharmacology, but also by sociological factors. The story of the psychedelic researcher Howard Lotsof sheds much light on some of the broader issues of group identity amongst illicit drug users, and is a fitting anecdote to appreciate just how fundamentally different it was from the psychedelic subculture: in 1962, the 19-year old Lotsof and a group of friends, who were addicted to heroin, discovered the exotic drug ibogaine.<sup>18</sup> Following a 27-hour trip and a few hours' sleep, Lotsof and most of the addicts realized they no longer had any craving for the drug. But two of them went to look for the drug the next day, because they actually enjoyed being addicts: "They have nothing else in their life. [...] They like the excitement of being chased by the police. They like the excitement of going into little dark corners and buying heroin and getting home. It gives their life structure and form."<sup>19</sup> Additionally, Lotsof found that drug dealers had vested interests in keeping users addicted to opiates.<sup>20</sup>

But just like they needed heroin, the psychedelic community needed a steady supply of psychedelics. Thus, drug dealers played a critical role in that respect. Jay Levin of the *New York Post* gathered substantial information on the world of drug dealing in 1966. Most of them were school drop-outs between 20 and 25 years old, who operated in their apartments, and usually sold a single dose for \$3 or \$4 (one could also buy vials or bottles for larger

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<sup>18</sup> Ibogaine is one of the main alkaloids contained in the *Tabernanthe iboga* shrub found in certain parts of West Africa, mainly Gabon.

<sup>19</sup> Howard Lotsof, interview by Geert Lovink, Amsterdam, date unavailable, page unavailable, <https://archive.org/details/InterviewMetHowardLotsofAboutIbogaine> (accessed November 17, 2014).

<sup>20</sup> Paul De Rienzo and Dana Beal, "Howard Lotsof," in *The Ibogaine Story: Report on the Staten Island Project*, page unavailable, <http://ibogaine.mindvox.com/articles/ibogaine-story-staten-island-project/>, (accessed November 17, 2014).

quantity). A “hit” would be typically a solution of powdered LSD mixed with distilled water fixed on a tab or a sugar cube, and would contain around 100 or 200 micrograms of LSD.<sup>21</sup>

The sources of supply were manifold. Many students brought LSD back from their holidays in Europe – one firm in Italy could still legally manufacture the drug after the production patents expired in 1963. This massive influx of LSD caused the prices to drop to 50 cents a dose in some areas of the city. But as the school year resumed, the prices went up again. Europe aside, Canada and Mexico had a steady flow of the drug available.

Domestically, major LSD factories were rumoured to have been set up in New Jersey, Boston, Iowa, and Kansas. The San Francisco Bay area was the biggest psychedelic hotspot of the country, though it is unlikely that much of its LSD made it over to the East Coast. Finally, some of the city’s LSD was manufactured within the five boroughs in small makeshift laboratories or in larger and more complex facilities.<sup>22</sup>

LSD and psychedelics differ from other addictive drugs like heroin or cocaine in that they allow less room for substantial profit and the tendency for dealers was to deal mostly to help friends or to make a little money on the side. For instance, one writer dealt the drug to meet his living expenses.<sup>23</sup> Another smuggled \$20,000 worth of LSD into the US from England and intended to use part of the money for his living expenses and for his tuition at one of the city’s universities.<sup>24</sup> However, some dealers sensed that they could still make good money with it and became “pushers,” who encouraged people to buy their materials in a more aggressive way than dealers, who just made themselves and their materials available. Pushers rarely used the drug and often dealt other substances; LSD was thus treated like any other

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<sup>21</sup> Jay Levin, “LSD in New York,” *New York Post*, June 9, 1966, folder “LSD – New York Post”, box 8, Stafford Papers.

<sup>22</sup> Jay Levin, “LSD in New York,” *New York Post*, June 10, 1966, folder “LSD – New York Post”, box 8, Stafford Papers.

<sup>23</sup> Levin, “LSD in New York,” June 9, 1966.

<sup>24</sup> Levin, “LSD in New York,” June 10, 1966.

staple. For example, two Black pushers from Harlem often went to the East Village with significantly diluted LSD. In another case, one young man purchased \$250 worth of LSD powder, which turned out to be baking soda. Pushers could be typically found in Washington Square Park, Tompkins Square, and Morningside.<sup>25</sup>

In the latter part of the 1960s, there were rumours that organized crime had taken an interest in the LSD trade, which seems surprising given that other substances yielded much greater profits. Yet, some evidence suggests that this was the case. One Harvard drop-out who had subsequently moved to NYC began working as a chemist for the underworld in a penthouse apartment, manufacturing between 50,000 and 100,000 doses a year. His employers also sold other drugs like hashish, cannabis, cocaine, and heroin - albeit to addicts, rather than college students.<sup>26</sup>

One psychedelic drug dealer, who was part of a vast interstate network, offers another glimpse into the LSD world. As of January 1969, the street prices in New York were on the decrease, with a dose selling between \$4 and \$7. The wholesale price of a dose cost around \$2 or \$2.50 (in the summer of 1970 doses could be purchased between 15 and 50 cents<sup>27</sup>). Another dealer's clients were between 18 and 25 years of age: "They usually come from rich bourgeois families." He was always very cautious about allowing other people into his network, because together they formed "a very close circle. You try not to let any new people into your dealing circle because that's a sure way to get busted."<sup>28</sup> More broadly, it seems that psychedelic drug

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<sup>25</sup> Levin, "LSD in New York," June 9, 1966.

<sup>26</sup> Jacob Brackman, "Four Ways to Go: The End of the Trip," *Esquire*, September 1966, folder "Esquire," box 18, Stafford Papers.

<sup>27</sup> "Intergalactic Union Doprogram," *East Village Other* Vol. 5(38), August 4, 1970.

<sup>28</sup> "Midipusher," interview by Jaakov Kohn, *East Village Other* Vol. 4(8), January 24, 1969.

dealers and buyers were part of “networks of friends,” where customers need to be “vouched for by friends.”<sup>29</sup>

His caution was motivated by the fact that he mostly dealt large quantities of LSD – thousands of doses. One transaction involved sums of money between \$300 and \$1,500, when during the previous year, a \$200 deal was considered important. When asked if Mafia-type organizations had tried to take over the cannabis and LSD trade, he answered that one of his business partners was allegedly “assaulted by supposed Mafia people and his personal property was destroyed. Supposedly it was for underselling.”<sup>30</sup>

He took heavy doses of LSD on a daily basis to help maintain his ideals, but also to fend off the stress and pressure of being a dealer. He claimed that “The dealing scene is totally brutal because people flip out when they deal. They go insane. Nervous breakdowns are a big problem among dealers. Especially on the lower levels. The police is [*sic*] after you all the time and people are out to rob you. It’s very hard on your sanity.” Thus, taking LSD allowed him to “[get his] head together.”<sup>31</sup>

### **Reaching Maturity**

The distribution of LSD and similar substances indicated that these drugs were gaining popularity amongst New Yorkers. There were also signs that the psychedelic subculture had reached maturity in the mid-Sixties. In 1965, Isaac and Rachel Abrams organized the first ever psychedelic art exhibition at the Coda Gallery on 10<sup>th</sup> Street. The event originated in one of Isaac’s meditations on the nature and definition of psychedelic art – which still remains contentious. At the end of 1964, he took some LSD and then decided that there was such a

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<sup>29</sup> Levin, “LSD in New York,” June 9, 1966.

<sup>30</sup> “Midipusher.”



thing as psychedelic art and that it should be better represented. After securing some money and some space in Manhattan, he visited Leary at his commune in Millbrook, New York and discussed his psychedelic art exhibition project. He was enthusiastic and pointed out that the Millbrook mansion was home to several psychedelic artists, including Allan Atwell, who had painted the front of the mansion and whom Isaac rated highly. He used the *Village Voice* bulletin board for \$20 to advertise the event (the ad read “Psychedelic Art Is Coming”) and also made posters. The show also featured light-shows and panel discussions with various figures of the psychedelic movement and psychedelic research. Michael Hollingshead also joined to read some of his poetry - which Abrams felt was too epic and undecipherable.

This event was more than just a landmark for psychedelic art; it signalled the coming of age of New York’s psychedelic culture. As Abrams contends, “We got a lot of people in and out of the place, and I think that it contributed to some real energy to it.” Although the opening was a failure from a financial perspective (no paintings were sold), he remembers being amazed by the number of people who turned up. Over two thousand reportedly attended, to a point where the police were forced to close off the streets at both ends to divert traffic. There was also some the early signs of exuberance and flamboyance that would come to define the 1960s psychedelic subculture: “Suddenly there were people doing face-paint, wearing top-hats, even some people with long hair appeared magically.” Many came under the influence of psychedelics.<sup>32</sup>

If this event can be seen as formative, it was also in many ways a “coming out” of psychedelic drug users who were looking for a community with like-minded individuals. This event echoes the similar Stonewall riots of 1969, which has been understood as the birth of modern homosexual activism. Gays realized that many of them were ready to fight for their

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<sup>31</sup> “Midipusher.”

<sup>32</sup> Isaac Abrams, interview.

rights and challenge conservative ideas of sexuality. Yet, as George Chauncey has argued in his seminal study of New York's gay subculture,<sup>33</sup> it would be overly simplistic to understand Stonewall as a single formative event that made the gay community suddenly visible - his evidence points to a rich and vibrant subculture that existed well before 1969. It is equally simplistic to reduce the opening of the psychedelic gallery to a landmark event devoid of any cultural substrate. Though it was certainly unifying and set in motion other important elements necessary for psychedelia to flourish, there also existed a small, but active psychedelic community prior.

Another key indicator was that the subculture had developed its own codes of conduct that established an internal hierarchy. In New York's highly competitive and dense urban setting, it was riddled with struggles for authority and legitimacy. This was down to the complexity of the psychedelic experience that was interpreted in so many ways, but at the same time, the city's imprint was visible in the way members of the subculture sought to gain credibility and position themselves as expert drug users, while looking down at those with little or no subcultural capital.

As the subculture grew in size, LSD consumers became more knowledgeable about the drug. For instance, one interviewer noted that the youthful users "have accumulated a fund of knowledge about the use and abuse of LSD." They knew about horror stories and how to minimize the chances of undergoing unpleasant experiences with it. They avoided combining amphetamines with the drug, as one user commented: "Say you've been taking A's for a few days, and just when they start to wear off you take acid [...]. That's bad. But the worst is when you take A's and acid together. It's like you've been skinned alive."<sup>34</sup> They tended to dismiss

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<sup>33</sup> George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Makings of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

<sup>34</sup> Edelson, "For \$5."

external advice that told them to avoid psychedelic experimentation, preferring to trust their own abilities to manage their trips.

The story of Bob Friede, who used his parents' house in Manhattan for parties in the early months of 1964, is a fitting illustration of the internal dynamics of subculture. parties involved around 30 to 50 people and had several rooms dedicated to drug use. One party-goer remembered that "People were smoking pot in one room, using mescaline in another. Just the atmosphere of that place was a kind of high."<sup>35</sup> But in spite of his hospitality and generosity (Friede reportedly supplied most of the drugs), he was derided by most of his guests for being fake and unhip, as one party-goer acknowledged: "I know lots of kids with lots of bread [money], and most of them are more or less accepted. Friede never was. He wanted so desperately to be hip, and he didn't know how." Another still offered a clearer explanation as to why he was mocked: "Friede wouldn't go out and 'cop' [buy] the stuff himself. [...] He always had someone go out for him. He wouldn't go through the street scene. He thought he was superior. How could we accept him? He never paid his dues."<sup>36</sup>

Psychedelic subcultural capital was also critical to be recognized as a true member of the subculture. Peter Lefcourt of the *Village Voice* once took two young "panhandlers" for lunch in the East Village, when they had asked him to spare some change. Despite his generosity, they still treated him with suspicion because he had decided to play Simon and Garfunkel on the jukebox, rather the Doors or Bob Dylan. To gain their trust, he first displayed his "roach clips" (cannabis joint holder), but sensing this wasn't enough, he had to convince them that he shared some of their lifestyle: "I make up an elaborate story about my

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<sup>35</sup> Dick Schaap, "College Drug Scene: Almost Anything Goes," *World Journal Tribune*, October 14, 1966, folder "College Drug Scandals," box 3, Stafford Papers.

<sup>36</sup> Schaap, "College Drug Scene."

last acid trip and throw in a little bit of East Village gossip. In time they start warming up, and pretty soon they're rapping away like teletype machines [about their own drug use]."<sup>37</sup>

As with alcohol consumption, taking large doses or claiming to take large doses of LSD was a way of positioning oneself within the psychedelic subculture. During the 1967 Be-In in Central Park, one LSD user claimed to have taken a fifteen hundred microgram dose of LSD (about fifteen times the standard dose), but the *East Village Other* reporter was unimpressed and contended that this was the "first acid head you ever saw who had an ego, to speak of."<sup>38</sup> Indeed, though this was a way to increase one's subcultural capital, LSD users tended to be leery of those who boasted too much about their drug use: "Youngsters say that their friends who talk most about LSD are the ones who have the least experience with it."<sup>39</sup>

The drug could sometimes be taken under peer-pressure, to avoid being branded a coward. Some (younger) users would "dare" their friends to take it, because of the risk, danger and deviance it was associated with. On one occasion, one 18-year-old took the drug "on a dare" because his friends told him that he "wouldn't be able to take it." Because the young man was allegedly unstable, the experience was a negative one. Competition and prestige was important amongst this group of students: they boasted that they could have LSD delivered to their school and that they knew 15 to 20 fellow students who had taken the drug – including a suspected "well-known politician's son."<sup>40</sup>

Likewise, Rachel Abrams once took DMT in someone's apartment in NYC and endured a discomfoting experience: "I felt like I was melting into that carpet and disappearing. It was so strong and it was so frightening." But despite this feeling, she also

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<sup>37</sup> Peter Lefcourt, "Naked Lunch on Avenue A," *Village Voice*, February 29, 1968, folder "Drugs Crackdown," Box 4, Stafford papers.

<sup>38</sup> "Being," *East Village Other* Vol. 2(9), April 1 – April 15, 1967, folder "Be-ins," box 2, Stafford papers.

<sup>39</sup> Edelson, "For \$5."

<sup>40</sup> Levin, "LSD in New York," June 8, 1966.

realized that she did not want the rest of the group to find out about her fear, because it would make her “the weird one, the scared one.” She also bore in mind that she had had enough drug experiences to realize that it was only a drug experience and ultimately “didn’t make a deal out of it.”<sup>41</sup>

With the maturing of the subculture and its codes of conduct came also ethical guidelines. Drug dealers were also expected to have moral standards along the lines of what Timothy Miller has dubbed the ethics of dope.<sup>42</sup> According to David Walley, “You have known [the dealer] for a few years or maybe as little as six months but you know that he’d never give you a bad count or sell you acid or mescaline which he had not tested first. He may have even tripped you out for first acid trip [*sic*] (the type of cat who used to make sure that everyone who got his acid could handle it [...] well the first time round).”<sup>43</sup> One LSD dealer followed these ethical guidelines and refused to sell his materials indiscriminately: “I would never sell it to anybody I thought was at all psychotic [...]. If I have any doubts whether they can handle it, I tell them I’m out of acid.”<sup>44</sup>

Beyond drug dealing, these ethics commanded the suspicion of law-enforcement officers and the refusal to yield to the police. In 1966, for instance, Leary organized a show in the East Village, for which they had recruited a young drifter called Rusty to play a part in the play. It turned out that Rusty had been arrested for dealing cannabis and was forced to cooperate or face a long prison term. The police asked him to plant a bag containing illegal drugs at Millbrook, so that the police would have the evidence necessary to prosecute Leary. But Rusty could not do it, because he loved them and believed in their psychedelic crusade.

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<sup>41</sup> Rachel Abrams, interview.

<sup>42</sup> Miller, “The Ethics of Dope.”

<sup>43</sup> David Walley, “Heads and Dopers: A Continuing Saga,” *East Village Other* Vol. 5(24), May 12, 1970.

<sup>44</sup> Levin, “LSD in New York,” June 9, 1966.

So Leary's group gave him \$200 and the safe address of a flat in St. Mark's Place, before he could finally take off to Los Angeles.<sup>45</sup>

Psychedelic drug users were also expected to share their drugs without any malice or unwise tricks. This meant that one should not give psychedelics to another person without her consent. For Isaac Abrams, failing to comply with these ethical guidelines was insulting: "I always thought dosing people, meaning giving them LSD without their voluntary participation was really bad manners. In the worse sense of bad manners. My entire idea always, politically and socially, was volunteers only."<sup>46</sup>

The ethics of dope, though, were not as important and strictly followed as in the psychedelic counter-culture, where psychedelics were regarded as catalysts for utopia. As a result, there still was some overlap between the psychedelic subculture and the broader drug culture. One reporter wrote in November 1965 that while LSD was the choice drug amongst the Greenwich Village teenagers he interviewed, they did not shun amphetamines (the "second choice" to LSD), and drank alcohol, when no illegal drug was available, but steered clear from heroin. "A student may well sell LSD or pills to his friends to help pay the rent, but he would not dream of selling heroin. The heroin dealer is not regarded very highly."<sup>47</sup>

Another member of the psychedelic subculture stated that the tendency was to avoid these kinds of addictive drugs: "Not too many kids here have any desire to even look at heroin, opiates, or other 'body' drugs."<sup>48</sup> Thus, even if some occasionally used other non-psychedelic drugs, opiates stood out and were largely rejected.

One of the reasons that drove the subculture to think about the ethics of LSD use was that there existed significant risks associated with the drug that required guidelines to

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<sup>45</sup> Leary, *Flashbacks*, 256.

<sup>46</sup> Isaac Abrams, interview.

<sup>47</sup> Edelson, "For \$5."

maximize the LSD experience and minimize risks of adverse reactions. Indeed, bad trips frequently happened when users were under-or unprepared. One 22-year-old from Greenwich Village needed psychiatric treatment after taking LSD: “I had been told it would be frightening, but I wasn’t prepared for what came [...] I ran from the room sobbing, it was pure panic. I ran, or I think I ran, for miles before I regained some control. Then I walked for hours praying I wouldn’t die.”<sup>49</sup> Another 18-year old former LSD user also underwent discomfoting experiences: “I saw spiders once, and once I thought I was going blind.”<sup>50</sup>

Jeff Perkins also had a disquieting experience after having spent the night under the influence of two psychedelic drugs, including psilocybin. The next morning, the effects had not worn off, but he still had to go to work in a store:

And I was supposed to put stuff together to start doing my job. And I find myself in the bathroom, sitting on the toilet, and there’s a mirror in front of me. So I’m looking in the mirror and this monster trip starts in the mirror. Which was kind of common to the LSD experience and perception. Or any psychedelic. You start to see things moving, and shit, and I saw my whole face was going through these transpositions. And I remember – I said: ‘I can’t go back to work like this.’ So I sat in there for like one hour. And finally, I was able to walk back to the department store and the boss called me into his office and fired me on the spot. He saw it. He saw that there was something very weird going on with me. And there was nothing I could do about it because it was true. So I was fired on the spot and just basically left.<sup>51</sup>

Managing these difficult moments often depended on one’s past experience with psychedelic drugs and on one’s age. Older users, rather than teenagers whose egos and personalities were still being built, often found themselves better equipped to deal with the powerful attacks on the psyche.<sup>52</sup> The young Amelie Edwards once had a bad trip in a

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<sup>48</sup> H.S.K., letter to the *East Village Other* Vol. 2(15), July 1 - July 15, 1967, folder “Drugs Crackdown,” box 4, Stafford Papers.

<sup>49</sup> Cashman, *The LSD Story*, 83.

<sup>50</sup> Jan Stacy, “LSD Forum: Why Take the Trip?,” *Village Voice*, November 3, 1966, folder “Village Voice,” box 33, Stafford Papers.

<sup>51</sup> Perkins, interview.

<sup>52</sup> Rachel Abrams, Conversation with Chris Elcock, Hotel La Louisiana, May 18, 2013,

commune and found that she wanted to withdraw from people. But a woman in her early 20s managed to calm her down and help her manage that difficult moment.<sup>53</sup> One 23-year-old Welfare Department social worker reported sensing a split in his identity during his LSD experience: “My sexual identity became female and I knew what it was like to be a woman.” The sensation frightened him, so he used some thiorazine (a tranquilizer) to counter the effects of the drug.<sup>54</sup> In some cases, young LSD users who were not following the stronger ethos and guidelines of the psychedelic counter-culture were overwhelmed by the experience. For instance, Steve Parish remembers taking LSD in New York City with a group of friends in 1966 (he was 16 at the time) and subsequently getting a car stuck in the heavy winter snow. The owner of the car became furious and kept repeating that he wanted to kill everybody. The distraught young man left his friends and went back to his parents’ home, only to find out that he was not coming down from his trip. Mundane activities such as watching television or simply trying to go to sleep took on hectic proportions, so he ended up walking the streets to shake it off.<sup>55</sup>

### **An Archetypal LSD User?**

Although the psychedelic community was predominantly composed of educated middle-class Whites,<sup>56</sup> there was no average LSD user. The drug was consumed by a broad range of New Yorkers, regardless of race, class, gender, and age. In this way, it differed greatly from other

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<sup>53</sup> Amelie Edwards (real name obscured at interviewee’s request), interview by Chris Elcock, midtown apartment, March 22, 2013.

<sup>54</sup> See Levin, “LSD in New’ York,” June 7, 1966.

<sup>55</sup> Steve Parish, “Family Values,” in *Psychedelic Trips for the Mind*, ed. Paul Krassner (New York: Trans-High Corp., 2001), 102–3.

<sup>56</sup> Other studies offered similar findings. See for instance Reginald G. Smart and Dianne Fejer, “Illicit LSD Users: Their Social Backgrounds, Drug Use and Psychopathology,” *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 10, no. 4 (1969): 297–308.



drugs like opium, heroin, cocaine, or cannabis that were often associated with particular ethnic groups, whether in actual fact or in the popular mind.<sup>57</sup>

During his days at Harvard in the early 1960s, Richard Alpert remembers taking LSD with a Black psychiatrist. Though he had been allegedly brought up with a very liberal attitude towards Blacks, he felt that in retrospect he had been rather fake and insincere. But during that experience, all feelings of racial difference disappeared: “there we were the same human beings. It was just that he was wearing that skin and I was wearing this skin.”<sup>58</sup> Additionally, when Leary and Ginsberg visited the publisher Barney Rossett in his townhouse in Fall 1960, they gave him some psilocybin mushrooms, but with him was also a Black woman named Zelda, who tried mescaline. One of the insights she had during the session, was that the experience had the potential of easing racial tensions.<sup>59</sup> In a context of civil rights activism, it was not surprising that some users pondered how to solve these problems and whether a wonder drug could lead to a form of racial levelling.

The light show artist Jeff Perkins offers a far more detailed account that illustrates both the potential for LSD to create a subculture beyond racial borders and the limits of psychedelic interracial relations. In 1960 he moved to New York from Massachusetts and met Tony Watkins, who was half Asian, half Black. One night they were approached by a man in a bar where they often met up.

So one night, Tony and I were staying and lounging at the juke box and this Black guy came in. His name was Andy. And Andy was like all high and he came over to us and said: “do you want to get

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<sup>57</sup> See for example Timothy A. Hickman, “Drugs and Race in American Culture: Orientalism in the Turn-of-the-Century Discourse of Narcotic Addiction,” *American Studies* 41, no. 1 (2000): 71–91; David T. Courtwright, “The Rise and Fall and Rise of Cocaine in the United States,” in Jordan Goodman, Paul E. Lovejoy, and Andrew Sheratt, eds., *Consuming Habits: Drugs in History and Anthropology* (London: Routledge, 2007), 219–22.

<sup>58</sup> Ram Dass, *Be Here Now* (Albuquerque: Lama Foundation, 1971), page numbers unavailable.

<sup>59</sup> Leary, *Flashbacks*, 68–9.

high?” And so being experienced in this I said: “yes.” And I said something and then he said: “do you want to get *really* high? Do you want to get *very* high?” And I said: “well, yes. I do.” And so he gave us both a sugar cube. And we ate the sugar cube. And this was LSD.<sup>60</sup>

On another occasion, he took LSD in a Broadway loft for Thanksgiving. A young Black girl, likely under the influence of the drug, became attracted to him. “So we became cozy with each other. No sex. We weren’t fucking or anything like that.” She then proposed that he accompany her to a party in the East Village. “And I remember going in. There was all Black kids. And I was the only White guy there. And I was high. And sensitive. Though I’m not uncomfortable with Blacks. I’ve lived with Black people. Most of my friends in high school were Black kids.” But gradually, he did become uncomfortable, because of his racial attributes. And indeed, the girl soon asked him to leave the party because his friends didn’t like the presence of a White with them. But this infuriated Perkins:

I objected violently saying: “Look, I’m a White nigger and I have every right to be here. I’m with you. I’m with you people.” And they go: “You people?! What are you talking about?! You People! We’re talking about *you* people! Now get the fuck out of here.” So anyway I did leave. And that was the end of that story. I never saw her again. Too bad. She was pretty.<sup>61</sup>

During this period, New York was witnessing important demographic changes in all five boroughs, which had been overwhelmingly populated by Whites until the 1920s. After World War II, many Blacks began settling in the Bronx and Brooklyn, but in Manhattan the trend had been well underway before the war: Blacks accounted for a quarter of the population there in 1960.<sup>62</sup> But in some parts, such as what is now referred to as the East Village, racial

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<sup>60</sup> Perkins, interview.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, “Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals by Race, 1790 to 1990, and by Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, for Large Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States,” U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, Working Paper No. 76, February 2005; Detailed Tables for New York: “New York – Race and Hispanic Origin for Selected Large Cities and Other Places: Earliest Census to 1990,”

tensions were strong, particularly when White bohemian elements began settling in the area in the Sixties with a view to leading a life of voluntary simplicity in a low-rent neighbourhood. Though the psychedelic subculture tried to build bridges with ethnic minorities, as Perkins' story illustrates, a drug was never going to be enough to effectively level class distinctions, even if some Beat individuals could be attracted to Blacks as a form of romantic primitivism or because they saw them as equally alienated as themselves.<sup>63</sup>

Although many psychedelic drug users felt part of a community by virtue of their consumption, not every LSD user was automatically part of this subculture simply by taking the chemical. Occasional users or one-time experimenters were drawn to it by mere curiosity, but did not necessarily adopt the codes of the subculture or feel the need to socialize with other users. For example, one 20-year student at Columbia University had tried LSD and cannabis at a party, but she did not like either drug and did not consider trying them again.<sup>64</sup> Likewise, one 28-year old insurance auditor only tried it three times after the third experience turned sour. The author of the article remarked that his lifestyle was far from deviant or counter-cultural: "He is no beatnik with long hair, his appearance is anything but scruffy, his politics are middle of the road."<sup>65</sup>

Surprisingly, Isaac Abrams claims that the highly potent DMT was the choice drug among business people in the early days of the psychedelic subculture, before LSD entered the scene – it was dubbed the "businessman's high," because a trip lasts between thirty minutes and an hour and can fitted in a tight corporate schedule. He also recalls giving the drug to a

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<http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0076/NYtab.pdf> (accessed July 30, 2015).

<sup>63</sup> Mel van Elteren, "The Subculture of the Beats: A Sociological Revisit," *Journal of American Culture* 22, no. 3 (1999): 82.

<sup>64</sup> Timothy Lee, "Students see no Rise in Use of Drugs," *New York Post*, July 6, 1966, folder "College Drug Scandals," box 3, Stafford papers.

<sup>65</sup> Robert Lory, "LSD: Nightmare of Bad Trips," *Man's Magazine*, October 1967, Vol. 15(10), 52, folder "Drugs Dangers," box 5, Stafford Papers.

reporter from a major press organization who was curious to know about the drug: “I don’t know if they let him publish anything, but he was really completely knocked out. Just blown away by the experience.”<sup>66</sup>

In June 1966, Jay Levin of the *New York Post* offered a portrait of LSD users that suggested a far more eclectic community than has been remembered: “Perhaps more significant than the classes of people from which LSD users are drawn is that the acid finger has reached out to touch men and women from almost all the professions, people with widely divergent backgrounds, tastes, and interests.” According to the reporter, these included CEOs, lawyers, bankers, advertising and public relations people, stockbrokers, engineers, market researchers, teachers, TV executives, actors, clerical workers, social workers, construction workers, or gas station mechanics. For instance, one 27-year-old stockbroker, who had taken the drug once, was surprised to learn that many of his fraternity brothers (all with high-profile jobs) were users. A 36-year-old account executive for one of the biggest advertising agencies in the city had taken the drug twice, because he was looking for a strong emotional experience – he feared that he might lose his sensitivity with his job. A 23-year-old Welfare Department social worker understood LSD use as a form of risk-taking and as a hobby no different from mountain-climbing or sky-diving. It enabled people to restore to themselves “a sense of what it means for there to be consequences for their actions.”<sup>67</sup>

Many users felt drawn to the drug because they had heard about it and reasoned that they should try it. Paul Franklin, who made the headlines for carelessly leaving an LSD-saturated sugar cube that was subsequently eaten by his five-year old nephew, acquired a dose of the drug in Greenwich Village for these reasons: “I was curious. [...] I read some books on the drug, so then I decided to buy one of these cubes. [...] It cost me \$5. I bought it home and

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<sup>66</sup> Isaac Abrams, interview.

<sup>67</sup> Levin, “LSD in New York,” June 7, 1966.

put it in the refrigerator and intended to do something with it, maybe today or the day after.”<sup>68</sup>

Another user “just wanted to find out what it was. I took it to find out the truth of other people’s descriptions.” One 17-year-old student was intrigued by LSD’s ability to procure strong sensations and “wanted an extreme high.”<sup>69</sup>

It was important to carefully plan sessions in order to maximize the benefits of the experience. A chemical engineer and his wife took the drug on a regular basis and sent their children away, re-arranged the furniture in their home and sometimes visited museums and galleries under the influence. Others took the drug to counter the increasing automation of society, which reveals how even members of the supposed mainstream could come to criticize the *status quo* after using LSD. One 34-year-old computer expert felt ill-at-ease with that trend and was drawn to LSD because he had “been involved with automation and [he] saw where the human being as [he] knew him would count for nothing if he didn’t do something new with his mind.”<sup>70</sup>

## Conclusion

Although LSD and psychedelics became the choice staple for several White middle-class New Yorkers, it was also taken by a much wider pool of people regardless of race, class, gender, age, and professional activity, and was not confined to downtown Manhattan. There were not one, but many profiles of LSD consumers, who tried the drug for a number of reasons and different ontological outcomes following the experience. For instance, one user reflected on his experimentation that had begun in 1963 and revealed that his sexuality had changed as a

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<sup>68</sup> Alfred Friendly Jr., “Police Fear Child Swallowed LSD,” *New York Herald Tribune*, April 7, 1967, folder “LSD – 5-year old girl,” box 8, Stafford Papers.

<sup>69</sup> Levin, “LSD in New York,” June 8, 1966.

<sup>70</sup> Levin, “LSD in New York,” June 7, 1966.

result. He was more inclined to sexual experimentations than before and even became interested in men. At the same time, though, taking the drug did not accentuate these inclinations but “took away all desire.”<sup>71</sup> Edwards saw some positives in her psychedelic experimentations:

I think that – it made me braver taking LSD. It made me less afraid, even though I would sometimes get paranoid on it. It just made me less afraid of taking chances overall. Just the fact that I could handle it lead me to believe that I could handle almost anything. I’ve been to war, to frontlines in wars in my life, and everything. I’ve been to Sarajevo, to the frontlines there. And I was able to handle that – I guess maybe my experiences with LSD allowed me to handle just very difficult situations in a way whereby I didn’t get upset. I was able to just go with the flow. But at the same time, there are plenty of things that I do get upset about that are really minor.<sup>72</sup>

In spite of the multiple profiles of LSD users, the 1960s saw a tangible psychedelic subculture blossom and mature thanks to the powerful LSD. While other critical characteristics of psychedelia waned towards the end of the decade, its subcultural core remained, even if a combination of other drug subcultures and repressive legislation severely undermined it. As will be explored in the following chapters, it was a rich cultural moment, even if at its heart was this social phenomenon that resists easy classification.

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<sup>71</sup> Brackman, “Four Ways to Go.”

<sup>72</sup> Edwards, interview.

## Chapter 3

### The Psychedelic Counter-culture

The feeling of cultural subversion associated with the consumption of LSD grew steadily out of the ontological insights gleaned by some of its users, who, questioning the consensual nature of reality, took issue with societal norms and the postwar American Dream and became part of a utopian and radical off-shoot of the psychedelic subculture. Indeed, out of the perceptions of the psychedelic experience grew an idealistic counter-culture that pitted itself against the established cultural order. One young user illustrated this duality: “When I’m high I see people’s games, the smiles that don’t mean anything, the useless conventions. I realize I’m not the only boy who feels unsure, who wants to cry. And now I’m happier because I know I don’t have to hide anything. [...] I don’t really think I’ve dropped out of things. I think I’ve dropped in, that this is how we’ll solve the world’s problems.”<sup>1</sup> Several of those who took LSD and psychedelics felt that society was sick and that if everyone used the drug, all would fall back into place. Meanwhile, the more active counter-culturists overtly criticized traditional values and social conventions, but also attempted to build their own utopian institutions.

The history of the 1960s counter-culture is well documented,<sup>2</sup> even if the very concept is contentious and potentially misguided<sup>3</sup> – chiefly, it suggests rigid boundaries between a

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<sup>1</sup> “Drug Addict,” *Look*, May 1967, 58, folder “Look”, box 24, Stafford Papers.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle, *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and '70s* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Ken Goffman and Dan Joy, “When You Change the Day: The Youth Counterculture, 1960-1967” and “Wild in the Streets: The Youth Counterculture, 1968-1972,” in *Counterculture through the Ages: From Abraham to Acid House* (New York: Villard, 2004), 246-310; Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo, *Daughters of Aquarius: Women of the Sixties Counterculture* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2009). Jeremi Suri, “AHR Forum: The Rise and Fall of an International Counterculture, 1960–1975,” *The American Historical Review* 114, no. 1 (2009): 45–68.

clearly delimited, organized and self-conscious counter-culture and a monolithic and oppressive “mainstream.” Here, I briefly define a counter-culture as a movement at odds with what counter-culturists perceive as “mainstream society” (or from a Marxist perspective, “cultural hegemony”) and that expresses its discontent through a set of discourses, attitudes, and beliefs that can be qualified as idealistic, romantic, utopian, and anti-hegemonic.<sup>4</sup> This discontent can in turn lead to attempts to change society and its values.

This chapter follows the work of David Farber who contends that “historians need to write more about the men and women who tried, often with qualified success, to build a new culture in the late 1960s and early 1970s,” and focus away from the famous counter-cultural events that fuel the rise and fall theory of Sixties historiography.<sup>5</sup> In doing so, it also builds on Edward Morgan’s much larger attempt to move away from the typical media coverage of the 1960s<sup>6</sup> and examines the involvement of many unheard-of counter-culturists in the promotion of the psychedelic way of life. It specifically conceptualizes the psychedelic counter-culture as a utopian and dynamic extension of the psychedelic subculture. As Andy Bennett suggests, both concepts are close enough because they designate categories of society that, to various

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Tellingly, Suri’s essay on the international counter-culture focuses more on politics and makes no mention of LSD and psychedelics. A transnational history of psychedelia and many facets would be the basis for a fascinating monograph.

<sup>3</sup> See in particular Andy Bennett, “Pour une réévaluation du concept de contre-culture,” trans. Jedediah Sklower, *Volume!* 9, no. 1 (2012): 19–31. On page 26, Bennett sees this concept as aesthetically, ideological, and politically seductive, but contends that it does not take into account social processes of mutability and diversification.

<sup>4</sup> A comprehensive and cross-disciplinary engagement with the scholarship analysing notions of cultural hegemony, counter-cultures, and subcultures, as well as the relation between the three would require far more space, but a counter-culture can be still used as a socio-historical category, if moved closer to the epistemological framework of its time. Sociology obviously has a different take on the concept, because it is concerned with the analysis of contemporary social phenomena in a context of globalization, mass transit, and communication.

<sup>5</sup> David Farber, “Building the Counterculture, Creating Right Livelihoods: The Counterculture at Work,” *The Sixties* 6, no. 1 (2013): 3.

<sup>6</sup> Morgan, *What Really Happened to the 1960s*.



extents, are unhappy with the values of the dominant cultural order.<sup>7</sup> A counter-cultural movement cannot exist in a cultural vacuum and must be seen as part and parcel of the superstructure it criticizes;<sup>8</sup> and in this way, it is also close to a subculture that exists on the fringes of that cultural order, without ever breaking away from it - it is worth wondering whether the term “rebel subculture”<sup>9</sup> proposed by Thomas Frank might be better suited than “counter-culture.” To analyse this facet of psychedelia, I build on Thornton’s notion of subcultural capital and propose the concept of counter-cultural capital to explain the tensions and competition within the psychedelic counter-culture. Ultimately, this counter-culture deserves to be placed somewhere between the psychedelic subculture and the more militant and vocal psychedelic movement led by Leary and his associates, who formed very much a psychedelic think-tank that influenced several LSD users.

As the decade unfolded, this community grew larger and became more visible thanks to the press, always on the lookout for sensational stories. The legislative attacks on LSD, rather than curtail its use, had the effect of increasing its appeal - “it made LSD seem even more romantic, more anti-establishment, a bigger kick.”<sup>10</sup> As Stuart Henderson has argued for his study of *Hip Toronto*’s Yorktown suburb, media exposure had the effect of exacerbating anti-establishment rhetoric and attitudes<sup>11</sup> and gave a clearer identity to the psychedelic counter-culture - much like the coverage of Beat controversies in the 1950s had helped discontented Americans identify with that subculture.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, many psychedelic counter-culturists resisted this essentialization by shifting emphasis to their utopian cause.

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<sup>7</sup> Bennett, “Pour une réévaluation du concept de contre-culture,” 23.

<sup>8</sup> Henderson, *Making the Scene*, 5; Keith A. Roberts, “Toward a Generic Concept of Counter-Culture,” *Sociological Focus* 11, no. 2 (1978): 133–14.

<sup>9</sup> Frank, *The Conquest of Cool*, 9.

<sup>10</sup> Cashman, *The LSD Story*, 11.

<sup>11</sup> Henderson, *Making the Scene*, 11. See also Siff, *Acid Hype*, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Mel van Elteren, “The Subculture of the Beats: A Sociological Revisit,” *Journal of American Culture* 22, no. 3 (1999): 73.

## Nina Graboi

The story of Nina Graboi represents a case-study that illustrates how an individual, who was initially suspicious of the psychedelic counter-culture, subsequently embraced it and felt that her prior life had been one of mental conditioning. Her experimentation with psychedelics and her involvement with Leary allegedly helped her see through social constructs such as gender-defined roles and enabled her to free herself from these constraints. In a broader context of second-wave feminism, it suggests that LSD and psychedelic drug use could become a form of empowerment for women seeking to become more active and visible in society. While Debra Michals has argued that psychedelic experimentation deserves to be understood as an early form of politicization of consciousness that was followed by feminist “Consciousness Raising,”<sup>13</sup> Graboi’s story underscores the connections between female agency and drug use in a far more salient way.

Before her life-changing experience and subsequent cultural deconditioning, she freely admitted being suspicious of New York’s bohemian elements. One day in the early Sixties, she took her children to Greenwich Village and remembered feeling disgusted by the burgeoning counter-culture: “It was not only their unkempt appearance that repelled me. The most unsavory aspect of the Flower Children was that they smoked pot and took LSD, that dreaded new drug that turned sane people into raving maniacs.”<sup>14</sup> Graboi, like many parents of the time made it a point to systematically warn her children against these drugs and showing her children the effect of these drugs was part and parcel of their upbringing. Additionally, she

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<sup>13</sup> Debra Michals, “From ‘Consciousness Expansion’ to ‘Consciousness Raising,’” in *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and ’70s*, ed. Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle (New York: Routledge, 2002), 49-51.

<sup>14</sup> Graboi, *One Foot in the Future*, 128.

dismissed any notions of drug-induced authenticity as vacuous: “Hey look, they seemed to say, we’re free! But in their non-conformity they conformed to a new dress code, one that included love beads, wrinkled and often torn clothes, blue jeans, and long, and if possible, matted hair.”<sup>15</sup>

In 1965, she attended one of Leary’s talks at the Hotel Albert, but still felt suspicious about the notorious High Priest of LSD: “Despite my interest in psychedelics and the years of peeling the onion of my conditioning, I was still middle-class enough to recoil from the tinges of disreputability that adhered to the notorious Dr. Leary.”<sup>16</sup> The underlying message of this statement was that she later moved on thanks to her psychedelic drug use and rejected what was left of her class background - in a similar vein, Richard Alpert confessed that prior to his venture with Leary, “he was fat, arrogant and bourgeois.”<sup>17</sup> Confessing to being middle-class and conditioned was thus a way of underscoring the potential of psychedelic drugs to lead to profound changes in personality and lifestyle.

In spite of her suspicions, Graboi underwent her first LSD experience at Millbrook in 1966, which led to a typical ontological shift that could occur as a result of a full-blown psychedelic experience and sometimes led psychedelic drug users to radically reappraise the world surrounding them. The difference between that supportive environment and the hectic life of the city became painfully apparent to her when she returned to New York: “Returning from Millbrook after that weekend was like stepping into a familiar scene with new eyes. What I had once taken for reality now looked like flim-flam. The hypocrisies and delusions in which I, like most people, had spent my life stood naked before me.”<sup>18</sup> By contrast, she wanted to find authenticity in the aftermath of her experience and began to question what she saw as

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 200.

the everyday futilities of social life. On one occasion, she was getting ready to attend a party and realized how absurd her preparations were: “As I apply make-up I think of the lovely faces of the Millbrook women, so innocent of make-up except when they paint them for the fun of it. Make-up is not part of the persona with which they face the world, as it has been for me and for all the women I knew before. How many years has ‘putting on my face’ been an unquestioned habit?”<sup>19</sup>

Socializing became, to echo some of Leary’s ideas, a game that also illustrated Erving Goffman’s theory on everyday social interactions as a theater<sup>20</sup> and further illustrates Farber’s framing of LSD as a deconditioning agent: “How easily the bantering phrases rise to my mouth! I’m aware of the coquettish looks, the flirtatious teasing that draws the men in the room to my side. I know that they desire me, and that they would tire of me as quickly as they had of their wives.”<sup>21</sup> Likewise, one young counter-culturist once told Graboi that he would like to “turn on” his mother to LSD because it would enable her to see the futility of social life, including the everyday theater: “The games. The ego trips. The hype. The guilt.”<sup>22</sup>

Later, when she was facing divorce, Graboi realized how removed from her previous life and how involved with the psychedelic counter-culture she now was. One of her former friends advised her not to file for divorce because of the financial hardship that would ensure. Moreover, the friend told her that people would be put off from inviting her to parties because she would become a “fifth wheel.” Rather than listen to that advice, Graboi saw as proof that she was doing the right thing: “As I listened to her cautious words I marvelled at the distance I had come from the kind of life in which the considerations she spoke of were paramount. I did not want to find another husband, and the parties she mentioned had long lost interest for

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 201.

<sup>20</sup> Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (London: Penguin, 1990).

<sup>21</sup> Graboi, *One Foot in the Future*, 202.

me.”<sup>23</sup> Graboi also took issue with the postwar consensus of consumerism, just like the Beats had done at the turn of the decade: “To own more than others was the legitimate goal of human endeavour.”<sup>24</sup> According to her, it was no surprise that some of the baby-boomers had found more meaningful paths with psychedelic experimentation.

In his cultural history of the Sixties counter-culture, Timothy Miller has posited – tongue slightly in cheek – an “ethic of hair”<sup>25</sup> that required counter-culturists (particularly men) to let their hair grow long as a form of protest against cultural hegemony. During one of Leary’s psychedelic performances at the Village Theater, Graboi noted that “hardly a short-haired male could be seen.”<sup>26</sup> In a similar way, sitting on the floor became another distinct feature of hipness. At the Center for the League of Spiritual Discovery, which Leary and Graboi set up to offer counselling on psychedelics, she realized that purchasing some 200 chairs for the audience would have been too costly. Fortunately, the audience did not mind, as it was made up of people “to whom chairs are as much a badge of the straight world as short hair.”<sup>27</sup> Thus, these became some of the most visible features of their counter-cultural capital, even though there was no obvious profile of the average LSD user.

Graboi realized that as a counsellor on psychedelics, she had to appear credible to those seeking advice and information. Yet, she was also aware that her outside appearance might raise suspicion. One day, a young man in his late teens approached her and asked her what she thought about LSD. She immediately felt that he was testing her: “I’m on a trial. I’m middle-aged, wear lipstick and straight clothes.” Yet this deficiency in counter-cultural capital was compensated by her experiences with psychedelics: “But I know something that all who

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 226.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>25</sup> Miller, *The Hippies and American Values*, 116–8.

<sup>26</sup> Graboi, *One Foot in the Future*, 206.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 223.

have taken LSD know, and that is that there are levels of consciousness of which we know nothing in our normal state.” This was indeed enough for the young man, who showed her he trusted her by displaying a trademark counter-cultural sign: “I passed the test. He sits on the floor.”<sup>28</sup>

These were some of the new rules of sociability that emerged within the psychedelic counter-culture. The Center’s staff, for instance, had to devise new guidelines that were a necessary evil to maintain a modicum of order within. But they were also aware that those who attended were suspicious of any form of authority. When Graboi grew tired of clearing up the litter after them, she thought of putting up a sign. But “a sign saying simply DON’T LITTER would bring visions of the police state to the young dropouts’ minds and provoke them to contrary acts.” So one staff member drew a psychedelic goddess and wrote “DON’T BE A LITTERBUG” underneath the drawing to devise a rule that seemed in keeping with the atmosphere of the place.<sup>29</sup>

The Center also became a meeting place to discuss topics like sexuality, which appeared to be undergoing important changes in the 1960s. Graboi spent a lot of time there discussing this, and realized that “the boys loved it. The girls pretended to, but under a thin veneer of hipness, most of them wanted one man, their man, instead of the one-night stands that were so common among them.”<sup>30</sup> Scholars like DeGroot have pointed to the contradictions of the 1960s “sexual revolution,” which became an excuse for a great deal of promiscuous and violent sexual relations.<sup>31</sup> But in spite of this, Graboi felt that LSD was

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 226.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 231.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 240.

<sup>31</sup> Gerard DeGroot, *The 60s Unplugged: A Kaleidoscopic History of a Disorderly Decade* (London: Pan, 2009), 215–21.

instrumental in developing new patterns of sexuality: “As consciousness expanded, so did sensory awareness.”<sup>32</sup>

Tensions surrounding LSD use in the counter-culture inevitably erupted and further illustrate how authority and expertise are critical concepts to understand the social history of LSD use. The counter-culture was attacked by medical, religious, and scientific authorities, as well as lay authorities who claimed to have a great deal of experience with these substances and took issue with its utopian fancies. For instance, Dave Deitch was a drug-addict for 14 years and used these credentials to dismiss the psychedelic idealism. During a conference in Manhattan, he warned against the dangers and delusions of “taking LSD and trying for the mirage of instant health,” where one became “alienated from self by the very act of getting high.” He also took issue with the idea that LSD was a magic bullet from which human beings could gain much self-understanding. “The pill or cube is self-removal. For what is it that makes us people? Not magic, but our human condition.”<sup>33</sup>

Counter-cultural elements often criticized the larger psychedelic subculture for being lethargic and unwilling to use the insights of the psychedelic experience to act in a positive and meaningful way upon society. For instance, Marsha Chok of the League for Spiritual Discovery wondered rhetorically: “Where is the community who’s [*sic*] desire is to share? To help one another grow with the most advantageous evolutionary tools that have ever been laid at our disposal? Where is the community who realizes that the expansion and growth of the coming generations lie on the tongue of every acid eater?” Chok and the psychedelic counter-culture held that LSD had the power to change the world for the better if everyone would follow Leary’s precept – “turn on, tune in, and drop out.” “Instead of leaving a time/place in the present society and ‘dropping-out’ into a functional harmonious effort towards a better

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<sup>32</sup> Graboi, *One Foot in the Future*, 241.

one, people are simply withdrawing into a land of coloured bubbles and plastic trips. Apathy is the by-product of narcissistic alienated culture. Hardly communal.” People like Leary were examples to follow, and the League for Spiritual Discovery offered a space to meditate and lectures “on living a psychedelic way of life,” but the psychedelic community lacked the support of fully committed activists.<sup>34</sup>

Even within the counter-culture and Leary’s close circles, there was much disagreement as to how psychedelics should best be used. Where Huxley and his intellectual friend Gerald Heard had both argued in favour of an elitist use of psychedelics, others like Leary or Ginsberg had a much more egalitarian conception of psychedelic drug use where everybody was encouraged to experiment – under the right set and setting. As Leary was wondering whether he would fly to Washington to testify during the 1966 senate hearing organized to assess the benefits and hazards of LSD, Graboi and a Buddhist monk, who had met Leary at Harvard and experimented with psychedelics long before him, both agreed that it would be bad publicity for both Leary and the psychedelic counter-culture. They both felt that Leary was merely courting self-promotion and that the senators would try to expose him to discredit LSD. “I’m not comfortable with his proselyting [*sic*],” admitted Graboi. “I guess that makes me an elitist.”<sup>35</sup>

On another occasion, she briefly retired from the Center and Leary sent over two young adults over from Millbrook to take over while Graboi rested for a few days. When she unexpectedly returned to the Center, she found them about to repaint the walls and ceiling to hide some large bronze plaques that were apparent and, which according to Graboi and Leary, at the time they had uncovered them underneath thick layers of plaster, gave the place a

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<sup>33</sup> Jan Stacy, “LSD Forum: Why Take the Trip?,” *Village Voice*, November 3, 1966, folder “Village Voice,” box 33, Stafford Papers.

<sup>34</sup> Marsha Chok, letter to the *East Village Other* Vol. 2(10), April 15 – May 1, 1967.

<sup>35</sup> Graboi, *One Foot in the Future*, 152.



unique charm. When pressed to explain why they were eager to conceal the plaques, it turned out that Leary had once told them that “all metal should be returned underground.” Graboi laughed out loud until she cried and then, shaking her head, reflected on Leary’s cult of personality.<sup>36</sup>

For many individuals within the psychedelic counter-culture, then, the deconditioning power of LSD and like drugs could serve the purpose of levelling class distinctions. But even then the dialectics of this chemical revolution remained unclear and a subject of contention, particularly when charismatic leaders like Leary stamped their authority on psychedelia and influenced many younger and naïve followers.

On the other hand, the psychedelic counter-culture built many bridges with other communities that were also questioning the American Dream. For instance, Graboi “became an active participant in some of the meetings where activists, community planners, ecologists, peace groups, counter culture economists and members of the underground press met.” But even then, she felt that their idealism was ill-suited to change the world - particularly when combined with their inertia: “They thought they could awaken the straight world from the idiocy of war, competitiveness, acquisitiveness and racism by using the logic of their idealism, but the chasm that yawned between them and the straight world was miles deep.”<sup>37</sup>

Some individuals like Graboi did their best to offer compromises. As she was nearing the completion of the renovations necessary for the opening of the Center for the League of Spiritual Discovery, a man came in and was outraged at what he thought was a place that deliberately encouraged illegal drug use. But eager to offer bridges between the two worlds, she pointed to the volunteers who were actively engaged in the renovations, which seemed to suggest that the psychedelic counter-culture was not necessarily incompatible with the ethics

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 234–5.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 236.

of hard labour: “It was a pleasant sight: four long-haired teen-aged boys wearing beads, colourful shirts and patched pants, cheerfully wielding screwdrivers, hammers and saws. [...] Not even the most rabid opponent to drugs could have found anything here to support his views.”<sup>38</sup> Indeed, the man ended up offering to help out and send his son over for counselling, as he had caught him smoking cannabis. Another passer-by was baffled, rather than shocked, when he saw young counter-culturists at the Center engaged in calm spiritual discussions, but nonetheless pressed Graboi to admit that LSD could be dangerous, which she had no trouble doing. He felt that his son had changed and believed that psychedelic drugs were the culprit. But Graboi discussed these issues with him in a friendly and cordial way and the man often paid her visits at the Center in the aftermath. Finally, she also managed to give pamphlets and reprints about LSD to a policeman, who was sweeping the Center for illegal drugs, and who ended up tempering his own views about the notorious chemical.<sup>39</sup>

Other examples show how the barriers between the mainstream and the psychedelic counter-culture were at times porous and further illustrate the conceptual limits of this dichotomy. In 1967, Kleps spoke at the Allan Burke Show, for which the host invited unorthodox personalities and regularly subjected them to a barrage of insults. But Kleps, who had been drinking, smoked a joint, and snorted some white powder beforehand (probably cocaine), was relaxed and unfazed, and immediately realized that Burke was fond of him: “The guy simply liked me and he couldn’t do anything about it. His attempts at insults turned into twisted compliments. My cause was bad, but he had to ‘admit’ I was an ‘attractive person, and an effective missionary for what you believe in,’ as he said at one point.”<sup>40</sup> One

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 219.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 229–30.

<sup>40</sup> Art Kleps, “An Awful Predicament,” in *Millbrook: A Narrative of the Early Years of American Psychedelianism, Recension of 2005* (San Francisco: Original Kleptonian Neo-American Church, 2005), page unavailable, <http://okneoac.org/millbrook/> (accessed September 12, 2013).

viewer concurred and felt it was good publicity for LSD: “Any open-minded person hearing Mr. Kleps must have been stimulated towards further investigation.”<sup>41</sup>

Even Leary, the ardent proselytizer, was prepared to leave the door open for positive dialogue between the psychedelic counter-culture and the mainstream. In 1966, and in the midst of judicial struggles, he spoke at New York City’s Town Hall where he delivered a lengthy lecture before hundreds of followers, in which he proposed a one-year moratorium on the use of psychedelics. This may have been a sign that even he was open to negotiations; yet, his talk also indicated that the truce could only be temporary and that the psychedelic revolution could not be stopped: “The next decade is going to be the most exiting period in human history. ... I think that we should relax and be calm. The psychedelic battle is won.”<sup>42</sup>

Some commentators on the Sixties counter-culture like Heath and Potter have been quick to point out the apparent cooptation of revolutionary ideals and contend that it was ultimately assimilated by the greater forces of the market.<sup>43</sup> While it is obvious that some saw economic opportunities, this can also be understood as a means of making its message more intelligible to the masses. Part of it was a discourse that was suspicious of technocracy, economic growth, or consumerism, which came about as a result of the insights of the psychedelic experience. This message was – and still is – a hard one to promote because it explicitly took issue with some of the pillars of the Western way of life. Thus, other strategies were required to give the counter-culture more visibility and legitimacy. What’s more, the idea that psychedelia “sold out to the system” denies any form of agency for LSD consumers and suggests that there existed a unique core of authentic and dedicated users. Instead, even commodification can be reframed as a form of multiculturalism.

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<sup>41</sup> William Bernhard to Timothy Leary, May 28, 1967, folder 2, box 74, Leary papers.

<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Cashman, *The LSD Story*, 64.

<sup>43</sup> Heath and Potter, *The Rebel Sell*.

Indeed, the more active members of the psychedelic counter-culture were aware that they needed increased visibility to pass on the psychedelic message to the masses. Murray Levy suggested organising a psychedelic showcase in a storefront on Carmine Street where they would exhibit psychedelic artwork. Graboi found the idea eccentric, but approved of it nonetheless: “We needed a showcase, a place where the straight world could view the psychedelic community instead of reading about it. To them, we were a breed apart.”<sup>44</sup> Graboi was wary of the some of the counter-culture’s confrontational approach and felt that people could be reached by establishing personal contact and convincing it that the psychedelic community was productive. In private, she told Leary that she saw herself as a go-between: “I got high on grass, sat down and meditated in the midst of that commercial scene. I acted as a magnet. Squares and hippies alike came and sat down with me.”<sup>45</sup>

The storefront was organized into a series of booths that displayed various objects such as paintings, sculptures, crafts, books, and jewellery, and there were also games and music. The New Consciousness store was run on a volunteer basis and courted a wide pool of psychedelic enthusiasts, with artists, writers, philosophers and religious figures.<sup>46</sup> Graboi, who had set up a booth for the League of Spiritual Discovery, felt that the “straight” people related to the commercial aspect of the event, which displayed few signs of revolutionary ideas. Some were invited to sit down with her and her circle of youth to discuss LSD. Though they were initially ill-at-ease, they opened up a great deal and listened to what they had to say: “Some of them had children who had become hippies, and the intelligent answers our kids gave as well as their sincere desire to build a bridge for those alienated, worried parents made a real exchange possible. It was rewarding to see faces loosen up as we discussed our differences

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<sup>44</sup> Graboi, *One Foot in the Future*, 236.

<sup>45</sup> Nina Graboi to Timothy Leary, February 16, 1967, folder 1, box 69, Leary papers.

<sup>46</sup> Murray Levy, “The Psychedelic Showcase,” undated, folder “Psychedelic Showcase,” box 12, Stafford Papers.

without anger, without noise, without hostility.”<sup>47</sup> For the League, this had been a good move, as some of the mainstream people came back to see them at the Center.

Things quickly turned sour, however. In May 1967, Levy had to close it down for good because of local animosity. Before opening the store in the first place, there were already signs that a nearby Catholic church, mostly attended by Italians, were taking issue with this: “Even before I opened the door I heard rumors of trouble and even a Church-sponsored petition, but I didn’t anticipate this.” Indeed, the store was broken into several times and after the fourth robbery, a man likely from organized crime told him to close for good because they didn’t want “any beatniks or niggers” in their neighbourhood. The police seemed oblivious to Levy’s afflictions and when he decided to temporarily close the storefront, thieves cleared it entirely.<sup>48</sup>

Though Levy was bitter about the whole episode, he reacted swiftly by organising the First International Psychedelic Exposition. This was held at the Forest Hills Country Club and, like his psychedelic showcase, it gave more coverage to the psychedelic counter-culture and building bridges with the larger community. As the official brochure stated,

On one level we hope to give the general public a glimpse of the psychedelic world and the beautiful creations it has inspired. On another level we hope that open and forthright exposition of psychedelic phenomena by the people it has inspired will facilitate communication between those who are somewhat fearful of the mind expansion experience and those who have had the experience and found a method to present what they found most worthwhile, be it through music, art, visual techniques, or group events.<sup>49</sup>

The idea reportedly originated in the East Village, where a man loosely connected to Leary and his crew gathered most of the alternative stores of the City. Merrill Mushroom remembers the excitement and anticipation that filled the air: “We were going to set up a sort

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<sup>47</sup> Graboi, *One Foot in the Future*, 238. One woman was so impressed that she donated a 200-dollar cheque to further the good work she was going with the young.

<sup>48</sup> “Scenes,” *Village Voice*, May 25, 1967.

of historical village of hippidom on the country club premises. They'd provide an experience for all (and sell souvenirs to) the primarily White, rich, straight American people who were curious about this newest breed of weirdos emerging out of the 1960s."<sup>50</sup> Additionally, the Exposition featured a psychedelic information center run by Peter Stafford and volunteers, and also played selections of poetry and music.<sup>51</sup>

The owners of the Country Club, curious about these unorthodox New Yorkers, allowed them to create a "total environment" and were free to use all the facilities of the club, to which the organizers added a campsite. Mushroom's store, which sold handmade crafts, served free food and gave away free clothing, secured a spot in the club and even had its own multimedia light show. The event reportedly drew huge crowds. "We had never seen so many hippies outside Central Park," remembers Mushroom.

But even this moment of cultural bridging had its limits. Although they were available to those in the know, the organizers made it clear that no drugs should be sold on the premises. "Even conversation about drugs was discouraged, at least with the straight people who were often disposed to ask us drug-related questions." There were also practical reasons for shunning that topic: "[...] we understood that there would be agents and law-enforcement officers mingling among us to obtain information, that thrill-seeking tourists would try to lure us into supplying."<sup>52</sup>

The organizers of the event aptly saw it as a natural counter-cultural off-shoot of the psychedelic movement: "All we are doing here with this exposition is showing you the effluvium, the bi-products, the serendipity of the psychedelic movement." They took the

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<sup>49</sup> *First International Psychedelic Exposition* (Millbrook, NY: Kriya Press), date unavailable, folder "Drugs Crackdown," box 4, Stafford Papers.

<sup>50</sup> Merrill Mushroom, "The First International Psychedelic Exposition," in *Psychedelic Trips for the Mind*, ed. Paul Krassner (New York: Trans-High Corp., 2001), 12.

<sup>51</sup> *First International Psychedelic Exposition*.

<sup>52</sup> Mushroom, "The First International Psychedelic Exposition," 14.

opportunity to argue against some aspects of psychedelia they found annoying: “The psychedelic world has been terribly misrepresented by our artists and poets who are always the fuck-ups of the scene.” They took issue with the notion that one could attempt to describe the un-describable: “There’s no way to represent the psychedelic experience. It cannot be represented.” Thus, taking LSD was the real (and only) deal and was a counter-cultural imperative: “You must get stoned. Take the pill.”<sup>53</sup>

Stuart Henderson has insisted on the performative dimension of the Toronto counter-culture and suggested that it increasingly acted out as the media began taking notice.<sup>54</sup> In the broader North American counter-culture, the quintessential illustration of this phenomenon occurred in the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco, when the tourist industry organized bus tours for people to “spot the hippies” in their natural habitat. The Exposition can also be understood along those lines: with this increased visibility came the need to offer more of the same to the weekenders. But at least some counter-culturists realized that they were running the risk of parodying themselves. After ingesting some LSD, Mushroom wandered around the displays and then reminisced about a childhood event: “I recalled when I was a child in the ‘40s in Florida, and my folks took me to an ‘Indian Village’ where some Seminoles made a living by being who they were for tourist onlookers. I thought about that, then about what was happening for me here, in this construct of community where we, too, were on display.” But even then, what he took away from the event went beyond these concerns: “Never before had I experienced such unity, such intimacy with strangers, as I was experiencing at this happening. Through all our differences, we shared a deep-seated desire for peace, love, and a gentler, healthier world.”<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> *First International Psychedelic Exposition*. The injunctions to “turn on,” “tune in,” and “drop out” were further proof of Leary’s influence.

<sup>54</sup> Henderson, *Making the Scene*.

<sup>55</sup> Mushroom, “The First International Psychedelic Exposition,” 14.

But for all the good-will and energy of the organizers, the Exposition seemed mismanaged. Andrew Kent, a 22-year old freelance public relations man who was involved, admitted that they had suffered several setbacks. Of the promised 150 exhibitors, several did not turn up; others did not bother to stay (they may have been put off by the Country Club setting); advance communication was so poor that few psychedelic enthusiasts from the City knew about the event; and on top of that, much of the building materials promised for the event were late in arriving and impeded the construction of the site. Despite these shortcomings, the Exposition enjoyed a modicum of success on the Saturday night. As one journalist observed, “There were enough Long Island families led by wide-eyed teenaged sons and daughters and dating couples forsaking the usual movie present to make the two-acre club look somewhat crowded.”<sup>56</sup>

The other critical places that allowed the psychedelic counter-culture to thrive were the communes.<sup>57</sup> While several of them were set up and were often havens for illicit drug use, some of those places explicitly prohibited drugs and drug use on the premises. For instance, a young man named Galahad founded and ran a commune on 622 East 11<sup>th</sup> Street that was intended as a humanitarian enclave for the needy or as a meeting point for those “on a journey in search of [themselves] and a better world.” His commune was one of the longest-lasting, precisely because of his anti-drug policy – police harassment was constant in NY communes and drug charges were one of the favourite tactics to shut them down.<sup>58</sup> In spite of this policy, this commune was part of the psychedelic counter-culture, because it was suffused with a similar psychedelic idealism.

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<sup>56</sup> Ira Rifkin, “Psyche’s Expo ’67 Brings its Wares to the Suburbs,” *Village Voice*, September 28, 1967, folder “Village Voice,” box 33, Stafford Papers.

<sup>57</sup> For an overview of communal living in the 1960s, see Timothy Miller, *The 60s Communes: Hippies and beyond* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999).

<sup>58</sup> Lorraine Glennby, “Cops Crush Communes,” *East Village Other* Vol. 2 (13), June 1 – June 15, 1967, folder “communes,” box 3, Stafford papers.



Amelie Edwards was one of the teenagers drawn to the excitement of becoming a runaway child and living in a commune some time in 1966. There she took a lot of LSD, which was virtually unlimited in supply and freely available to those on the premises. She remembers it as being a positive place: “We used to walk around bare-foot. We [...] used to go pan-handling. And we used to play toy guns in the street. Water-pistol type guns. We used to act out some kind of fantasy we had about living on our own.” Living in this world was a way of turning her back on her previous life. To that end, taking psychedelics was critical: “[...] when I started using drugs, I wanted to cut myself off completely from anything I had known in the past. [...] I remember I had a gold ring that my parents had given me with my initials on it. I gave that to someone, because [...] it wasn’t important to me. Gold rings just seemed like part of this capitalistic society that I didn’t want to be a part of any more.”

Instead, she and her boyfriend Michael, whom she met in the commune, enjoyed a much more carefree life. They spent their free time drawing, making up stories, pan-handling or going to listen to poets. They also openly criticized what they perceived as the external signs of the establishment, making “remarks to people about their 9 to 5 jobs and their business suits [...]. We would tell people ‘Smile!’ like ‘How come you look so unhappy?’ ‘Why don’t you smile?’ that kind of thing.” Michael was always far more enthusiastic about LSD than she was: “I think he dealt drugs a little bit. [...] He wanted everyone to have LSD. So he was definitely idealistic about it.”<sup>59</sup>

Psychedelic idealism also materialized in underground newspapers. The *East Village Other* became an important voice for the psychedelic counter-culture to spread its message and was another way to reach out to broader audiences.<sup>60</sup> For example, in 1968 the paper

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<sup>59</sup> Edwards, interview.

<sup>60</sup> The paper, as many other underground publications, was instrumental in shaping the psychedelic subculture, as well as promoting the revolutionary ideals of its counter-cultural off-shoot. John McMillan briefly mentions this support, albeit in relation to pro-

published a piece that summed up the counter-cultural gospel and revealed the extent to which Leary's ideas had struck a vibrant chord. The piece praised LSD for its ability to expand consciousness and took issue with capitalism's endless drive for profit. It also saw protest as playing into the hands of the "establishment." The solution was similar to what Leary proposed: "DROP OUT. On a given day, walk out of shops, offices, factories, schools, and universities. Do not demonstrate. Go home, enjoy life somewhere, or organize a peaceful, happy festival of rejoicing." This was to be repeated "until the whole debt-ridden, profit-mongering Establishment [was] brought to a standstill."<sup>61</sup>

The paper fuelled revolutionary messages through its pages by giving a clearer voice to the psychedelic underground and promoting psychedelics as wonder drugs. Through an anonymous newsletter called the "Intergalactic Union Doprogram," psychedelic counter-culturists hailed drug dealers as spiritual crusaders for their community: "Throughout human history the herbalist, the alchemist, the medicine-man has always been the center of religious, esthetic, revolutionary impulse. The dope dealer is a revolutionary." The "Doprogram" also offered ethical guidelines for drug dealing. Profits were to serve the revolution. LSD had to be understood as a religious sacrament. Other drugs like cannabis or hashish should be sold at fair prices.<sup>62</sup> Elsewhere, it contended that government propaganda was thwarting the psychedelic revolution: "We know that the danger of LSD is not physical or psychological, but social political. We know that the use of consciousness-expanding drugs will be to transform our concept of human-nature. And we know that the present social establishment is not prepared for this change."<sup>63</sup> Still another newsletter called for action against the prohibition of psychedelics. When one psychedelic drug dealer and her customer (both

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cannabis activism. See *Smoking Typewriters: The Sixties Underground Press and the Rise of Alternative Media in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 128.

<sup>61</sup> "Cape of the Sacred Island," *East Village Other* Vol. 3(33) July 20 – July 25, 1968.

<sup>62</sup> "Intergalactic Union Doprogram," *East Village Other* Vol. 5(20), April 14, 1970.

students at Columbia and NYU) were arrested and released on bail, the letter contended that this was the easy way (their family had posted \$25,000 bail) and lamented that “If Andrea Rosenberg would have made use of her right of one phone call, and would have called a revolutionary friend, who would have informed ten other friends, and each of them called ten other people, within the hour, hundreds and hundreds of heads could have stormed the apartment of Miss Rosenberg. And those dozen narcos would have shit in their pants.”<sup>64</sup>

While not all drug dealers were idealists, at least some saw their illegal activities as duties for the improvement of their country. They were also critical of what American society had become. One dealer claimed that “with society and its ways politics have gotten us down to a point where you either rebel or freak out.”<sup>65</sup> Another dealer, who was amassing capital to set up a business, was aware that “money corrupts and therefore you have to keep yourself from becoming part of the establishment yet keep making money at the same time.” He saw himself as “a militant radical” that was part of a broader counter-culture composed of “people who are working toward a change in this country by way of positive type action. People who see a necessity for a change on the present level of awareness. A change in the way our government and economy function.” Initially, he had been politically active but soon realized that his activism was not sustainable and was forced to find a way to make money while also serving the revolution:

The answer is DEALING. If more people would turn on in this country more people would think. So if you are a dealer, you're fair and don't rob anybody, distribute the acid at cheap prices and not profiteer [*sic*]. It is important to distribute it fast and make sure that more and more people will turn on. There

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<sup>63</sup> “Intergalactic Union Doprogram,” *East Village Other* Vol. 5(25), May 19, 1970.

<sup>64</sup> “Intergalactic Union Doprogram,” *East Village Other* Vol. 5(26), May 26, 1970.

<sup>65</sup> “Superpusher,” interview by Jaakov Kohn, *East Village Other* Vol. 4(6), January 10, 1969.

will be a more positive trend in the thinking patterns and a change of awareness will be inevitable. There isn't much of that going on because the average level of awareness is pretty low.<sup>66</sup>

He also discussed how his activities made him part of a close-knit circle that included the underground manufacturers of synthetic drugs. But although he trusted them and their ability to deliver good materials, he made a point of systematically testing them “in massive quantities” before selling them. He never had direct contact with the chemists. Mostly, he was “usually fourth man down [the ladder]. Sometimes third and [he had] been at times second down from the chemists.” He never sold on the retail market (to friends, he simply gave away LSD); rather he sold wholesale to other dealers. His activities allowed him to be economically autonomous, but he ultimately wished to set up legal ventures that would create employment.<sup>67</sup>

This dealer was also an active consumer of strong doses of LSD, because he saw it as an aid to remain distant from the lure of materialism and profit. The day before the interview, he had allegedly taken 1,500 micrograms (a staggering amount by most standards), and 700 the day before. He took heavy doses on a daily basis because it allowed him to stay focused and never stray away from his ideals: “I like to keep my perspectives straight and to me acid does this. Maybe I am different than others, but money tends to corrupt my mind. [...] It tends to change me into a self-thinking creature and at this point I need the help of a psychedelic drug to keep my head in such a frame of reference whereby I won't dehumanize myself and become a part of the establishment.”<sup>68</sup>

Nick Sand was also a major LSD manufacturer and dealer who was later be arrested as part of his involvement with the Brotherhood of Eternal Love. In late 1966, Sand plied his trade in his warehouse in Brooklyn, with the help of his mother. He manufactured a battery of

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<sup>66</sup> “Midipusher,” interview by Jaakov Kohn, *East Village Other* Vol. 4(8), January 24, 1969. Another NYC dealer also saw LSD as a tool to help the revolution. See “Sunshine Supermen,” interview by Jaakov Kohn in the *East Village Other* Vol. 4(28), June 19, 1969.

<sup>67</sup> “Midipusher.”

psychedelics like LSD and DMT and also tried to develop new compounds. Sand saw his work as a duty to mankind and saw himself as part of a crusade: “We are commandos in the psychedelic army.”<sup>69</sup>

All in all, psychedelic drug dealers were a fitting illustration of the complexity of psychedelia: many dealers saw themselves as benevolent philanthropists with a moral duty to distribute LSD; counter-culturists admired them for the critical role they played in spreading the psychedelic gospel; but conservative voices saw nothing less than greedy “pushers” no better than opiate dealers. Still, their discourses were in keeping with some of the general facets of psychedelia, at the cross-roads of politics and religion.

In spite of all the disputes and attacks on various fronts, psychedelic idealism remained prevalent throughout the decade. In 1970, a party was organized in the East Village to support Timothy Leary who was now behind bars. With the foremost spokesperson of the LSD revolution sidelined, a more eclectic coalition now scrambled to keep the counter-culture alive. As Allan Katzman of the *East Village Other* put it, “The psychedelic fringe, the revolutionary hip and committed, the OM seekers, celebrities and their cohort capitalists, the beautiful people and freak counterparts, an alter ego revolution playing out their parts to a dead dream of dropout. They all came together but nothing seemed to hold.”<sup>70</sup> Graboi, who had swallowed a tab before the party, also saw a very different crowd from the days of the Center for the League of Spiritual Discovery. Prominent members of the psychedelic movement such as Allen Ginsberg, Alan Watts, and Rosemary Woodruff Leary were attending, but so were political radicals like Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin. Thrown into the

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Rhoney Gissen Stanley, *Owsley and Me: My LSD Family* (Rhinebeck, NY: Monkfish, 2013), 31.

<sup>70</sup> Allan Katzman, “Poor Paranoid’s Almanac,” *East Village Other* Vol. 5(25), May 19, 1970.

mix were “a sprinkling of jet-setters, and some secret service men with hard faces and guarded eyes” and “two tall men who both looked like Lord Mountbatten.”<sup>71</sup>

The party tried to assess Leary’s situation, but the various approaches sometimes clashed. Hoffman furiously bleated about the oppressive power structures that had imprisoned him and reasoned that armed warfare was warranted. When Graboi and her friend tried to calm him down by chanting “OM,” the latter became even angrier, thinking they were mocking him. Ginsberg, Watts and Leary’s lawyer, by contrast asserted that Leary was a political prisoner and a victim of a religious war. Graboi became more ill-at-ease when the lawyer suggested Leary was ready to resort to force, but was then uplifted by the presence of the entertainer and activist Wavy Gravy, who felt that they were winning the battle: “There is something they don’t know. [...] They can’t win. Evolution is on our side!”<sup>72</sup>

The notion that LSD and psychedelics were the key to the next stage of human evolution and would bring about a better world was one that was widespread in the psychedelic counter-culture.<sup>73</sup> During a talk at Town Hall on 21<sup>st</sup> April 1966, Leary argued that his youthful followers would be instrumental in this cultural change: “It is in the hands of the young. Evolution rolls on relentlessly.”<sup>74</sup> Even the researchers Robert Masters and Jean Houston, who were important scientific authorities in the field of psychedelic research and more than suspicious of Leary’s proselytizing, were seduced by this idea and used the argument to make a case for consciousness-expansion: “Consciousness is still linked to survival in a world in which the dangers and needs were different from those of the present. Our progress in the world has outstripped the evolutionary development of our bodies and

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<sup>71</sup> Graboi, *One Foot in the Future*, 294–5.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 295–6.

<sup>73</sup> For a broader analysis of this phenomenon, see Elcock, “From Acid Revolution to Entheogenic Evolution.”

<sup>74</sup> Walter Bowart, “Leary’s Politics and Ethics of Ecstasy,” *East Village Other* Vol. 1(11), May 1 – May 15, 1966.

especially our brains.” Thus, only the (controlled) use of psychedelics would be able to re-establish a harmonious balance between the human brain and the world.<sup>75</sup>

Psychedelic evolutionism did not simply arise out of a necessity to promote LSD as a life-changing catalyst that could bring about peace and understanding to the human race. LSD users frequently reported experiencing the unravelling of the evolution of species during their trips. Isaac Abrams vividly recalls one of these experiences:

I was sitting there and it was very hot and I opened my eyes and I went “How did I get here?” And when I asked that question, I had an intense release of energy and a complete white light experience. Nothing but white light. And then it was like the creation of the universe. Then it started to come together. The whole process. The envision of the big-bang. Energy forms happening. Concentrations of them. Galaxies and stars. Planets evolving. Going through a volcanic stage. Dinosaur period. And the whole evolutionary process. The rise of mammals, swimming, being a fish, and finally, my grandfather, my grandmother, my parents and getting born - to where I was at that instant. That was an astounding experience. A truly transcendental experience.<sup>76</sup>

## Conclusion

The short-lived but dynamic psychedelic counter-culture, which had built on the Beats’ early critique of the postwar consensus of conformity, organized important and highly visible events in the broader social history of psychedelia, even though its counter-cultural messages were often overblown by the press, which fuelled a distorted feeling of imminent revolution. Many psychedelic drug enthusiasts were drawn to this message because it seemed like a breath of fresh air following the stuffy climate of the 1950s. For example, the artist Martin Carey remembers learning about Leary and Alpert getting fired from Harvard in 1963: “The ‘50s were such a dull, sleepy time, and school was dull and boring and inoffensive. The people who had trouble in school were usually more intelligent, so they got bored.” Seeing them get

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<sup>75</sup> Robert E. L. Masters and Jean Houston, “Art and Psychedelic Experience,” in *Psychedelic Art*, ed. Robert E. L. Masters and Jean Houston (New York: Grove Press / Balance House, 1968), 127.

fired because of a drug scandal, “It was like a light shining into all that boredom.”<sup>77</sup> At the time, he felt being part of a special generation that had realized that reality was merely a social consensus that could be challenged; yet, in retrospect, he had reservations: “Every generation feels that they are transforming the world. Then what they do gets assimilated into the society and gets chewed up. America makes pablum [*sic*] of any new idea in seven years, and then the idea becomes dull. The only thing is – this time, it was really moving into a new area of consciousness, and that’s a totally new thing.”<sup>78</sup>

Not surprisingly, adolescents were also drawn to the counter-cultural messages of the times and wanted to be with like-minded individuals. Edwards was about 15 when she first went to San Francisco on a family trip and was impressed by a local young bohemian she met there: “It was just completely opposite of how I had grown up. Wearing white gloves when we went into the City [...]. The Fifties were kind of like strict. I remember when I met him, I was wearing a suit. [...] that’s how my mother used to dress me.” When she got back to NYC, she wanted to meet more people like him and started going to Washington Square, which was then one of the psychedelic hotspots of the city.<sup>79</sup>

The psychedelic counter-culture assumed a far more distinctive form as the 60s unfolded. At the same performance at the Village Theater, Graboi remembers that “The 800-seat theater was packed, people were standing and sitting on the floor in the aisles. The aroma of incense filled the theater, bells tingled, beads shone [...].”<sup>80</sup> Several distinct codes revealed a great deal of overlap between other spheres like art, spirituality, and even politics. For instance, several psychedelic enthusiasts wore buttons that read “Psychedelize Suburbia,”

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<sup>76</sup> Isaac Abrams, interview.

<sup>77</sup> Interview by Graboi in Graboi, *One Foot in the Future*, 250.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, 252.

<sup>79</sup> Edwards, interview. For more on Washington Square as an important site with a long history of contested meanings, see Emily Kies Folpe, *It Happened on Washington Square* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).



hoping to spread the acid gospel. One reporter also noted that these buttons, along with paperweights, peacock feathers, and diffraction disks were all considered to have in common the shape of a mandala – “a form that symbolizes the universe to Hindus, Buddhists and now psychedelics.”<sup>81</sup>

The psychedelic counter-culture was one of a kind and does not elicit easy categorization. It differed from Henderson’s *Hip Toronto* in that it emanated from an experience, rather than just a desire to “make the scene” in a particular place by performing hipness. Taking consciousness-altering substances in a major American city was likely to lead to uncanny feelings, as Michael Hollingshead’s first LSD trip illustrates,<sup>82</sup> and it is quite possible that many psychedelic substance users then went on to reject the American way of life as a direct result of their experimentation amidst the hectic New York life. But this also begs the question of whether the potential for ontological revamping boiled down to the pharmacological properties of such drugs, the influence of peers and mentors, or the vocal psychedelic crusaders like Leary.

But it was more than a simple collective desire to subvert the established cultural order. As Farber writes, some members of the psychedelic counter-culture “actively sought to engage and influence the society they had, at least in some sense, repudiated. Herein was a process not of withdrawal – of simply dropping out – but of creating institutions, vocations, enterprises, and opportunities built not on stoned indifference but on active social engagement and community-oriented hard work.”<sup>83</sup> The way people like Graboi or Levy attempted to build bridges with the outside is a case in point and further illustrates how a binary

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<sup>80</sup> Graboi, *One Foot in the Future*, 206.

<sup>81</sup> “Psychedelic Art,” 68–9.

<sup>82</sup> See chapter 1, note 56.

<sup>83</sup> Farber, “Building the Counterculture, Creating Right Livelihoods,” 3.

mainstream/counter-culture opposition obscures the complexity of New York's psychedelic moment.

Towards the end of the decade, several factors like tougher penalties for illicit drug use, the sidelining of influential figures, or the challenge posed by competing drug subcultures led to the demise of psychedelic idealism.

## Chapter 4

### Psychedelic Politics

The utopian ideals of the psychedelic counter-culture were very much shaped by a psychedelic movement composed of academics, artists, writers, and religious figures, who became vocal advocates of chemical experimentation through publications, public talks or with the help of the press. Figures of this movement, spearheaded by Leary, touted the psychedelic experience as a magic bullet that could lead to a profound ontological shattering. As the mythology of the LSD revolution went, the turned-on person would no longer be the same. All these reformed individuals would naturally change their ways of life and ultimately transform society.

Thus, politics became an important lens to make sense of the psychedelic experience and formed a critical part of psychedelia. But as ever, LSD became an important source of polarization. For many New Left activists, drug use discouraged protest and was equated with selfish hedonism when the US government was dropping bombs in South East Asia.<sup>1</sup> The “Groucho Marxist” Abbie Hoffman, who was quite partial to LSD, resented the psychedelic movement, because he was convinced that only radical politics could bring about social change. For many LSD enthusiasts, on the other hand, protest was futile because it was firmly encapsulated in the dominant cultural model and thus gave it credit. Nina Graboi, for instance, held that the solution was to drop out of society to create new political structures that radically departed from the existing model and ultimately made the United States a better place.<sup>2</sup> While activists protested against the war in Vietnam or campaigned for civil rights, USCO artists

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<sup>1</sup> David Farber, “The Counterculture and the Antiwar Movement,” in *Give Peace a Chance: Exploring the Vietnam Antiwar Movement*, ed. Melvin Small, William D. Hoover, and Charles DeBenedetti (Syracuse University Press, 1992), 8-9.

<sup>2</sup> Graboi, *One Foot in the Future*, 245.

were oblivious to what was happening outside their world: their use of LSD made them realize the bankruptcy of nationalism and politics, and that altering one's consciousness ultimately posed a greater threat to the state.<sup>3</sup>

Despite this strong tension, other cases point to a more complex relation between politics and LSD. Under the influence of LSD, the very concept of going to war and killing human beings seemed not just wrong but absurd, when pitted against chemically induced feelings of love, bliss, and unity. For example, two New York LSD users came to talk about the Vietnam War as they were slowly coming down from an LSD trip in a midtown house. They felt that the American intervention in South East Asia and the whole concept of going to war was beyond them, particularly after undergoing the psychedelic experience: "We both couldn't comprehend war, when mankind could find peace, just as we did for a few hours." More broadly, the author of the article who took the drug felt that the insights of the experience had valid political import: "And I will say that I learned one thing that people can get along together harmoniously if somehow some way we could break through the bag we are in now, if we could just shoot through our hangups."<sup>4</sup>

Thus, psychedelics had the power to awaken a stronger political consciousness. In a long-term assessment of the effect of psilocybin on personality, Rick Doblin has noticed that at least two individuals who were given psilocybin in the early 1960s went on to become actively engaged in the civil rights and antiwar movements, one of them denying the notion that "drugs are an escape from social obligations."<sup>5</sup> Graboi also remembers one LSD user who was deeply opposed to the Vietnam War: "We all have to eat, sleep and shit. And make

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<sup>3</sup> Michel Oren, "USCO: 'Getting Out of Your Mind to Use Your Head,'" *Art Journal* 69, no. 4 (2010): 91.

<sup>4</sup> Gerald Rothberg, "LSD," *Clyde*, December 1965, 19, folder "LSD Experiences," box 8, Stafford Papers.

<sup>5</sup> Rick Doblin, "Pahnke's 'Good Friday Experiment': A Long-Term Follow-up and Methodological Critique," *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 23, no. 1 (1991): 15.

babies. That's all. Killing is considered honourable in primitive societies, and in our own it's mandatory to kill in war."<sup>6</sup> Even those who put protest before chemical experimentation did not always discard the psychedelic experience. When asked if he condoned LSD use despite its alleged potential for brain damage, Hoffman answered that "If that's what brain damage is, then we all ought to be brain damaged, and besides, there's no revolution without risks, and that's part of the risk of this revolution."<sup>7</sup>

This chapter adds to the recent scholarship that has studied the history of the psychedelic movement<sup>8</sup> and examines the relationship between psychedelics and politics, by looking at Leary's psychedelic movement and its internal tensions and external pressures, as well as other less visible figures who helped fuel ideas of chemical revolution. In doing so, it conceptualizes the psychedelic movement as one of the driving cultural forces behind the psychedelic counter-culture, thus treating it separately. It also looks at the conservative response to LSD use by examining the campaign against LSD, but tempers the idea of widespread moral panic by looking at the more liberal voices that saw the campaign as exaggerated. Finally, this movement can be understood as something close to a religious crusade, even though this particular dimension is deliberately set aside here to be taken up in the chapter on psychedelic spirituality.

### **Leary's psychedelic mission**

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<sup>6</sup> Graboi, *One Foot in the Future*, 228.

<sup>7</sup> John Garabedian, "New York's Hippies," *New York Post*, September 13, 1967, folder "Hippies Yippies," box 7, Stafford Papers.

<sup>8</sup> Don Lattin, *The Harvard Psychedelic Club: How Timothy Leary, Ram Dass, Huston Smith and Andrew Weil Killed the Fifties and Ushered in a New Age for America* (New York: HarperOne, 2010); Peter Connors, *White Hand Society: The Psychedelic Partnership of Timothy Leary and Allen Ginsberg* (San Francisco: City Lights Book, 2010).

As noted in the previous chapter, Nina Graboi was initially suspicious of Leary, but revised her opinion of him during one of his talks at the Hotel Albert. She was impressed by his coolness and focus and found him to be very different character from the one that existed in the media: “I don’t remember if I had a mental picture of Leary before I met him, but if I did, it would probably have been of a sunken-eyed fanatic, a Svengali out to enslave the kids with dope, a mad scientist with glittering reptilian eyes and a hypnotic voice, a sexual aberrant who staged orgies. That’s how the press presented him.”<sup>9</sup> Even though she did not always agree with him, and became acutely aware of the other sides of his personality “that could cut like broken glass,”<sup>10</sup> she still found him fascinating: “I really did not understand him, but I marvelled at the depth of his commitment.”<sup>11</sup> According to Graboi, he was always very uneasy about the idolatry of his followers: “I believe that Leary did not want to be seen as a guru, a prophet, or a High Priest. In him, the scientific temperament overshadows the devotional. He is a super-salesman of evolution who deploys his talents to sell a more advanced stage of human consciousness.”<sup>12</sup>

She became equally impressed with Leary’s closest lieutenants, Richard Alpert (“outgoing” and “ebullient”) and Ralph Metzner (“more somber and somewhat dour”), whom she described as “intelligent and well-meaning individuals.”<sup>13</sup> The trio made for an eclectic mix: “Leary the archetypal Irish rebel, Alpert the Jewish intellectual, and the scholarly, reserved German Metzner. They were a strange but effective combination.”<sup>14</sup> If Leary has been

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See also Higgs’ and Greenfield’s respective biographies of Leary for more on the psychedelic movement.

<sup>9</sup> Graboi, *One Foot in the Future*, 143.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>13</sup> Graboi, *One Foot in the Future*, 146.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

remembered as the most vocal advocate of the psychedelic movement, he was also supported by a cast of equally competent, if flawed, characters.

Ralph Metzner, who is still active today in contemporary psychedelia and environmentalism, was considerably younger and less charismatic than Leary, but was still a close companion. Though Leary was the obvious leader of the psychedelic movement, Metzner sometimes stepped up to assume some form of leadership. In the fall of 1966, the Brooklyn Psychological Association sponsored a conference on youth drug use, which drew a wide-range of attendees. Being ill, Leary had sent him over as a substitute. One observer found him “too removed” and scientific, as if he were “reading from some textbooks in his mind.” But his ideas were in tune with Leary’s. He touted the discovery of LSD as important as that of the microscope; claimed to have witnessed cases of telepathy under the drug’s influence; reminded the audience of the drug’s potential for religious import; and lambasted the legislation for ending psychedelic research and creating a black market.<sup>15</sup>

Alpert was by most accounts Leary’s closest associate and a charismatic speaker with a magnetic aura. During the Harvard days, his lecture rooms were always jammed and required the largest auditoriums. According to Gerd Stern, who was hired by the same head of Social Relations who ousted Leary and Alpert from the prestigious university, “Richard was probably the most magnetic and the most successful lecturer in psychology ever to teach at Harvard.”<sup>16</sup> This was apparent during the Psychedelic Workshop and Experiential Theater Evening at the famous Village Vanguard jazz club in spring 1965. The event boasted an impressive crew: Ralph Metzner, Michael Hollingshead, Alan Watts, Gunther Weil (another former Harvard psychedelic experimenter), important jazz figures like Steve Swallow, Peter Larocca and Charles Mingus, and a light-show artist. The event was a success and Alpert, along with

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<sup>15</sup> Jan Stacy, “LSD Forum: Why Take the Trip?,” *Village Voice*, November 3, 1966, folder “Village Voice,” box 33, Stafford Papers.

Mingus, was offered a nightly spot as an entertainer at \$500 a week – a blessing, considering how low Leary’s group’s finances were at the time. Yet, Alpert soon found himself working there without a salary and the proprietor even forced him to give him back part of his advance.<sup>17</sup>

Stern also recalls that Alpert’s charisma had its darker sides as well: “Wonderful ability, but also a frightening and destructive - because you can lead people very easily down the garden path and he did.”<sup>18</sup> Indeed, he also remembers Alpert playing irresponsibly with LSD and without giving any consideration to the dangers of the drug. Alpert once took Stern and other people on a plane ride and announced once they were up in the air that he was high on LSD. For Leary’s marriage to the Swedish model Nena von Schlebrügge he secretly spiked the champagne with the drug, thus wreaking havoc during the party.<sup>19</sup>

Other key figures seemed to have questionable ethics in contradiction with their discourse of psychedelic liberation. Despite his key role in psychedelia’s metanarrative, a lot of rumours circulated around the notorious Michael Hollingshead and just evoking his name still elicits strong emotional responses from those who knew him. In 1966, he left for England and Leary heard reports that he was “turning people on to LSD and then turning them in to the police.”<sup>20</sup> The psychologist Stanley Krippner describes him as very urbane, intelligent, articulate, charismatic, but also irresponsible and manipulative of Leary and his circle. Even someone as bright as Jean Houston was temporarily under his spell. He also heard rumours

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<sup>16</sup> Gerd Stern, “From Beat Scene Poet,” 90.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Hollingshead to Alex Trocchi, May 4, 1965, Item 55, Folder 10-11: 1965, Box 38, Sub-Series 1: Correspondence, Series 5: Sigma, Box 38-45, Alexander Trocchi Papers (MSS116), 1944-1984, Washington University Libraries, Department of Special Collections.

<sup>18</sup> Stern, “From Beat Scene Poet,” 90.

<sup>19</sup> Gerd Stern, interview.

<sup>20</sup> Art Kleps, “Sandy’s Tale,” in *Millbrook: A Narrative of the Early Years of American Psychedelianism, Recension of 2005* (San Francisco: Original Kleptonian Neo-



that he went around in supermarkets with a syringe and injected oranges with LSD.<sup>21</sup> Isaac Abrams thought that “he was very full of himself. He was almost like one of these English Lords or imaginary aristocrats from the 17th century, who carried swords and wore fancy clothes. He was living on another planet.”<sup>22</sup>

Art Kleps was another key (and zany) figure in the psychedelic movement, who often found himself navigating between the otherwise rigid borders of New York’s social stratifications. In 1967, Kleps, Leary and another psychedelic guru Bill Haines, as well as a few other figures of the Millbrook scene were invited to a “psychedelic seder” hosted by the millionaire Peggy Hitchcock in her house off Fifth Avenue – a popular place for parties amongst the New York jet set. But the heiress to the Mellon family had been selective in her invitations and made sure undesirable elements stayed away. According to Kleps there were none of the usual “twerps” that were part of the Millbrook scene, who were constantly “moralizing about almost everyone and everything. It tended to put a damper on the free flow of conversation.”<sup>23</sup>

Kleps was referring to those at Millbrook who were suspicious of the aristocratic and elitist elements hovering around their communal experience, when the consensus was one that advocated material detachment: “They wanted to vent spleen and make all who didn’t conform to the latest totems and taboos squirm and confess and tear their hair out [...], thereby evening the score, as it were, for the crime of enjoying any distinction of any sort.” Thus, leaders were faced with an important conundrum: having to reckon with both their

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American Church, 2005), page unavailable, <http://okneoac.org/millbrook/> (accessed September 12, 2013).

<sup>21</sup> Stanley Krippner, interview by Chris Elcock, Hyatt Regency, Albuquerque, February 15, 2013.

<sup>22</sup> Isaac Abrams, interview.

<sup>23</sup> Art Kleps, “Sixth-century Political Economy,” in *Millbrook: A Narrative of the Early Years of American Psychedelianism, Recension of 2005* (San Francisco: Original

counter-cultural imperatives and the necessity of courting the wealthy to fuel the psychedelic crusade.

For Kleps, this became a source of pressure for Leary and Haines: “As the only avowed elitist around, I was in many ways immune to the pressures exerted on Tim and Bill. I got a lot of flack [*sic*] for this at first, before it became generally known that I was a hopeless case.” Thus, Kleps, who had nothing against the Millbrook “twerps,” became one of the few who successfully negotiated those boundaries. Haines, on the other hand, threatened to become violent with anyone who “[laid] this kind of crap on him.” Leary, however, was in a far more complicated position, because of his visible public discourse that promoted egalitarianism. Thus, he “was obliged to repeat and endorse and appear to observe in actual practice all the kid-culture political dicta and moralistic formulations ‘our’ media ordained. It’s the classic price extorted from those who seek prominence in this field of endeavour.”<sup>24</sup>

Though LSD is not a habit-forming drug like cocaine or heroin, Leary apparently needed it to function better when facing this kind of societal pressure. At the beginning of the party, Haines noticed that he looked nervous and immediately asked him for some LSD. Haines then told Kleps that Leary had become an “acidholic,” which struck him as preposterous, but then would admit that “it’s possible to be dexterously extroverted on the stuff, if that’s the way you want to go.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, Leary’s use of LSD seemed to help him perform the expected role of the psychedelic public figure he had become.

Yet, the evening at Hitchcock’s turned out to be one of simple social interactions, far removed from any political agenda. As Kleps comments, it “was no meeting of the rabble to

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Kleptonian Neo-American Church, 2005), page unavailable, <http://okneoac.org/millbrook/> (accessed September 12, 2013).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Art Kleps, “The Yankee and the King Sold as Slaves,” in *Millbrook: A Narrative of the Early Years of American Psychedelianism, Recension of 2005* (San Francisco: Original

plot pillage and rapine, nor of the rich to figure out new ways to tread them underfoot. I doubt if anyone present spoke one word about politics all night.”<sup>26</sup> Hitchcock invited Kleps and Haines to a separate room on another floor, where she instructed them to prepare an LSD-spiked punch for the guests – the psychedelic seder was mentioned on the invitation cards, so the guests could likely guess it would involve taking LSD at some point. The majority of the guests obliged their host by picking a cup once the drinks were served, though Kleps noticed that “quite a few looked like they were going up the Amazon, against their better judgment, to wrestle alligators.”<sup>27</sup> In the aftermath of the party, Kleps reasoned that he had become a prominent figure of the psychedelic movement and possessed a great deal of cultural capital amongst the New York elite: “I interpreted the psychedelic seder as a demonstration of the abrupt high status I had somehow acquired in Psychedelian society and in the eyes of the powers that were. According to the program, I was Tim’s junior, his ‘son,’ but I was also trusted and accepted more than he was.”<sup>28</sup>

Despite their connection with the New York jet-set, trouble was never far away for Leary and his movement. In 1966, Leary was facing a 30-year prison sentence for cannabis possession, which threatened to derail his psychedelic enterprise altogether. To counter his troubles with the law, he decided to make a case for legalizing psychedelic drugs by invoking the principle of freedom of religion and touting the LSD experience as a valid part of American culture.<sup>29</sup> This idea originated from Isaac Abrams, who was visiting Millbrook after Leary had been arrested in December 1965 for attempting to smuggle cannabis across the Mexico-Texas border. He and his lawyer were pondering how to beat the charges when

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Kleptonian Neo-American Church, 2005), page unavailable, <http://okneoac.org/millbrook/> (accessed September 12, 2013).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> For more on this, see Elcock, “The Fifth Freedom.”

Abrams suggested: “American Indians take peyote as a sacrament. Maybe this is a similar thing.” His lawyer found the idea brilliant. “And the next thing you know, they were calling it a sacrament.”<sup>30</sup>

Van Wolfe was also instrumental in shaping the battle to save these drugs from prohibition. Wolfe had just become engaged to the daughter of Charlie Berns, co-owner of a major liquor business. When Berns had told Wolfe that Leary and his proselytizing had become the worst enemy of the liquor business and that he would not help then in their cause, Wolfe reasoned that a solution was to bring the debate into the public limelight: “Psychedelic drugs must be associated with beauty, glamour, sexuality. We need symbols of personal freedom. High fashion. Graceful hedonism compared to sloppy boozers.” Leary thus realized the importance of mastering public relations and communication with the press.<sup>31</sup> From then on, the former Harvard professor barely made a move without making the headlines. Reporters were largely suspicious of his extreme and provocative statements, but listened to him nonetheless. The controversies surrounding him were profitable; better still, here was a chance to zoom in on the promotion of illicit drugs unhindered by censorship - which was the logical escalation from the previous decade’s focus on literary and philosophical takes on psychedelics.<sup>32</sup>

To achieve this, Wolfe concluded, Leary needed to meet the famous Marshall McLuhan. During his lunch at the Plaza, the Canadian media theorist advised him to “associate LSD with all the good things that the brain can produce – beauty, fun, philosophic wonder, religious revelation, increased intelligence, mystical romance. Word of mouth from

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<sup>30</sup> Isaac Abrams, interview.

<sup>31</sup> Leary, *Flashbacks*, 249. For a brief theoretical sketch that analyzes how movements like Leary’s are ever dependent on media coverage to gain public support and sympathy, see William A. Gamson and Gadi Wolfsfeld, “Movements and Media as Interacting Systems,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 528, no. 1 (1993): 114–25.

satisfied consumers will help, but get your rock and roll friends to write jingles about the brain.”<sup>33</sup> McLuhan then suggested that Leary speak only of the psychedelic experience in religious terms to make it more intelligible to the masses and told him to always smile and appear courageous when in public to make the drug even more appealing. In the aftermath of this conversation, he came up with his notorious slogan “turn on, tune in, and drop out.”<sup>34</sup> To get an idea of the popularity and influence of his maxim, one need only look at the way it was recycled by the soft drink company Squirt and the Televangelist Billy Graham for their own campaigns.<sup>35</sup>

One way Leary rallied supporters for political and financial assistance was by embarking on a cross-country lecture tour. During a talk at the Central Plaza Hall on February 7, 1966 that was clothed in a mystic-scientific language and that typified his preaching, he disseminated the notion that the last five years had “witnessed a psychedelic revolution.” Leary found support in The Native American Church, which by then could legally use peyote as a sacrament, and also sent a speaker for the occasion. Mana Pardeahtan claimed that Leary’s Castalia Foundation (the organization that replaced the IF-IF in 1963) was the best-adapted organization to structure the use of psychedelic drugs.<sup>36</sup>

Though many felt that Leary was an irresponsible preacher, he did caution against the dangers of LSD: “If you don’t get along with your boss and your mother-in-law in your normal consciousness, don’t think you can handle the cosmic energies you’ll encounter on a

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<sup>32</sup> Siff, *Acid Hype*, 146-7.

<sup>33</sup> Leary, *Flashbacks*, 251.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Walter Bowart, “Facing Jail Leary Lectures,” *East Village Other*, Vol. 1(6), February 15 – March 1, 1966.

trip.”<sup>37</sup> He also offered two maxims as guidelines for the psychedelic experience during a talk at Town Hall on April 5, 1966:

-Thou shalt not alter the consciousness of thy fellow man by chemical or electrical means. You can teach him how, yes. But the goal and controls must be a man’s own.

-Thou shalt not prevent man from changing his own consciousness, except when clear and present danger is shown, such as when there is a threat to society or to one’s self. But the goal and control of a man’s own consciousness has got to be in the hands of each individual and not in the hands of a system.<sup>38</sup>

Amongst the compromises he made during his lecture tour was the suggestion that there be a one year moratorium on psychedelic drug use in order to appease the authorities. On his April 21, 1966 talk at Town Hall he reasoned that “We should voluntarily stop doing what has caused anguish and confusion for those who do not understand. The tendency is to fight. [...] I think we should love.” He specifically targeted the Brooklyn District Attorney Aaron Koota, who had embarked on highly politicized crusade against the psychedelic movement, by telling his audience to send him flowers, pictures, or poems in order to “turn him on” without drugs.<sup>39</sup>

More broadly, the psychedelic movement tried to offer an “ethics of dope” similar to the one present in the much broader psychedelic subculture: “We made a clear distinction between psychedelic substances and drugs like heroin, cocaine, amphetamines, alcohol, etc.,” remembered Graboi, who also cautioned about STP (2,5-Dimethoxy-4-methylamphetamine) when that extremely potent, long-lasting, and hazardous psychedelic entered the drug scene. As a general rule, Graboi’s followers at the Center shunned these drugs: “The effect of the psychedelics rather than the substances themselves was the focus of interest.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Graboi, *One Foot in the Future*, 149.

<sup>38</sup> Walter Bowart, “Leary’s Politics and Ethics of Ecstasy,” *East Village Other* Vol. 1(10), April 15 – May 1, 1966.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Graboi, *One Foot in the Future*, 245.

But even then, these ethics were not always strictly followed. The most striking example of discrepancy between rhetoric and fact was Leary's own heavy drinking that remained more or less secret during his time as chief LSD proselytizer. As Gerd Stern recalls, "Timothy was really and always has been an alcoholic. [...] He allowed the drug world to become an additional layer on this alcoholism; he never gave up the alcohol, by the way. Alcohol and drugs are not the greatest mix in the world; they're destructive physiologically. Especially together, and when they're taken in large quantities."<sup>41</sup>

Many more who collaborated with Leary disagreed about his ideas of chemical revolution. Isaac Abrams, for instance, was arguably as enthusiastic as him or other people who had their lives changed by the psychedelic experience. But he felt that Leary's approach was far too confrontational and reliant on controversy. Instead, he felt that the establishment of a subculture that would eventually permeate American culture on a much broader level was far more critical to popularize the consumption of LSD and psychedelics: "I felt it was something that had to grow. And there had to be a literature and an art. And a culture."<sup>42</sup> This culture, according to Abrams might have blossomed into something far more productive than anything Leary ever attempted: "And in many respects I felt that the generation like Hollingshead and all – they were too far gone. [...] they had attitudes of arrogance, superiority, intellectual superiority, and especially, they had their PhDs, and so on, or they came from wealthy families, they knew wealthy people." Leary was also quite fond of criminal or otherwise deviant characters, which might have made for an eclectic mix, but ultimately missed out on an important driving force:

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<sup>41</sup> Stern, "From Beat Scene Poet," 90.

<sup>42</sup> Abrams' reasoning is close to Lawrence Goodwyn's own theoretical framework to study protest movements and the necessary conditions for them to thrive and challenge

I wanted to turn on the middle class and bring them along. [...] the working class should be the middle-class. Turning on the middle-class. It spreads. It comes from the middle. It doesn't come down from the top, skip all of the middle-class with disdain and turn on the working class. Which is why you then create two kinds of people: red shirts and brown shirts. And it's been tried. And obviously you have to transcend the idea of class in this way.<sup>43</sup>

Likewise, the artist Richard Aldcroft basically agreed with Leary that LSD was a wonder drug, “But I don't think he places enough importance on what can really be done with LSD. I mean he says LSD is good, society is wrong, and the best thing to do is to move out of society, to drop out of it. But I think that society needs to be changed by the people who take LSD and direct their consciousness into a program of reorganization.” Aldcroft had anticipated environmental and energy conservation issues and held that the heightened psychedelic awareness of inventors and innovators could help solve these problems.<sup>44</sup> Another LSD user was suspicious of Leary's injunction to “drop out” of society and inquired rhetorically: “Do you quit your job? Do you seek out other people like yourself and start a community of your own?” Such a radical maxim was bound to put people off LSD, when LSD users could simply carry on with their jobs and support their families.<sup>45</sup>

Others still simply grew tired of the movement. Bonnie Golightly, who co-authored a book with Peter Stafford, officially “retired” from the psychedelic crusade after that publication, because she felt the movement had become counter-productive, repetitive, and riddled with internal conflict. She felt that a magazine like *Innerspace* deserved to be circulated on a much larger scale, rather than remain confined to the psychedelic community (thus preaching to the converted). Instead, the movement (and the magazine) should be tempering its confrontational and radical politics and creating a form of compromise by

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orthodox culture. See Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1980).

<sup>43</sup> Isaac Abrams, interview.

<sup>44</sup> Gordon Ball, “Triptape: An Interview with Richard Aldcroft,” *Film Culture* Vol. 43(Winter), 1966, 4–5.

<sup>45</sup> Bill Lazial to Timothy Leary, September 1966, folder 1, box 75, Leary papers.



reaching out to political leaders: “The only way to get public and legal acceptance for psychedelics is to lure the Outsiders Inside, or at least to the threshold. It is no good for psychedeliacs to buzz furiously at each other, constantly prating about what all of us already know.”<sup>46</sup>

To various extents, these dialectical problems echoed a similar one that had surfaced in the early days of the movement when Huxley had told Leary that the best way to carry out the psychedelic revolution was to initiate the people in power and create a trickle-down effect of psychedelic wisdom to ultimately make the world a better place. Instead, Leary, pressed by Ginsberg, decided that psychedelics should be shared democratically and offered to everyone. In retrospect, he was forced to admit that their approach had been “naively democratic” while Huxley’s was “ethologically correct.”<sup>47</sup> Whether such an approach would have worked is a matter of speculation.

### **Radical Politics**

Because of its largely apolitical nature and refusal to join protest groups, Leary’s psychedelic movement often came under attack. The High Priest of LSD shunned or even mocked some of the trademark social movements of the time, such as the antiwar movement, leftist politics, and second wave feminism, reasoning that protest played into the hands of the establishment, when true reform and revolution could only be achieved within the brain. For example, Art Kleps remembered reading a piece in the *Village Voice* that had been written by a lesbian feminist journalist in which she took issue with the way Leary had silenced the rare female

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<sup>46</sup> Bonnie Golightly to editor of *Innerspace*, 1966, page unavailable, folder “Innerspace,” box 21, Stafford Papers.

<sup>47</sup> As quoted in Peter Stafford, *Psychedelics Encyclopedia* (Berkeley: Ronin Publishing, 1992), 45

voices of the movement and specifically referred to the highly active Lisa Bieberman as a perfect example. The criticism was fair, in that Leary had not openly endorsed feminist causes and often treated women as sexual objects – with the notable exception of Graboi. But for Kleps, the problem also stemmed from Leary’s cult of personality: “Tim’s intent throughout, unmodified by any concern for veracity or consistency, was to picture anyone whom he thought might shadow his brilliance as the leading light of Psychedelia [...] as imitative reruns and self-deluded diddlers and piddlers, while promoting himself as magisterial.”<sup>48</sup>

There was also a rift between the psychedelic movement and anti-war protesters. The activist David McReynolds was dismayed by Alpert’s behaviour when the latter attended a meeting in an old Court House in the East Village, where a loose coalition of counter-culturists were talking about organising alternative lifestyle across the city – such as setting up a farm on Columbia campus or making an apartment available for the needy. Alpert initially sat quietly in a back row, but then proposed to boycott the April 15<sup>th</sup> (1967) Spring Mobilization Against the War in Vietnam: “some people are going to burn their draft cards there and it will be bad public relations for the psychedelic community to be involved in that kind of thing.”<sup>49</sup>

Even more infuriating was Alpert’s narrative of his latest STP trip, which had nothing to do with the ongoing discussions. McReynolds not only pointed to the obvious hypocrisy of worrying about public relations, for someone who claimed to be engaged in a revolutionary movement, but he also reminded him that the younger elements present at the meeting had not expressed any interest about his experience: “I had been sure they would concentrate on the

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<sup>48</sup> Art Kleps, “A Pitiful Incident,” in *Millbrook: A Narrative of the Early Years of American Psychedelianism, Recension of 2005* (San Francisco: Original Kleptonian Neo-American Church, 2005), page unavailable, <http://okneoac.org/millbrook/> (accessed September 12, 2013).

<sup>49</sup> David McReynolds, “An Open Letter to: Richard Alpert,” *Win*, July 1967, 10, folder “Drugs Crackdown,” box 4, Stafford Papers.

STP trip and ask for further information on that but no, they wanted to set you straight on why their journeys were leading them to Sheep Meadow on April 15<sup>th</sup>.<sup>50</sup>

Leary was just as dismissive of leftist politics. Early in 1968, the editor of *The Realist* Paul Krassner invited Leary to discuss a potential merging of forces. Krassner had allegedly taken LSD with the founders of the Youth International Party (Yippies) Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman on New Year's Eve in a Lower East Side apartment and "had revelations about merging the entire spectrum of dissenting Americans in a Young [*sic*] People's Party."<sup>51</sup> For Leary, their politics were a kind of urban socialism that deeply resented the pastoral utopianism that was gathering momentum and slowly creating a rural exodus away from the tumult of metropolitan life. These politics, however, did not appeal to him. He found them to be too negative and out-dated: "The militants of the '60s were out of touch with the optimistic aspirations of the young for more and better of everything." For Leary, they became "the first party to deal not with voting blocs or platforms but with information, media images, neurological campaigning." The militants failed to convince the people because "they emitted bad vibes" and tried to make them feel guilty: "Abbie continually projected on me his worst fears of what would happen if everyone were free and self-confident." Conversely, Hoffman took issue with Leary for "leading youth down the path of fascism" and "creating a group of blissed-out pansies ripe for annihilation."<sup>52</sup>

Yet, Leary and the Yippies agreed at least on one point: communication through mass media was the key to success. Leary had learned from McLuhan that he needed to make the most of the mass media to appear fashionable and charismatic, if he ever wanted to gain sufficient support. Likewise, Hoffman understood how politics could be turned into theater to gain enough media attention. Despite their divergences, they had many discussions on the

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>51</sup> Leary, *Flashbacks*, 268.

necessity to seek increased coverage to further their respective causes. On the one hand, Leary admitted that “The thing I liked about Abbie was that he kept changing, taking risks, dropping acid, reprogramming his head.” On the other hand, he concluded that “he became the ultimate contradiction – a psychedelic socialist”<sup>53</sup> that was greatly experienced with altered states of consciousness, but continued to play a political game based on a consensual conception of reality.

But for all the talks of dropping out of the political system, the psychedelic movement can be understood as promoting a form of libertarian utopianism that underscored the value of psychedelics for society and challenged illicit drug prohibition by framing it as a form of intrusive state intervention. During a talk in the loft of a psychedelic artist, Leary stated that the 1969 Woodstock festival had created a benchmark for an Aquarian Age full of love, understanding, and cooperation. Psychoactive drugs were to be the ultimate answer for all the ills of society: violent and deviant behaviour could be treated with the right chemical and restore harmony in society, as could the perennial fear of dying.<sup>54</sup> As an American citizen, he argued, he had the right to use these drugs freely and systematically countered his drug-related troubles with the law by condemning them as violations of his basic constitutional rights.<sup>55</sup> Some LSD dealers had similar opinions: “My own political activism, whatever form it may take, is based on the assumption that NOBODY is going to tell me what to do in my own home and nobody is going to walk into my house to tell me what to put in my body.”<sup>56</sup> Another dealer held that drug-dealing allowed him “to teach people to be more capable of

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 269.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ron Rosenbaum, “Leary’s Final Dropout: ‘This Time Around’?,” *Village Voice*, January, 8 1970, folder “Village Voice,” Stafford Papers.

<sup>55</sup> Elcock, “The Fifth Freedom: The Politics of Psychedelic Patriotism.”

<sup>56</sup> “Superpusher,” interviewed by Jaakov Kohn, *East Village Other* Vol. 4(6), January 10, 1969.

helping themselves.”<sup>57</sup> Thus, even alleged apolitical LSD users who were suspicious of traditional politics expressed views that were in keeping with the politics of the psychedelic movement.

Leary even realized that aligning his discourse with orthodox politics could ultimately make it even more intelligible. During a press conference where he announced the incorporation of the League of Spiritual Discovery on September 19, 1966, he provocatively argued that “The next president of the United States will be an LSD president.”<sup>58</sup> Pressed by further legal issues,<sup>59</sup> he decided to run for Governor of California in 1969, reasoning that getting into office might keep him out of jail. Leary found support from many celebrities and counter-cultural icons who organized and endorsed his campaign. He and his then wife Rosemary flew to New York to record a campaign album (the most famous song, John Lennon’s “Come Together,” was recorded in Montreal). There they met with Jann Wenner of *Rolling Stone* magazine, who was always paying attention to the up-and-coming cultural trends, and Jimi Hendrix, who recorded the music for the album.<sup>60</sup> During a press conference in Manhattan, he argued that California needed a “life-peace and not a Reagan war-death atmosphere” and also admitted that running of Governor was part of a larger strategy to discuss moral issues and the need for a new consciousness.<sup>61</sup>

Though the movement depended on media coverage and public appearances, it promoted its vision through several publications. For instance, the magazine *Innerspace*, offered a platform for psychedelic enthusiasts to share their ideas. Though based in NYC, it

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<sup>57</sup> “Midipusher,” interviewed by Jaakov Kohn, *East Village Other* Vol. 4(8), January 24, 1969.

<sup>58</sup> Peter Weinberg, ““On this Cube Will I Build my Church,”” *East Village Other* Vol. 1(21), October 1 – October 15, 1966.

<sup>59</sup> On December 26, 1968, Leary was again arrested for possession of cannabis and LSD in California.

<sup>60</sup> Leary, *Flashbacks*, 279–80.

also appeared in other major American cities and featured contributors like Peter Stafford and Lisa Bieberman, as well as the better-known psychedelic celebrities. Articles offered discussions on how to maximize a psychedelic drug experience, its potential for religious import and for human evolution, news about the broader psychedelic community, legal information about psychedelics, arguments supporting decriminalization of psychedelic drug use, letters, book reviews, or announcements.<sup>62</sup>

Another major publication was the *Psychedelic Review*, which was edited by Leary, Metzner, and Weil. It was first published at Millbrook - then New Hyde Park - and distributed by the Head Shop in Manhattan. Yet, the *Review* was not just intended at preaching the psychedelic gospel, but also geared towards serious academic study of psychedelics and altered states of consciousness. Boasting a wide range of contributors, the journal featured reprints of classic texts, poetry, as well as eclectic scientific publications in medicine and the humanities. With the increasing visibility of the psychedelic subculture in latter part of the decade, the *Journal* shifted its focus accordingly and became more concerned about increasing psychedelia's coverage.<sup>63</sup>

By contrast, *New York Provo* was a magazine that allegedly published “articles on psychedelic phenomena with an anarchist or Marxist perspective,”<sup>64</sup> and thus offered a different take on psychedelic activism than Leary and his collaborators. Provos argued in favour of a psychedelic revolution, but took issue with utopian fancies or cooperation with the state. Instead, the psychedelic movement should offer new social structures without falling into the pitfall of state capitalism. It took issue with the notion that socialism and psychedelics

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<sup>61</sup> Steve Lerner, “Leary: Promises to All but the Turned-on Young,” *Village Voice*, July 3, 1969, folder “Village Voice,” box 33, Stafford Papers.

<sup>62</sup> See folder “Innerspace,” box 21, Stafford Papers.

<sup>63</sup> To browse issues, see <http://www.maps.org/psychedelicreview/> (accessed August 13, 2014).

could not mix – the Progressive Labor Party, for instance, had called these drugs a “capitalist plot” and denounced all those within their ranks who had shunned activism after undergoing the psychedelic experience.<sup>65</sup> The magazine offered information on how to extract mescaline from peyote, translations of their Dutch counterparts’ own writings, and information on psychedelics and counter-cultural lifestyle.

### **The Campaign against LSD**

As LSD use increased in the second part of the decade, several voices rose to counter the supposed drug epidemic and the psychedelic movement. This conservative response embodied modernity, rationality, and hegemony, and illustrates Michel de Certeau’s opposition between the ruling class’s panoramic vision of the city to the everyday life in the streets that resists this hegemonic process.<sup>66</sup> The officials who moved to ban LSD and psychedelics adopted an epidemiologic approach to condemn illicit drug use, but knew in fact very little of the broad psychedelic community and its practises.

One of leading figures of this backlash was the D.A. Koota, who actively campaigned against LSD and its users. In spring 1966, he called for stronger repressive measures to curb LSD use, claiming that it was endemic in high schools across the country. He also felt that LSD abuse could lead to “antisocial behavior that is synonymous with criminal behavior.” These measures were intended at making the distribution of the drug a felony (rather than a

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<sup>64</sup> Introductory paragraph of *New York Provo*, date and author unavailable, 1, folder “New York Provo,” box 27, Stafford papers.

<sup>65</sup> “Psychedelics and Socialist Perspective,” *New York Provo*, date and author unavailable, 11, folder “New York Provo,” box 27, Stafford papers.

<sup>66</sup> Michel de Certeau, “Walking in the City,” in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 91–110.

misdemeanour) punishable by a 7 to 20 year jail sentence.<sup>67</sup> He later added that high school and college students were manufacturing the drug in the chemistry classrooms. He set up a special telephone line and mailing address for the narcotics squad police to receive information about the drug.

Crucially, though, “he refused to divulge how many schools, how many youngsters or which schools were involved” and remained elusive as to how the information had come to him.<sup>68</sup> Several school officials acknowledged this lack of evidence and the director of health education for the Board of Education went on to claim that “so far not a single case of the use of LSD by students has been reported to [his] office.”<sup>69</sup> The principal of James Monroe High School in the Bronx even wrote Koota a strong letter demanding apologies for blackening the reputation of several high schools and causing unnecessary alarm amongst parents.<sup>70</sup>

Additionally one Columbia student played down Koota’s claims that LSD could be easily manufactured in a chemistry classroom: “This business about making LSD in school laboratories is preposterous. [...] I know the formula and I’ve had enough chemistry courses to follow it; but I couldn’t make LSD if I spent a year in a lab.”<sup>71</sup> This charge was backed up by one expert toxicologist from Suffolk County, New York, who stated that “It requires time, skill and special chemicals. A graduate student, who may be alone in a lab at night, could make LSD, especially if he had access to lysergic acid, but I do not believe an undergraduate

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<sup>67</sup> Murray Schumach, “New Laws Urged for LSD Pushers,” *New York Times*, April 16, 1966. Koota, though, had no axe to grind with scientific study into LSD and psychedelics, which “may well serve a useful purpose in treating diseases of the mind.”

<sup>68</sup> “Koota Says Students Make LSD in Classes,” *Daily News*, April 20, 1966, folder “College Drug Scandals,” box 3, Stafford papers.

<sup>69</sup> “The DA’s LSD Cue Gives Schools Little to Go On,” *New York Post*, April 20, 1966, folder “College Drug Scandals,” box 3, Stafford papers.

<sup>70</sup> “Principals Deplore Koota’s LSD Charge,” *New York Times*, May 15, 1966.

<sup>71</sup> Timothy Lee, “Students see no Rise in Use of Drugs,” *New York Post*, July 6, 1966, folder “College Drug Scandals,” box 3, Stafford papers.



could, and certainly not a high school student.”<sup>72</sup> But another final reason to doubt these accusations was that LSD was so plentiful and cheap that undergraduates would not bother taking such risks to make the drug themselves.<sup>73</sup>

Other official figures had more nuanced views that tempered Koota’s. At the FDA’s offices in Brooklyn, the acting director of the New York field station of the Bureau of Drug Abuse Control (BDAC) Edward Wilkens admitted on the one hand that they got “more leads, more injury cases, more actual LSD cases that were developed in New York than in any other section of the country.” But on the other hand he stated that LSD-related arrests were few and that there was virtually no hard evidence related to the numbers of users or the identity of its manufacturers – “I know of no mob, no Mafia, no syndicate.” Even Donald Louria, the chairman of the New York County Medical Society’s narcotics committee who was alarmed at the increased amount of LSD-related hospitalization at Bellevue Hospital and previously called LSD the “most dangerous” illicit drug available,<sup>74</sup> conceded that they needed “a realistic approach and a vigorous approach, but certainly not a hysterical approach.”<sup>75</sup>

The *New York Times Magazine* portrayed Koota as a politically motivated conservative. The newspaper noted that the D.A., often branded a “headline-hunter,” had formulated his accusations based on letters sent from parents forwarded by the Board of Education. But although the board would dismiss these claims as unfounded, Koota countered this with a rather flimsy defence. He “did not withdraw his accusations, explaining that he used LSD as a “generic” term for all kinds of hallucinatory drugs, some of which can be

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<sup>72</sup> (author unavailable), “LSD: Alarums and Excursions,” *M.D.*, September 1968, 112, folder “LSD – Medical Accounts,” box 8, Stafford Papers.

<sup>73</sup> Jay Levin, “LSD in New York,” *New York Post*, June 10, 1966, folder “LSD – New York Post”, box 8, Stafford Papers.

<sup>74</sup> Natlie Jaffe, “Stronger Curbs on LSD Proposed,” *New York Times*, April 30, 1966.

<sup>75</sup> Bernard Weinraub, “LSD: A Fascinating Drug and a Growing Problem,” *New York Times*, April 22, 1966.

manufactured – or at least distributed – in the schools.” He justified this simplistic equation by arguing that he had a moral duty to warn parents about the drug peril.<sup>76</sup>

He also suggested that the underworld had moved in to take control of the LSD trade and claimed that “The profits from the sale of (LSD) are obviously tremendous,”<sup>77</sup> when a drug like LSD differed from black market drugs like cocaine or heroin in that it was not habit-forming and thus presented a weaker value-for-money than physically-addictive drugs - according to one reporter, an LSD dealer would rarely make a profit greater than \$2 a dose.<sup>78</sup> In Washington, the chief of drug abuse control for the FDA John Finlator backed up these claims by suggesting that the Cosa Nostra had latched upon the LSD market.<sup>79</sup> But another newspaper challenged these allegations by noting that the FDA’s Drug Abuse Control center in New York, as well as the New York City Police Narcotics Division had found no evidence of such links and dismissed them as “a federal attempt (isolated to the Federal Food and Drug Administration) to place psychedelic drugs in the realm of organized crime and a journalistic ‘confirmation’ rooted only in sensationalism.”<sup>80</sup> For New York’s political underground like Provo, these notions did not stand when pitted against psychedelic evangelism that touted LSD as a revolutionary asset and contended that “no one makes much money dealing acid, because of legal hassles, and because nobody takes acid more than twice a week.”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Thomas J. Fleming, “Case of the Debatable Brooklyn D.A.,” *New York Times Magazine*, March 19, 1967, page unavailable, folder “Koota, A.E.,” box 7, Stafford Papers.

<sup>77</sup> “Koota Urges LSD Crackdown,” *Daily News*, April 16, 1966, folder “LSD – Legislation,” box 8, Stafford Papers.

<sup>78</sup> Jay Levin, “LSD in New York,” *New York Post*, June 9, 1966, folder “LSD – New York Post,” box 8, Stafford Papers.

<sup>79</sup> David Brestid, “On LSDollars, Probers Told,” *Daily News*, June 28, 1967, folder “LSD – Mafia,” box 8, Stafford Papers.

<sup>80</sup> David Tanner, “LSD and Organized Crime,” *Westside News*, July 13, 1967, folder “LSD – Mafia,” box 8, Stafford Papers.

<sup>81</sup> “Mafia Acid,” New York Provo Statement, July 20, 1967, folder “LSD – Mafia,” box 8, Stafford Papers.

Elsewhere, the State Council on Drug Addiction jumped to request tougher penalties for LSD and psychedelic drug use. The Council, chaired by Louria and composed of one layperson, one lawyer, and two clergymen, admitted that LSD use was not the most alarming drug phenomenon around, but had the potential to escalate into a major crisis. It cited evidence of increased consumption amongst high school and college students, as well as over a hundred episodes of adverse reactions to LSD at Bellevue Hospital. The council noted that federal law provided penalties for possession of cannabis, but not yet for LSD. Tougher penalties aside, it recommended an increase in the federal budget to fight drug use and sale, as well a mandatory reporting system that would have physicians and social agencies systematically inform the Narcotic Addiction Control Commission of psychedelic drug use.<sup>82</sup>

While it is difficult to assess how much LSD was taken in the 1960s, official figures related to seizures can offer some idea. The *Daily News* cited a report of the BDAC – created by the FDA – that stated that in 1967 the bureau in New York’s regional office had seized 111,631 doses of LSD, nearly 4,000 doses of DMT, and 44,000 doses of MDA (3,4-Methylenedioxyamphetamine, a stimulating psychedelic close to MDMA). The combined street value was estimated at over \$800,000.<sup>83</sup> In another feature article, the paper referred to another bust in January 1968 where agents collected 44,000 doses of MDA worth around \$220,000 on Chambers Street. Reportedly, the laboratory had the capacity to produce some 50,000 doses of LSD or 15,000 doses of MDA. Though the article was not specific as to

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<sup>82</sup> State Council on Drug Addiction statement, February 27, 1967, folder “Drugs Crackdown,” box 4, Stafford Papers.

<sup>83</sup> Joseph Martin and John Quinn, “U.S.A. vs LSD: Hip (not Hippie) Unit Battling Drug Flood,” *Daily News*, January 29, 1968, folder “Drugs Crackdown,” Box 4, Stafford papers.

which drugs were seized, 254 arrests related to drug abuse were made in New York City in 1967.<sup>84</sup>

Though many accusations against LSD were disputed and tempered within the establishment and the counter-culture, two separate bills to make the distribution of psychedelics a felony were introduced in April 1966 by Anthony Travia, Democrat of Brooklyn, and Norman Lent, Republican of Nassau. Travia, who devised the bill at Koota's request, stated that "The recent horrifying cases involving the use of LSD in New York City and disclosures of apparently widespread use in many parts of the country make immediate action necessary." The purpose of the bill was to equate the distribution of LSD with that of addictive narcotics.<sup>85</sup>

With the policy-makers successfully implementing tighter measures to curb psychedelic drug consumption in New York State, law-enforcement agents now challenged the broad psychedelic subculture in a much more aggressive way. In turn, many LSD users realized the dangers they faced and countered by spreading the word around. In particular, some of its members cautioned against undercover narcotics agents. According to the *East Village Other*, Nelson Barr became the first person to be convicted under the LSD statute. His story says much about how members of the subculture claimed to have been so transformed by their experiences with LSD that they felt compelled to assist its other members and warn them against the punitive legislation. It also reveals the extent to which the opposing conservative forces were genuinely wary of an LSD epidemic.

On July 15, 1966, Barr was arrested for dispensing some LSD to an undercover FDA agent. On 9<sup>th</sup> August 1966, he appeared before a court that sought his cooperation to entrap or

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<sup>84</sup> Joseph Martin and John Quinn, "U.S.A. vs LSD: Special Agents Turn on the Heat in Drug War," *Daily News*, January 30, 1968, folder "Drugs Crackdown," Box 4, Stafford papers.

give away other LSD users in return for some leniency. But instead of cooperating, he gave them “the Acid Gospel” by extolling the virtues of the drug and claiming that enforcing the prohibition was futile. During the trial, Barr observed that the probation officer kept referring to LSD as if it were heroin and counted these charges by referring to his many LSD experiences he had written down in reports and that revealed a great deal of religious meaning he ascribed to the psychedelic experience. During a subsequent hearing, the prosecutor, based on Donald Louria supposed expertise, cited sordid evidence about LSD’s habit-forming properties. Barr was sentenced to a one-year prison sentence and \$500 fine. While his lawyer prepared an appeal based on excessive sentencing, Barr was sent to Rikers’ Island prison and was immediately placed in an isolation cell. The reason, he believed, was that the inmates and prison guards were so curious to hear about the effects of LSD.<sup>86</sup>

Howard Lotsof was another to be convicted under the new law. Some accounts state that Lotsof had been monitored for several years. In 1963, two FDA agents had realized that his laboratory in Brooklyn was ordering large quantities of mescaline and raided it. Lotsof countered by claiming that they were for experimentation with rats. He had also taken part in Mario Savio’s Free Speech Movement in 1964 at the University of California, Berkeley. Thus, with the new legislation, U.S. justice sought to put an end to his activities, which had consisted in giving ibogaine to heroin addicts. When one former user was arrested for possession, he decided to give away Lotsof. The judge then dismissed his claims that he had found a cure for heroin addiction and ultimately sentenced him to fourteen months in prison after finding him guilty on four misdemeanour charges.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Richard L. Madden, “Legislature Gets Bills to Curb LSD,” *New York Times*, April 19, 1966.

<sup>86</sup> “First LSD Casualty,” *East Village Other* Vol. 2(6), February 15 – March 1, 1967.

<sup>87</sup> Paul De Rienzo and Dana Beal, “Howard Lotsof,” in *The Ibogaine Story: Report on the Staten Island Project*, page unavailable, <http://ibogaine.mindvox.com/articles/ibogaine-story-staten-island-project/> (accessed November 17, 2014).

That LSD and psychedelics had become a problem for many leading authorities in the second part of the decade is beyond doubt, but it is hard to point to a single reason why the drug was targeted so viciously. Of course, many argued that LSD posed a threat to public health. This epidemiological take on the problem had its origins in the medical establishment that took issue with the lay use of LSD. Some MDs condemned it, while underscoring the drug's medical potential. Others were less charitable and rejected it altogether. In doing so, medical figures tended to dismiss LSD because of its recreational potential and forgot to denounce the potential for abuse of other substances: legal drugs like amphetamines or barbiturates posed no problem because they were equated with efficiency. As Stanley Krippner indicates, several drug education programs for youth in the late 1960s concentrated solely on cannabis and LSD, and devoted hardly any time to amphetamines and barbiturates – never mind tobacco and alcohol.<sup>88</sup>

Several voices in the counter-culture charged that the epidemiological argument was a ploy devised by the government to curb a genuine cultural revolution. This notion saw anti-LSD legislation as a logical reaction to psychedelic utopianism. As Irving Shushnick of the *East Village Other* put it,

It is an established fact that most takers of LSD and marijuana, during, after, and in many instances before consumption of the drug, are unable and no longer desirous of identifying with existing social conditions such as poverty, disillusionment, and the war in Vietnam. These people cannot tune in to the social mores prescribed by the State. [...] The order of society as manifest in its President is in danger, and the increased use of LSD and marijuana constitutes in the eyes of President Johnson, a 'grave and imminent threat' to his ability to maintain the status quo – specifically his personal interest. The issue is not and never has been drugs. It is rather, part of a systematic process to subvert the youth of this country who would seek a new and better order.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> William Slattery, "Researcher Argues Pot Laws Hurt, not Help, Society," *Staten Island Avenue*, November 17, 1969, folder "Krippner, Stanley," box 7, Stafford Papers.

<sup>89</sup> Irving Shushnick, "Life and Death: Medicine's Newest Discoveries about LSD," *East Village Other* Vol. 3(8), January 25 – February 1, 1968.

This, of course, becomes a rather self-serving argument when one compares the number of committed psychedelic revolutionaries with the amount of casual LSD users – never mind the rest of the population that stayed clear of the drug. It overlooks the fact that the psychedelic experience does not have pre-determined ontological outcome that automatically favours alternative lifestyles challenging the American way of life. There is no denying that LSD gave profound insights to a handful of its users who decided to radically change their lifestyles as a result, but to think that this was a widespread phenomenon is probably the result of media focus on the youthful and flamboyant elements of psychedelic counter-culture.

Even so, this argument was not only widespread in the counter-culture, but also in newspapers. At least some journalists took seriously the idea that LSD was inherently revolutionary and posed a genuine threat to the social and moral fabric of American society: “An affluent and complex society can easily afford small groups of people whose chief commitment is to their internal processes and their fantasy worlds. But what if there were many such?”<sup>90</sup> Others were far less convinced by this notion and contended that “it’s the psychedelic ‘way of life’ which is – inaccurately – associated with dissent and political heresy.”<sup>91</sup> In any event, the psychedelic movement’s messianic promotion of LSD was certainly a factor.<sup>92</sup>

## Conclusion

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<sup>90</sup> Mervin B. Freedman and Harvey Powelson, “Drugs on Campus: Turned on and Tuned out,” *Nation*, January 31, 1966, 126, folder “College Drug Scandals,” box 3, Stafford papers.

<sup>91</sup> David Tanner, “LSD and Organized Crime,” *Westside News*, July 13, 1967, folder “LSD – Mafia,” box 8, Stafford Papers.

<sup>92</sup> The 30-year prison sentence Leary initially received in 1966 for possession of less than an ounce of cannabis goes to show just how concerned about him authorities were.

The psychedelic movement stood out of the trademark protest movements of the Sixties that required organization, commitment, patience, and hardships. By contrast, Leary and his associates argued that this was a waste of time and that true reform could only come about by taking LSD and similar drugs - exactly what would follow after a sufficient amount of American citizens had gone through the process was unclear. Unsurprisingly, the movement was attacked on several fronts and ultimately side-lined (even if many of its ideas survived and re-surfaced in the 1980s<sup>93</sup>). While there was much disagreement as to how chemical revolution should be best achieved, New Left activists felt that psychedelic proselytizing put off protesters from genuine political concerns. Some public officials like Koota embarked on high profile campaigns to ban LSD and counter the movement.

In spite of the crackdown, the psychedelic experience had made such a strong impression on several LSD users that it led some to move into social activism. In 1978, for instance, a group people living on a commune in rural Tennessee (“The Farm”) set up a relief program in the South Bronx that offered medical assistance until 1984. This social awareness emanated, according to Morgan Shipley, from the “psychedelically inspired mystical teachings of Stephen Gaskin” - the leader of The Farm. He and his followers “interpreted the oneness of mystical consciousness as a catalyst for local and global engaged activism.”<sup>94</sup> Such an involvement with the community thus found itself at the crossroads of politics and spirituality and further illustrates how psychedelics could blur the lines between these spheres “through real-world projects of social justice.”<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Elcock, “From Acid Revolution to Entheogenic Evolution.”

<sup>94</sup> Shipley, ““This Season’s People,”” 42.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 44-5.



## Chapter 5

# Psychedelic Science

As the previous chapters have argued, the consumption of LSD and other psychedelics led to the establishment of a significant drug subculture, which also contained utopian and radical elements that promoted the drug as a cure-for-all. But while some New Yorkers experimented with psychedelics motivated by desires of self-exploration, cultural subversion, or hedonistic satisfaction, others had been striving to prevent the drug from reaching the masses in order to confine it to the realm of scientific research. Medical doctors had indeed been researching into the potential of mescaline or LSD for over decade, but when psychedelic drug consumption peaked in the second part of the 1960s, they raised concerns about public health while clearly discriminating between their “legitimate” research and the “illegitimate” lay use of psychedelics. This led to the greatest source of contention in the social history of LSD: as legislators moved to ban the drug, MDs scrambled to reclaim their authority by arguing that these drugs should be used as adjuncts in psychiatry only, while others simply terminated their research eager to keep their names clean from the mounting controversy. Meanwhile, other doctors dismissed these drugs altogether and sided with the anti-LSD crusaders by claiming that psychedelics had no medical potential whatsoever and that drug abuse needed to be swiftly curtailed.

This chapter aims to further illustrate the plurality of conceptions of the psychedelic experience by focusing on its more conservative appraisal and by framing it as the strongest rival of the more liberal psychedelic subculture. It echoes the work of both Erika Dyck and Marcel Martel, who have studied the controversies surrounding legitimate LSD use in Canada and how Medical Doctors sought to stamp their authority on what they saw as serious research

into the potential of the psychedelic experience, when policy-makers argued that the experience necessarily undermined their personal judgement.<sup>1</sup> It also builds on the work of Roy Baumeister and Kathleen Placidi, who have examined the debates surrounding what constituted legitimate drug use and shown how polarising they could be.<sup>2</sup>

### **Psychedelic Medicine**

Many therapists found LSD to be a valid tool for probing the depth of the psyche and used it as an adjunct in psychotherapy. Although it is difficult to assess how many New Yorkers were given LSD in therapy, one doctor who had tried the drug in a non-medical setting and undergone a very positive experience, claimed that he knew “a lot of therapists and three or four doctors who are using it.”<sup>3</sup> For instance, the singer Ronnie Gilbert was suffering from acute depression and in 1962 she found the help of a psychedelic psychiatrist. The treatment underlines the holistic dimension of the psychedelic experience and how that was incorporated in the therapeutic process: they occasionally visited art galleries and Gilbert was encouraged to paint and produced paintings that were “luminously nonobjective splashes of color and curiously pleasant.” The aesthetic experience was also enhanced by walks in nearby Central Park, where she experienced “an atavistic sense of life around [her].” These experiences were supplemented with a spiritual component by going to churches. Her depression disappeared after six months.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dyck, ““Just Say Know””; Martel, “Setting Boundaries.”

<sup>2</sup> Baumeister and Placidi, “A Social History and Analysis of the LSD Controversy.”

<sup>3</sup> Jay Levin, “LSD in New York,” *New York Post*, June 7, 1966, folder “LSD – New York Post”, box 8, Stafford Papers.

<sup>4</sup> Bob Gaines, “LSD: Hollywood’s Status-Symbol Drug,” *Cosmopolitan*, November 1963, 80, folder “Hollywood,” box 7, Stafford Papers. The doctor remained anonymous during his interviews, reasoning that his trade was too controversial.

One major research institute in New York was The Agora Scientific Trust, founded in 1963 by John Beresford and located between Madison and Park Avenues on Eighty-First Street. The enthusiastic Beresford, who had been hitherto conducting informal research with LSD, co-directed the organization with Jean Houston, the highly-acclaimed philosopher who conducted research into LSD with the sexologist Robert Masters. Houston was interested in probing Jungian concepts by “setting up drug-related experimental designs and a foolproof methodology of administration of long-term and short-term psychedelics” The Trust’s epistemological angle was eclectic and interdisciplinary; it was influenced by biochemistry, genetics, astrology, humanistic science, and evolution.<sup>5</sup>

Although Agora was intended as a scientific organization, it embodied in many ways the philosophical and spiritual insights that came about as a result of psychedelic drug use, and were so present in the psychedelic movement. The statement of purpose indicated that it took issue with the growing technification of human life that had led to crisis of consciousness and of ontology; Cartesian dualism that extended into a mind/body duality that had prevented science from thoroughly studying the mind and privileged the behaviourist model in psychiatry; and a mechanistic view of life that has led to a de-humanization of knowledge and of humanity. By contrast, the Trust sought to study consciousness in order to explore human potentiality and to probe the nature of human reality, but with the ultimate goal of improving the human race.<sup>6</sup>

In a similar way, some liberal doctors were happy to condone the LSD use of their patients. In June 1966, a journalist reported the case of a mother who had taken LSD before giving birth to her child in her own home. This experiment was conducted under the

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Hollingshead, “The Exile’s Re-Return,” in *The Man Who Turned on the World* (New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1973), page unavailable, <http://www.psychedelic-library.org/hollings.htm> (accessed 6 September 2012).

<sup>6</sup> Hollingshead, “The Exile’s Re-Return.”

supervision of her doctor, who was perfectly aware of what she had ingested before going into labour. There were no issues with the delivery and the mother stated that the drug had eased the pain. Yet, she made it clear that the primary motivation had been “for the very intense, very personal, experience it promised” and reported later that it had been the most meaningful event of her entire life.<sup>7</sup>

Conversely, there is also some evidence that the scientific study of LSD was not confined to academia, but to lay LSD users with no credentials. Stephen Kessler made the headlines in 1967, when he was arrested for the murder of his mother-in-law in Brooklyn after taking a heavy dose of LSD. Yet, during his trial he also admitted that as medical student, he had been investigating the drug’s potential to induce a model psychosis in an attempt to demonstrate the biological origins of schizophrenia.<sup>8</sup>

But for the most part, scientists made it clear that not everyone should be using or giving psychedelics and used their credentials to stamp their authority on these drugs. As early as 1962, Krippner had cautioned that the psychedelic experience would ultimately appeal to the lay segments of American society and thus create potential for abuse. Although he saw these drugs as ground-breaking, the flip side of the coin was that experimenters would likely be overwhelmed by them: “perhaps my basic reaction for distrusting the dependence on ‘mind-expanding’ drugs is that most people haven’t learned to use the senses they possess.”<sup>9</sup> He prophetically suggested that LSD, mescaline, or psilocybin would become popular amongst college students, which would likely lead to several cases of psychotic experiences. The only way this could be avoided, Krippner concluded tellingly, was to expand research

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<sup>7</sup> Levin, “LSD in New York.”

<sup>8</sup> Edwin Ross and Polly Kline, “He Tells Murder Jury of LSD Experiments,” *Daily News*, October 10, 1967, folder “Drugs Danger,” box 5, Stafford Papers. Kessler claimed that he had been “flying” on LSD for three days, which appears highly unlikely (and sounds more like an STP trip).

programs “so as to permit people to have psychedelic experiences in supportive settings under medical supervision.”<sup>10</sup>

Years later, Krippner admits that he has always been very selective, when it comes to deciding who should legitimately be allowed to use these drugs: “My position is very conservative. [...] It only should be used for research, especially creativity and psychotherapy. And that was my position then, it’s my position now. There are others ways of having fun, which are less dangerous, legal, and more productive.”<sup>11</sup> As LSD became increasingly notorious in the second part of the 1960s, Krippner was sympathetic to the cries of alarm coming from the medical establishment, because he had first-hand knowledge of these drugs and of their potential danger. “I have seen individuals develop panic reactions, enter a temporary or long-lasting psychosis, or deteriorate slowly under the influence of LSD and its relatives.”<sup>12</sup> He was even critical of his friend Beresford for “getting it out to so many people” because he thought that LSD would save the world. But “Nothing will save the world except hard work.”<sup>13</sup>

More broadly, many academics felt that the psychedelic movement gave a bad name to their field. Nina Graboi, who had set up the Third Force Lecture Bureau in Manhattan to disseminate ideas of humanistic psychology, remembered how Abraham Maslow (one of the founders of humanistic psychology) was unimpressed when he heard that Leary, Alpert, and Metzner had joined the Bureau. In a letter to Graboi, he wrote that

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<sup>9</sup> Stanley Krippner, *Song of the Siren: A Parapsychological Odyssey* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1977), 31.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>11</sup> Krippner, interview.

<sup>12</sup> Stanley Krippner, “The Psychedelic Artist,” in *Psychedelic Art*, ed. Robert E. L. Masters and Jean Houston (New York: Grove Press / Balance House, 1968), 180.

<sup>13</sup> Krippner, interview.

the workers with psychedelic drugs have now fallen into a kind of left wing and right wing, the more far out and the more sober and scientifically responsible being with the latter. I very definitely identify with the latter group and think the former ones as positive danger not only to science and research which they are, but also dangerous to many individual human beings. I would urge you not to load yourself up too much with proselytes and drug pushers.<sup>14</sup>

Others still were comparably ambivalent towards the psychedelic movement and the way it promoted LSD. During an LSD seminar in October 1966 organized by the Association for Research and Enlightenment, Houston stressed that the administration of LSD “should lay in the hands of a body of experts, excluding both the federal government and the great body of users.”<sup>15</sup> She also took issue with Leary’s mystical understanding of LSD and his low-profile secretive approach to research - something which Leary, in turn, resented: “Unlike the philosophers telling us to keep our brain-drugs elitist and private Jean believed that science, not religion, was the social institution that could domesticate the use of psychedelics. Not for her these old-time cabals and secret men’s clubs.” For Houston, Leary and his followers needed to shun the Eastern paradigm and publicly adopt the trusted language of science to make it more respectable and legitimate to the American public.<sup>16</sup>

Despite this awareness that LSD proselytizers posed a threat to psychedelic research and to public safety, even Krippner could hardly conceal his enthusiasm, to a point where his scientific discourse sometimes showed signs of overlap with Leary’s radical ideals. He ultimately contended that the reactions of the governmental and medical authorities had shown “more signs of hysteria than of intelligence,” because they had effectively terminated psychedelic drug research.<sup>17</sup> During a 1964 conference on altered states of consciousness and psychical research in NYC, he suggested that these substances would bring about a “consciousness revolution” that “would rival the Copernican, Darwinian, and Freudian

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<sup>14</sup> Graboi, *One Foot in the Future*, 149.

<sup>15</sup> “LSD Meets ESP,” *Innerspace*, 1966, page unavailable, folder “Innerspace,” box 21, Stafford Papers.

<sup>16</sup> Leary, *Flashbacks*, 158. For more this tension, see Novak, “LSD before Leary.”

Revolutions in its impact on science and society.” More broadly, this conference showed how the boundaries between scientific research and the lay public were porous. Indeed, the variety of speakers further reveals the eclectic nature of NYC’s research community: Krippner remembers meeting the endocrinologist William Wolf, Masters, Houston, who was already conducting research into LSD, and one of the pioneers of the nudist movement Zelda Suplee.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the pluralistic nature of psychedelia was ever-present, even in its most conservative side and ensured that even within its scientific manifestation, there was always room for diversity.

Krippner even used his scientific credentials to dismiss or challenge some of the popular misconceptions surrounding the psychedelic counter-culture through scholarly publications. In one of his surveys, he took issue with the way the media portrayed these communes: “The popular press and mass media have depicted these new communal settings as havens of sexual license, illegal drug usage, and pseudo-religious activity. However, the contra-cultural communities we visited displayed no stereotyped pattern.”<sup>19</sup> Similarly, the psychiatrist Humphry Osmond, famous for introducing Huxley to mescaline and for coining the word “psychedelic,” was just as ambivalent about lay LSD use, but he also dismissed scientific fears of LSD as a form of obscurantism by comparing them to the hysteria surrounding the introduction of the automobile: “People were convinced that man was meant to move along at 4 to 5 miles per hour, and any attempt to increase that speed was interpreted as flying in the face of nature.”<sup>20</sup> Likewise, LSD seemed to have a strong potential to explore human consciousness, but such ventures were often seen as heresy.

### **Fighting the Controversies**

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<sup>17</sup> Krippner, “The Psychedelic Artist,” 181.

<sup>18</sup> Krippner, *Song of the Siren*, 30.

<sup>19</sup> Stanley Krippner and Don Ferish, “Paranormal Experience Among Members of American Contra-Cultural Groups,” *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs* 3, no. 1 (1970): 109.

Medical doctors and researchers felt hard done by the controversies surrounding LSD. Most of them made it clear that they did not condone lay use and that LSD should remain within the realm of medical sciences. During one Senate subcommittee meeting on May 24, 1966, the New York psychiatrist Charles Dahlberg contended that “the present public hysteria can lead to no useful purpose. No good will come from directing the energies of the police toward controlling young people who are not criminals but who use minor drugs.”<sup>21</sup> In November 1968, Dahlberg co-published an article in the *American Journal of Psychiatry* discussing the impact of publicity on scientific research into psychedelics. The data, collected in December 1966, “therefore, during the period of adverse, sensationalistic publicity,”<sup>22</sup> suggested that the press coverage had significantly hampered scientific research into psychedelics. Dahlberg and colleagues sent questionnaires to 29 researchers in North America and received 19 replies pertaining to their study. The responses indicated that the publicity had negatively affected the recruitment of subjects; increased fears and anxiety amongst participants engaged in studies; and forced researchers to cease their investigations altogether.

The psychologist Rollo May also denounced “an extremely irrational reaction” on both sides of the debate. “On one hand are the Government people who are scared to death of it. [...] But on the other side are all these kids who think LSD is going to solve everything. It has no magical properties, however. It doesn’t put anything in your mind that wasn’t there before.” While he felt that the drug had the potential for ontological disruption that could lead

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<sup>20</sup> “LSD Meets ESP.”

<sup>21</sup> Cashman, *The LSD Story*, 116.

<sup>22</sup> Charles C. Dahlberg, Ruth Mechaneck, and Stanley Feldstein, “LSD Research: The Impact of Lay Publicity,” *American Journal of Psychiatry* 125, no. 5 (1968): 686.



to breakthroughs in psychotherapy, he dismissed Leary's suggestions that the LSD experience paved the way for religious life.<sup>23</sup>

Another Medical Doctor, Laretta Bender, famous for devising the Bender Visual Motor Gestalt test, used LSD to treat juvenile mental illness. Children diagnosed as schizophrenic were given daily doses and showed "alterations in mood, appearance of physical well being, responsiveness, [...] integrated perception, [...] and intellectual and personality maturity."<sup>24</sup> When LSD was banned, she lamented that the prohibition hindered genuine and important research, but cautiously stayed clear of the more militant voices that lambasted the legislation. For Krippner, she purposefully withdrew from the debates surrounding LSD in order to protect herself and preserve her reputation as a medical doctor, even when she saw LSD as a great asset in therapy.<sup>25</sup> The allergist Harold Abramson, who had found that LSD could help solve conflicts stemming from early childhood, was just as dismayed and contended that "There are no valid scientific data showing any potential dangers to subjects when these drugs are administered by a private physician."<sup>26</sup>

In a similar way, Masters and Houston felt that the study of psychedelics deserved further scientific attention. Hoping to create some sort of public debate, they published the first collection on psychedelic art, arguing that "the reader is entitled to have a statement of our views on psychedelic experience and the uses of psychedelic chemicals." They also felt that further research was warranted, because these substances had "value in psychotherapy,

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<sup>23</sup> William Clopton Jr., "Effects of LSD Played Down by Psychologist," *Washington Post, Times Herald*, September 1, 1967.

<sup>24</sup> Laretta Bender, "D-Lysergic Acid in the Treatment of the Biological Features of Childhood Schizophrenia," Reprinted from *Diseases of the Nervous System Monograph Supplement 27*, no.7 (1966): 39-42, p.3, folder 4, box 13, series 5: Writings, The Papers of Laretta Bender, Brooklyn College Special Collections, Brooklyn College Library.

<sup>25</sup> Krippner, interview.

<sup>26</sup> Leonard Wallace Robinson, "Hearing Color, Smelling Music, Touching a Scent," *New York Times*, August 22, 1965.

but also for research in many areas outside medicine and therapy – for example, philosophy, psychology, anthropology, religion, scientific problem-solving, and the arts.”<sup>27</sup>

In private, though, Masters was furious at the public outcries surrounding the use of LSD. As the Director of Research of the Foundation for the Mind Research in Manhattan, he informed his co-researchers that he was no longer prepared to let the media orchestrate its smear campaign without fighting back: “I, for one, am fed up with all this bullshit. Now I am going to tell some unpopular truths about psychedelics.”<sup>28</sup> This meant publicly discussing the effects of LSD and psychedelics on the sexual experience. He submitted an article<sup>29</sup> to *Playboy* that discussed this topic, with material that had been omitted from his classic *The Varieties of Psychedelic Experience*,<sup>30</sup> from fear of bringing controversy to psychedelic research. But given that psychedelic research had come to a virtual standstill, it no longer mattered.

It is worth noting, though, that Masters had taken issue with Leary’s infamous *Playboy* interview, where the latter had claimed that a woman could have over a hundred orgasms under the influence of LSD and touted the drug as the ultimate cure for what was then commonly called frigidity.<sup>31</sup> While Masters admitted that the drug did have some potential to aid sexual life, he strongly opposed Leary’s sensational claims.<sup>32</sup> In the second part of the decade, the association of youth and sex in Leary’s public discourse had become nothing short

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<sup>27</sup> Robert E. L. Masters and Jean Houston, “Psychedelic Art and Society,” in *Psychedelic Art* ed. Robert E. L. Masters and Jean Houston (New York: Grove Press / Balance House, 1968), 19.

<sup>28</sup> Robert E. L. Masters to The Foundation for the Mind Research, October 11, 1967, folder “LSD – research,” box 8, Stafford Papers.

<sup>29</sup> R.E.L. Masters, “Sex, Ecstasy and the Psychedelic Drugs,” *Playboy* 14 (11), November 1967, folder “Personalities,” box 11, Stafford Papers.

<sup>30</sup> Masters, *The Varieties of Psychedelic Experience*.

<sup>31</sup> “Timothy Leary: A Candid Conversation with the Controversial Ex-Harvard Professor, Prime Partisan and Prophet of LSD,” *Playboy*, September, 1966, pages unavailable, <http://www.archive.org/details/playboylearyinte00playrich> (accessed August 2, 2015).

of a political weapon for him. In a 1969 press conference, Leary argued that “The kids want peace, and love, and better orgasms – they are a generation of lovers.”<sup>33</sup>

Naturally, several researchers or psychiatrists who used LSD as an adjunct in therapies blamed the psychedelic movement for giving a bad name to the drug and terminating research. Yet, one New York psychiatrist had more nuanced views about Leary and his involvement in the popularization of the drug: “I think Leary’s done a lot of harm to the cause of psychedelic medicine, but I give him credit for having the guts to stick his neck out. He’s convinced he’s right and he’s willing to jeopardize his career for these ideas.”<sup>34</sup>

Official medical organizations were also wary of the media coverage of the LSD phenomenon. In summer 1966, the New York County Medical Society released a study that suggested that LSD (and other drug) use was on the rise in schools. It criticized the press for its “flamboyant reporting” on LSD that had created a new market and that could lead to an LSD epidemic among young New Yorkers. Yet, only three of the 68 school principals surveyed claimed to have major problem with drugs and these included cannabis, barbiturates and glue.<sup>35</sup> The study was disputed by some students who found the claims exaggerated. One 20-year old pre-medical student at Columbia said that “I’ve been here four years and I’ve never seen any students use drugs.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> R.E.L. Masters to Editor, “Psychedelic Information Center,” October 8, 1966, 3-4, folder “Psychedelic Information Center,” box 29, Stafford Papers.

<sup>33</sup> Steve Lerner, “Leary: Promises to All but the Turned-on Young,” *Village Voice*, July 3, 1969, folder “Village Voice,” box 33, Stafford Papers.

<sup>34</sup> Gaines, “LSD.” The same psychiatrist who treated Ronnie Gilbert argued that, with Sandoz’s decision to cease production of LSD in the United States, therapists face near-insurmountable difficulties to legally carry on their treatment. First, it meant that doctors could no longer obtain a malpractice insurance to cover potential mishaps. Second, it meant research restrictions, when the pharmacology of LSD was still relatively unknown and potentially dangerous.

<sup>35</sup> G. Bruce Porter, “Use of Drugs in Schools up, Study Shows,” *New York Post*, July 5, 1966, folder “College Drug Scandals,” box 3, Stafford papers.

<sup>36</sup> Timothy Lee, “Students see no Rise in Use of Drugs,” *New York Post*, July 6, 1966, folder “College Drug Scandals,” box 3, Stafford papers.

Several MDs became vocal opponents to LSD use and dismissed the drug altogether, regardless of its alleged scientific value. William Frosch, professor of psychiatry at New York University and attending physician at Bellevue Hospital contended that it was “dangerous with or without supervision” and had “serious adverse effects with prolonged psychotic reactions even on normally stable persons.” He cited over 150 cases of hospitalization related to LSD use at Bellevue and several cases of prolonged psychotic reactions, and argued that LSD was far more dangerous than alcohol and tobacco – tellingly, he added that “we’re stuck with them for historical and social reasons.”<sup>37</sup> He was also quick to dismiss any benefit the drug may have for its users as “pseudo intellectual, pseudo esthetic and pseudo philosophical. [...] Those who are looking for help though, feel, subjectively, that they’ve gotten some sort of help. I’d disagree with them.”<sup>38</sup>

Thus, researchers into the potential of psychedelic drugs may have tried to present their work as respectable and stay clear from controversy, but even this side of psychedelia did not exist in a cultural vacuum and was forced to acknowledge the presence of the psychedelic subculture – for better or worse. The controversies related to LSD use in the lay public or the psychedelic movement’s sometimes provocative statements that tended to undermine the scientific legitimacy of psychedelic research.

### **Counter-cultural Attacks on the Medical Order**

Medical doctors and other scientists were keen to carry on their research and fend off the controversies by condemning lay LSD use, but counter-cultural elements and members of the

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<sup>37</sup> “LSD – A Curse or...,” *S.F. Sunday Examiner & Chronicle*, June 19, 1966, folder “LSD, Berkeley LSD Conference,” box 8, Stafford Papers.

<sup>38</sup> Bernard Weinraub, “LSD: A Fascinating Drug and a Growing Problem,” *New York Times*, 22 April 1966.

psychedelic movement also became part of the discussion on the legitimacy of LSD use by dismissing concerns of health hazards as irrational, if not entirely obscurantist. These discourses thus countered these attacks by denouncing the perils of scientism and extolling the virtues of their cherished compound.<sup>39</sup>

Leary was of course one of the most vocal opponents to the scientific confiscation of LSD use. Although he was trained as a psychologist, his discourse became increasingly resentful of orthodox science. Surprisingly, the High Priest of LSD was reluctant to try the drug at first, because he associated it with the drabness of hard-nosed science, contrary to the organic cacti and mushrooms he had sampled prior to his championed chemical: “The mushrooms and peyote had grown naturally in the ground and had been used for thousands of years in wise Indian cultures. LSD, on the other hand, was a laboratory product and had quickly fallen into the hands of doctors and psychiatrist.”<sup>40</sup> He even referred to the “dark priesthood of psychiatry”<sup>41</sup> as a kind of inquisition that prevented the LSD movement from fulfilling its missionary task, and took issue with the head of the FDA James Goddard, “the

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<sup>39</sup> This tension was observed in the late 1960s. See Victor Gioscia, “LSD Subcultures: Acidoxy Versus Orthodoxy,” *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 39, no. 3 (1969): 428–36.

<sup>40</sup> Leary, *High Priest*, 244.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 290. In the field of psychiatry, a loose set of ideas that questioned the well-founded of mental institutions created what has been remembered as the anti-psychiatry movement. Writers like Ronald Laing (who was acquainted with Leary) argued that schizophrenia had been misread as mental illness, when it corresponded in fact to certain extraordinary states of consciousness, and even went further by suggesting that it was society that was mad. Some of the ideas struck a chord in the psychedelic movement. Like individuals deemed schizophrenic, LSD users felt alienated by society who denied them the exploration of their subconscious. For instance, Graboi remembered welcoming a girl called Judy at the Center for the League of Spiritual Discovery: “She has been in and out of mental institutions where she was diagnosed as an incurable schizophrenic. She feels welcome at the Center. Her words are amazingly profound; the kids regard her with something akin to reverence. Judy’s cryptic remarks and her strange sudden laughter make her a kind of guru to the rest.” Graboi, *One Foot in the Future*, 228.

aggressive, hard-driving political medic,<sup>42</sup> for orchestrating a smear campaign against a drug he had never even tried.

During a talk in New York on April 5, 1966, he reasoned that the nation's scientists had a moral duty to explore the effects of LSD by taking the drug themselves. This idea was not just intended to follow William James' principle of radical empiricism, but also to further a much larger Americanist tradition. Indeed, "Faith and bravery are needed by the scientist of the future if he is going to make use of these chemicals like the 1491 mariners who got into ships and faced the unknown."<sup>43</sup> The connection of psychedelic drug use with a cornerstone of the American mythos certainly appears far-fetched on the surface; but it says more about Leary's broader strategy to tout LSD as a valid part of the American experience.<sup>44</sup>

In the second part of his lecture on April 21, he targeted Donald Louria of Bellevue Hospital, who had become one of the most vocal opponents of LSD use. Where Louria had claimed that LSD was the most dangerous drug available, Leary replied that "Psychedelic Drugs put you in touch with the ancient cellular wisdom within us."<sup>45</sup> Quite similarly, Alan Watts recalled a fitting illustration of the tensions between the psychedelic movement and the scientific community, which so often adopted a rigorous scientific discourse to assert its credentials. At a party in the City, he met a prominent psychiatrist, who, upon learning that Watts had experimented with LSD "became surgically professional. He donned his mask and rubber gloves and addressed me as a specimen, wanting to know all surface details of perceptual and kinesthetic alterations, which I could see him fitting into place [...] with his

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 316.

<sup>43</sup> Walter Bowart, "Leary's Politics and Ethics of Ecstasy," *East Village Other* Vol. 1(10), April 15 – May 1, 1966.

<sup>44</sup> Elcock, "The Fifth Freedom."

<sup>45</sup> Walter Bowart, "Leary's Politics and Ethics of Ecstasy," *East Village Other* Vol. 1(11), May 1 – May 15, 1966.

keenly calipered mind.”<sup>46</sup> A lot of scientists were suspicious of LSD and dismissed psychedelic experiences as pure delusion. Indeed, during the psychedelic art exhibition at the Coda Gallery in 1965, scientists and medical doctors were asked to assess whether the psychedelic experience helped or hindered the artist. “Many of the doctors had not had the experience themselves and may perhaps have been too easily tempted to dismiss it as a crutch or short cut, to reject the art as (simply) similar to that produced by psychotic patients in a mental hospital.”<sup>47</sup> It was a fitting irony, then, that LSD and psychedelics had initially been conceptualized as a “psychomimetic” drug – that mimics psychosis.

Art Kleps also took issue with the medical order that was, according to him, organizing a massive slander campaign against LSD. In the aftermath of the 1966 US Senate Narcotics Hearings designed to gauge the utility of LSD and psychedelics against concerns for public safety, Kleps specifically targeted Robert Baird of the Harlem Haven Clinic. He referred to him as a “deranged psychiatrist” whose opposition to psychedelic drug use bordered the fanatical: “Baird is more representative of our opponents than people like Sidney Cohen [...]. Inquisitions spawn inquisitors and sadists, not the avuncular judges of middle class liberal’s imagination.”<sup>48</sup> Though Kleps had the tendency to make extreme statements through his trademark ferocious prose, his indignation was understandable. Baird might have been genuinely concerned about drug abuse in New York City, but several of his claims were

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<sup>46</sup> Alan Watts, *In My Own Way: An Autobiography, 1915-1965* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 356.

<sup>47</sup> Howard Junker, “LSD: ‘The Contact High’,” *The Nation*, July 5, 1965, page unavailable, <http://www.thenation.com/article/156988/lsd-contact-high#> (accessed November 16, 2013).

<sup>48</sup> Art Kleps, *The Boo Hoo Bible: The Neo-American Church Catechism* (San Cristobal, N.M: Toad Books, 1971), 28. Reprinted from a letter sent to the *Saturday Review*, September 1, 1968.

indeed misguided or unsubstantial - he lumped all illicit drugs into a monolithic “narcotics” category and dismissed claims of spiritual enlightenment or self-discovery as delusion.<sup>49</sup>

Baird had another chance to publicly attack the psychedelic subculture. Kleps had been invited to speak at a talk show and present his own brand of psychedelic religion. After the talk, Baird began the question and answer period by explicitly citing scientific evidence to underscore the danger of drugs like LSD. Kleps was openly contemptuous of his speech: “He initiated the question and answer period at the end of the show by citing ‘scientific’ research results ‘of 13 alcoholic, junkie-prostitute speed freaks who smoked an ounce of hashish a day for 13 years, seven reported feeling nauseous’ or, ‘of 47 stark-naked human chromosomes hosed down with a solution of LSD and Drano, 42 were wounded, and five gave up the ghost’ variety.”<sup>50</sup> Fortunately for Kleps, he had come down to New York with a Millbrook chemist, Tord Svenson, who had joined the audience and promptly rebuked Baird’s scientific claims. Kleps watched Svenson answer him “with great aplomb, causing a minor sensation also, I suspect, because of the contrast between his learned mini-lecture and his appearance, highlighted that day by a light-blue, fluffy, synthetic fabric vest, which didn’t close over his broad chest.”<sup>51</sup>

Kleps also challenged some of the leading scientific authorities in the field of psychedelic research. He took issue with Houston for lacking psychedelic experience, yet writing at length about the subject. Indeed, Houston had allegedly undergone only one LSD

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<sup>49</sup> Robert Baird “Statement of Dr. Robert Baird, Director, Harlem Haven Clinic,” *The Narcotic Rehabilitation Act of 1966*, Hearings before a Special Subcommittee of the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, 89th Congress, 2nd Session, January 25-27, May 12, 13, 19, 23 and 25, June 14 and 15, July 19, 1966 (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966), 385-399.

<sup>50</sup> Art Kleps, chapter 37 “An Awful Predicament,” in *Millbrook: A Narrative of the Early Years of American Psychedelism, Recension of 2005* (San Francisco: Original Kleptonian Neo-American Church, 2005), page unavailable, <http://okneoac.org/millbrook/> (accessed September 12, 2013).

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.



experience in which she had used a relatively low dose (50 micrograms) and had admitted that she was “too analytical” to try a much stronger dose. Kleps moaned: “That’s the problem with all these great-mystery-that-surrounds-the-pyramids kind of people.”<sup>52</sup>

The underground press, which was largely sympathetic to the psychedelic cause, also lamented that the scientific and medical establishment had done little to prevent prohibition. The *East Village Other* was particularly infuriated that “Out of fear or ignorance, the medical profession has abdicated the control of psychedelic drugs to the federal bureaucracy. A campaign of terror and sensationalism coupled with prohibitive legislation is now being waged by the FDA.” The paper also blamed medical doctors for their lack of know-how when faced with cases of adverse reactions to psychedelic drug use – one of the reasons being that did not experiment on themselves with these drugs.<sup>53</sup>

Some LSD users challenged medical doctors’ authority by re-interpreting data or questioning the findings in some of their studies. They challenged the methodology of some of these publications and suggested that these scientists were biased in favour of strict measures to curb lay LSD use. Conversely, their own experiences with the drug and their contact with other drug users gave them subcultural capital and was often enough to trump their scientific credentials. As Baumeister and Placidi contend, “Many believed that the reports of the dangers of LSD use were simply a trick of the “Establishment” to discourage drug use. Their own observations and experiences often contrasted sharply with the portrayals of LSD in the news media.”<sup>54</sup> Hence, the scientific debates surrounding LSD were not confined to the medical realm and overlapped into the public arena to create a complex conflict centered on

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<sup>52</sup> Art Kleps, chapter 9 “The Tournament,” in *Millbrook: A Narrative of the Early Years of American Psychedelianism, Recension of 2005* (San Francisco: Original Kleptonian Neo-American Church, 2005), page unavailable, <http://okneoac.org/millbrook/> (accessed September 12, 2013).

<sup>53</sup> “Psychedelic Ignorance,” *East Village Other* Vol. 1(10), April 15 – May 1, 1966.

notions of credibility and authority. The clash opposed on the one hand scientists, who were quick to cite empirical evidence to back up their arguments, and lay LSD users, who dismissed (when convenient) that evidence as nonsensical or irrelevant when pitted against the overwhelming power of the psychedelic experience.

In 1966, the story of a five-year old girl accidentally ingesting a sugar cube saturated with LSD made the headlines and – along with the Kessler case - was ample ammunition for the prohibitionists.<sup>55</sup> Almost a year later, a follow-up study published by the American Medical Association outlined the girl’s recovery from being distraught by her experience to a gradual rise of IQ.<sup>56</sup> One observer noted that the girl’s IQ had not been recorded before the incident; that her IQ was 108 the day after; 94 four days later; 102 two months later; 121 at five months after; and then it levelled off. Doris Milman of the New York State Medical Center in Brooklyn, who wrote the follow-up, concluded that the child’s original IQ was 121. By contrast, the author of the letter to the *East Village Other* played down that interpretation: “I decided to arbitrarily conclude that acid made the kid’s IQ go from 94 to 121. Thing is, of course, neither one of us can prove anything.”<sup>57</sup>

Following that critique of the study, which lambasted the cold, detached analysis of LSD users, the author offered a perfect illustration of the discrepancy between the epidemiological take on the use of psychedelics and the subjective experience often described as profound, aesthetic, or in some cases spiritual: “In most medical or scientific reports on the actions of acid or pot the untoward effects noted in victims sound like a physical description

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<sup>54</sup> Baumeister and Placidi, “A Social History and Analysis of the LSD Controversy,” 32.

<sup>55</sup> Alfred Friendly Jr., “Police Fear Child Swallowed LSD, *New York Times*, April 7, 1966.

<sup>56</sup> Doris H. Milman, “An Untoward Reaction to Accidental Ingestion of LSD in a 5-Year-Old Girl,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 201, no. 11 (1967): 821–25.

<sup>57</sup> “Drugging the Public,” letter to the *East Village Other* Vol. 2(22), October 1 – October 15, 1967.

of what some things look like from the outside. For instance, lying back on a rug and grooving the colors on the ceiling gets the following description. ‘Victim showed signs of spatial disorientation, lethargy and withdrawal.’ Sometimes the fear-written words sound absolutely delicious.’<sup>58</sup>

In January 1968, the Medical Society of the County of New York issued a report on psychedelic drugs that typified how medical authorities sought to condemn the lay use of these drugs, while arguing in favour of further research. Indeed, the Society called for lengthy prison sentences for users and distributors, but also made it clear that further research into the potential of LSD to treat mental illness, substance addiction, “sexual perversion,” or frigidity was warranted. The report also overviewed the cases of hospitalizations of psychedelic drug users prone to adverse reactions and underlined the fact that the vast majority of them occurred without medical supervision. One commentator of the *East Village Other* was quick to point out the contradictions in the prescriptions in the report: “The Society has the audacity to make this recommendation after it made it clear at the beginning of its report that *not only is there no statistical evidence that these drugs can be associated with crimes of violence in the United States*, but that the existing laws result in ‘*excessive harsh penalties at both federal and state level*.’”<sup>59</sup>

Another observer and reader of the *East Village Other*, Mike Katzoff, took issue with the way medical authorities were handling the LSD controversy and how they fuelled the notion that LSD posed a serious threat to human health. In 1967, several studies in Buffalo, New York, Oregon, and Bellevue Hospital in Brooklyn suggested that LSD might lead to chromosome damage. For those suspicious of LSD, this finding offered more ammunition. For instance, the March of Dimes Foundation designed a poster that made the link explicit in

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

order to deter youth from using the drug.<sup>60</sup> Upon learning about this, several LSD consumers ceased to experiment with the drug. Others immediately claimed it was a hoax devised by the government to curb the spread of psychedelics. Others still reasoned that the genetic alterations that would follow would be beneficial to the human race.<sup>61</sup> Katzoff cited a study published in *Scientific American* that suggested that chromosomal damage could occur when any kind of chemical was introduced into the human body. What's more, the damage done to the body was minimal - particularly if compared to the shocking mutations that resulted from a drug like Thalidomide.<sup>62</sup>

In spite of these well-informed statements, Katzoff further countered the medical establishment by making some bolder claims. Although he pointed out that chromosomes have the ability to regenerate themselves, he went on to suggest that he had never seen any apparent abnormalities with "acid babies" born from around 30 LSD using couples. Better still, he contended that "For the most part, acid babies are happier, more secure, and develop faster than non-acid babies. Maybe it has to do with where their parent's [*sic*] heads are at, or the environment they are subjected to." This, of course, was anecdotal evidence. But to back up his claims, Katzoff put forth his subcultural capital by underscoring his experience with the drug as proof of its safety: "I mention all these points as one who has successfully used LSD on my own for better than two years. I have never had a bad trip, and to date, the number of trips I have taken is quite sizeable." Not only had he found the drug to be safe, he had allegedly become a better person thanks to LSD: "Anyone who knew me two or three years ago and hasn't seen me since would probably not recognize me, and would definitely prefer

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<sup>59</sup> Irving Shushnick, "Life and Death: Medicine's Newest Discoveries about LSD," *East Village Other* Vol. 3(8), January 25 – February 1, 1968.

<sup>60</sup> "Give me One Good Reason why I shouldn't Use LSD!," folder "Chromosome," box 3, Stafford Papers.

<sup>61</sup> Simon Galubara, "Acid," *East Village Other* Vol. 2(14), June 15 – July 1, 1967.

the current me to the old me before I started using acid, and let's not forget the point that I like the current me a lot better also."<sup>63</sup>

Though the psychedelic counter-culture attacked several MDs for dismissing LSD as dangerous or useless for medical sciences, some directed their frustration at the FDA for imposing a ban on scientific research on LSD. Allen Ginsberg, for instance, felt that it was completely misinformed and incompetent to make such decisions and explicitly referred to Harold Abramson (who had strong scientific credentials) as the best candidate to run the agency: "Abramson is more qualified than anybody in the government to deal with it, and yet he is being judged by his scientific inferiors."<sup>64</sup>

Of course, the mere fact of experimenting with LSD did not systematically lead to the suspicion of the medical establishment. The respected Abramson stated that some users came to see him after their initial experience. For him, these people had tried the drug not out of simple curiosity, but because they had seen in it a magic bullet that could help them solve their psychological or emotional problems. But this sort of self-experimentation, subconsciously intended to be first step towards psychotherapy, often led to negative experiences and in turn to look for a fully qualified therapist.<sup>65</sup>

## Conclusion

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<sup>62</sup> Mike Katzoff to editor, *East Village Other* Vol. 3(11), February 16 – February 22, 1968.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Allen Ginsberg, "Seminar on Marihuana and LSD Controls," Seminar given before the USNSA 19<sup>th</sup> National Student Congress at the University of Illinois, August 24, 1966, 10, folder "Ginsberg, Allen," box 6, Stafford Papers.

<sup>65</sup> Harold A. Abramson, "Led out," *Mademoiselle*, January 1967, 53, folder "National Institute of Mental Health," box 10, Stafford Papers. Abramson was trained as a physician, but not as a psychiatrist. He was also involved in the CIA's MKULTRA project to study the effects of LSD on human subjects.

The controversies and contentions surrounding the use of LSD were arguably the strongest in the medical sciences and epitomized the perennial problem of authority within the psychedelic subculture. In the broad scientific community, there were disagreements as to whether LSD had any therapeutic value or was too dangerous to be used altogether. To further complicate these discussions, lay users and the psychedelic counter-culture were also quick to challenge this order by often asserting their own authorities as experienced drug users.

Ever since LSD was prohibited and research into its potential terminated, there have been calls to reconsider the ban on psychedelic drug research.<sup>66</sup> As early as 1972, a group of researchers at NYU published a book that made similar calls. The scientists, led by Harriet Linton Barr and Robert Langs, soberly re-asserted that in spite of “the confused public and governmental response” to LSD, the drug should still be seen “as a research tool that permits the scientific study of aspects of human behavior and functioning that are otherwise difficult to approach.”<sup>67</sup> They hoped that their publication would “serve as firm evidence of the value of LSD as an investigative instrument, and that it may help lead to a reconsideration of the use of psychedelic drugs for scientific inquiry.”<sup>68</sup>

Though psychedelic psychiatry was an important part of psychedelia, the psychedelic experience had also opened new avenues of research in several academic fields.<sup>69</sup> For instance, Nadya Olyanova – famous for analysing Adolf Hitler’s hand-writing - was interested in examining the influence of psychedelics on hand-writing and offered to collaborate with Leary

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<sup>66</sup> See for instance Lester Grinspoon and James B. Bakalar, *Psychedelic Drugs Reconsidered* (New York: Basic Books, 1979); Ben Sessa, *The Psychedelic Renaissance: Reassessing the Role of Psychedelic Drugs in 21st Century Psychiatry and Society* (London: Muswell Hill Press, 2012).

<sup>67</sup> Harriet Linton Barr et al., *LSD: Personality and Experience* (New York: Wiley-Interscience, 1972), ix.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, x.

<sup>69</sup> For more on the relation between psychedelics and creativity, see Marlene Dobkin de Rios and Oscar Janiger, *LSD, Spirituality, and the Creative Process* (Rochester, VT: Park Street Press, 2003).

and Alpert.<sup>70</sup> Several experimenters reported profound insights thanks to their experimentation with the drug - one mathematician was struggling to solve an equation and found the solution under the influence of LSD, and a psychiatrist reported that he had finally understood the theory of relativity “from the inside” while undergoing a psychedelic experience.<sup>71</sup> But often the reflections on the scientific implications of the experience came later. During the 1962 international general semantics conference at NYU, Stanley Krippner discussed the implications of the psychedelic experience on language. As Aldous Huxley had argued in his famous “Doors of Perception” in which he discussed the philosophical implications of this experience, Krippner suggested that it “could help a person to re-establish contact with the reality first encountered in childhood.”<sup>72</sup> Likewise Anaïs Nin thought that “its value is in being a shortcut to the unconscious, so that one enters the realm of intuition unhampered, pure as it is in children, of direct emotional reaction to nature, to other human beings.”<sup>73</sup> In a similar vein, Krippner believed that psychedelics “could help people break through word games which trap them and release individuals from early conditionings which thwart their later developments.”<sup>74</sup> In many ways, this statement epitomizes just how porous the boundaries between the supposedly conservative scientific realm and the radical counter-culture were: on both sides, the psychedelic experience had the power to alter consciousness and offer new perspectives for the individual. But ultimately, it remained up to the user to decide what to do with these insights.

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<sup>70</sup> Nadya Olyanova to Timothy Leary, February 14, 1964, folder 6, box 61, Leary papers.

<sup>71</sup> Levin, “LSD in New York.”

<sup>72</sup> Krippner, *Song of the Siren*, 29.

<sup>73</sup> Nin, *The Diary of Anaïs Nin: Volume Six, 1955-1966*, edited by Gunther Stuhlmann (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), 338.

<sup>74</sup> Krippner, *Song of the Siren*, 29. For more on this, see Farber, “The Intoxicated/Illegal Nation: Drugs in the Sixties Counterculture.”

## Chapter 6

### Psychedelic Religion

The spiritual interpretation of the psychedelic experience was one of the main driving forces behind the psychedelic subculture - and one that appeared the most controversial on the surface. Several LSD users understood the profound ontological break caused by the drug as a connection with the Divine or with a mystical level of reality. Spiritually inclined people had their faiths reinforced as a direct result, while others felt that this was the true core of authentic spirituality and dismissed religious dogma as fake and authoritarian spirituality. Others still hoped to have their sacraments legalized and set up religious institutions hoping to make a case for the religious use of psychedelics within an incorporated church.<sup>1</sup> Spiritual discourses and attitudes were ever-present in psychedelia and often merged with the overt proselytizing of the psychedelic counter-culture to offer a blend of politics and religion. While the psychedelic counter-culture and the politics of the psychedelic movement have been treated in separate chapters, a re-reading of these themes as features of a religious movement is quite possible.

The following chapter examines a critical aspect of psychedelia that was yet again a source of strong contentions and debates. Psychedelic spirituality appeared offensive to orthodox church-goers, while several LSD enthusiasts felt that their revered chemical was a godsend that could bring about peace, love, and understanding to the world, if they managed to spread the psychedelic gospel. But, as in other facets of this subculture examined

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<sup>1</sup> For a list of some of these churches, see R. Stuart, "Entheogenic Sects and Psychedelic Religions," MAPS Bulletin vol. 12(1), 2002, 17-24.



throughout this dissertation, there were moments of cooperation, despite the multiplicity of conceptions of the psychedelic experience.

### **(Re-)connecting with the Divine**

Robert Ellwood has argued that the 1960s witnessed an important religious awakening, after which Americans became less interested in following rigid dogma and longed to attain the Divine through brands of religion that were more personal and experiential.<sup>2</sup> Though this awakening was the result of several factors, Robert Fuller has built on his argument and suggested that psychedelics played a part in this awakening and helped foster a more post-modern conception of spirituality.<sup>3</sup> Masters and Houston illustrated this notion in the late 1960s when they acknowledged the “new consciousness” as a genuine renewal of ritualization: “the traditional religions are felt by more and more people to be inadequate. They do not, for one thing, provide means of personal growth; and the ritual content of much psychedelic experience suggests that this is one critical area of failure.”<sup>4</sup> As a result of these concerns, several orthodox Christian institutions realized that they needed to adapt or would see their churches gradually empty.

Several psychedelic drug users reported life-changing and meaningful religious experiences that allowed them to find God without the help of religious institutions. But at the same time, some of them felt that their experiences were so overwhelming that they were forced to turn to existing religious models to make sense of their experiences. Some, like Leary and Alpert, travelled to the Far East, looking to channel their initial insights into a system that allowed spiritual room for experiences of bliss and unity with the cosmos. Yet, as

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<sup>2</sup> Ellwood, *The Sixties Spiritual Awakening*.

<sup>3</sup> Fuller, “Psychedelics and the Metaphysical Illumination,” 77-8.

previously noted, the 1950s had already sown some of the seeds for the Sixties spiritual awakening. For instance, the Beat generation and key teachers like Alan Watts were influential in disseminating Zen Buddhism in the West, which had a tangible presence in alternative spirituality. In 1962, Stanley Krippner remembers meeting Virginia Glenn at the International General Semantics Conference held at NYU and noting that “She wore a necklace of potbellied Buddhas, as well as a Buddha bracelet and Buddha earrings.”<sup>5</sup> He describes Glenn as “the midwife of part of the psychedelic movement,” who introduced him to Leary, Watts, Houston, Masters and Ida Rolf, even though she reportedly never took psychedelics.<sup>6</sup> Glenn was critical in directing the early psychedelic movement towards Eastern spirituality, which in turn found an important framework to make sense of the psychedelic experience.

Though its potential for spiritual import can be illustrated in many ways, describing the psychedelic experience along religious lines was always problematic and contentious. Jeff Perkins, for one, feels that way: “These words – spiritual, religious, Divine – they all have these associations of imagery that I know very well. The Virgin Mary and St-Thomas, and Jesus Christ and God. And all of these images that are just [...] icons.” In spite of this, he understands that the religious experience could be very overwhelming:

If anything, I mean, the feeling was that I was God. Or I was divine. [...] I remember I had a gay friend, Eric Bruin. [...] And his saying was ‘I feel like I’m fucking God.’ And it had two meanings: physically fucking God and just fucking as a metaphor, an adjective. [...] So the feeling is extraordinary. The feeling of that’s the whole idea about getting high. That’s how you feel. It’s liberating. It’s other than self. You get into this higher perception of yourself.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Masters and Houston, “Art and Psychedelic Experience,” 100–1.

<sup>5</sup> Krippner, *Song of the Siren*, 30.

<sup>6</sup> Krippner, interview.

<sup>7</sup> Perkins, interview.

Nina Graboi was another to become intrigued by the potential for psychedelics to induce a genuine spiritual experience. In 1962, she read about Walter Pahnke's "Good Friday Experiment" at Harvard's Divinity School, for which he gave psilocybin to several divinity students.<sup>8</sup> Graboi was impressed by the results - nine of the ten students who received the drug reported a genuine religious experience – and began to have a more nuanced view on psychedelics. Like some who learned about these substances in the early part of the Sixties, it was her spiritual background that helped stimulate her interest, even though she remained cautious: "My studies of extra-sensory perception and Eastern philosophies plus my own meager experiences during meditation had convinced me that these [exceptional] states [of consciousness] exist. But I had always believed that only rare individuals such as saints, prophets and geniuses are granted mystical visions." She later read some of the psychedelic literature that had built on some elements of Eastern spirituality, but decided her experimentation with LSD would have to wait until 1966.<sup>9</sup>

The drug's potential to induce a meaningful spiritual experience even led some to speculate on the origins of religion. In the latter years of his life, the famed J.P. Morgan banker-turned amateur anthropologist Gordon Wasson contended that the original religious impulse must have come from the use of psychedelic substances.<sup>10</sup> The archaeologist and Dead Sea Scrolls scholar John Allegro also infamously argued that the consumption of vision-inducing mushrooms had led to the rise of Christianity, which included a hallucinated and

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<sup>8</sup> Doblin, "Pahnke's 'Good Friday Experiment': A Long-Term Follow-up and Methodological Critique."

<sup>9</sup> Graboi, *One Foot in the Future*, 130. She wanted to take care of her divorce to fully experience LSD unhindered by personal issues.

<sup>10</sup> See R. Gordon Wasson, Stella Kramrisch, Jonathan Ott, and Carl A. P. Ruck, *Persephone's Quest: Entheogens and the Origins of Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

thus fictitious Jesus Christ.<sup>11</sup> But even earlier, there were similar speculations. The English poet Robert Graves contented that a connection existed between the Lord's Prayer and LSD: the fruit of the tamarisk tree in the Negev desert could contain ergot (the basic ingredient for LSD), if not eaten right away. The poet concluded that "The extravagant account in the Bible of the manna in the wilderness indicates that the Israelites had been on a long trip themselves."<sup>12</sup>

Of course, the religious dimension of the psychedelic experience largely depended on the meaning ascribed by its users. Some reports contained elements of spirituality, but were not necessarily stressed as such. In 1966, Graboi tried DET (a milder version of DMT) under the guidance of Ralph Metzner in his New York apartment and was thrust into a world full of oddities: "I pass through a gate where my brain gets compressed before it explodes from its shell and enter a familiar scene of throbbing sounds, perfumes, brightly lit colored glass baubles and cheap glossy silks. Pan waits for me there, leaps to welcome me and engulfs me in a wild, sensuous dance. His breath and his hands travel over me in flashes of hot light. Niagaras of dazzling gems pour from his hair and mouth. How enticing he is!"<sup>13</sup>

But it was often in the aftermath, when the user tried to elaborate insights following the experience, that individuals felt reconnected with the world in an enchanted way. Graboi was deeply affected by her 1966 LSD experience and felt that she was rediscovering the beauty of her garden in an animistic way:

My garden embraced me. The trees, the flowers, the shadowed mosses were alive with tenderness. As my eyes wandered through the graceful arc formed by two trees, they were drawn further; a landscape of

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<sup>11</sup> John M. Allegro, *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross: A Study of the Nature and Origins of Christianity within the Fertility Cults of the Ancient Near East* (London: Sphere Books, 1973).

<sup>12</sup> Harry Gilroy, "Robert Graves Couples Manna of Bible Story to Today's LSD," *New York Times*, November 8, 1967.

<sup>13</sup> Graboi, *One Foot in the Future*, 188.

virginal splendour opened before me. It was still my garden. I knew every tree, every bush; but it was transformed, transfigured into the perfection of a world newly created – a vernal world, inhabited by ethereal beings under whose feet the grass does not bend.<sup>14</sup>

By contrast, Rachel Abrams' first psychedelic experience in 1962 was allegedly awe-inspiring and revelatory, rather than outright religious in nature. Though she had Jewish ancestry, she considered herself mostly atheistic: "I'd never heard God, because I didn't grow up with that. So in the first instance with psilocybin, I think it was more like the most amazing joy-ride." The religious element came with subsequent trips. She remembers having a spiritual bend in her late teens, which the psychedelics subsequently helped rekindle.<sup>15</sup>

If psychedelic drugs like LSD, mescaline or psilocybin often led to powerful experiences that were sometimes interpreted as spiritual, the far more potent psychedelic DMT triggered preternatural experiences that assumed a surprising feeling of reality. Users frequently reported shifts from one dimension to another and extraordinary sensory perceptions.<sup>16</sup> Isaac Abrams enjoyed a most memorable DMT experience, where he was transported into a church-like building:

I was sitting in a magnificent multilevel temple. Great high ceilings and arches and complex arches. And also like a floor, which in itself was transparent. And had runes or maze-lines made of gold. And you could look down through them. And when I turned my head with my eyes closed, my vision turned and there were other places in the space. It was like I had been put through in another dimension. In a way I could almost say that I saw a world that actually exists.

He describes his DMT experiences as very rewarding and inspirational, though quite different from LSD, in that it offered a far more intense visionary experience: "I found that DMT was a really spectacular and formative experience. White light experiences.

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 200–1.

<sup>15</sup> Rachel Abrams, interview.

<sup>16</sup> Rick Strassman, *DMT: The Spirit Molecule* (Rochester, VT: Park Street Press, 2001).

Transcendence. Voices. Meetings with beings or elfish – you might interpret them as elves or gnomes or something.”<sup>17</sup>

Journalistic accounts covering the use of LSD in New York further illustrate the religious import of the experience when the drug was taken in a group. In 1965, for instance, several people underwent the LSD experience in an Upper East Side penthouse. Although Peter,<sup>18</sup> a Jesuit Priest, was keen to undergo the psychedelic experience, he also feared that his faith might be shattered as a result, having spent fifteen years becoming a priest. He was also afraid of becoming sexually aroused, when he had remained a life-long celibate, even before his priesthood. The author of the article, who also took the drug, regretted that the group did not ritualize the event in a more ceremonious way – “we merely popped the pill in our mouths and continued our conversations.”<sup>19</sup> When the LSD took hold of the participants, Peter wanted to read some Psalms, which the author ended up doing (Psalm 22). Peter seemed confused in the aftermath of the session and felt that he had been unable to communicate and that several questions had remained unanswered. To which the author replied that “it should do Peter good to know that not everything fits into a neat predetermined package outlined by a church. I only hoped that his confusion would not confound him, but give him insight into another world of experience.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Isaac Abrams, interview. Abrams also makes an interesting claim regarding the popularisation of LSD, rather than DMT: “When they outlawed LSD, they also outlawed indole - the base of LSD and DMT. It wiped out DMT at the time because DMT – you could smoke 50mgrs of DMT and have an incredible experience. But when you used indole as a base, it was much more economically rewarding to make acid – 250µgrs is a quarter of milligram. A DMT experience required 50mgrs and represented 200 LSD experiences. So obviously, because of what happened economically, the whole emphasis shifted over to LSD. So DMT became extremely rare and difficult to find and to get.”

<sup>18</sup> The names were altered to protect their identity. Peter feared that he might be reprimanded by his church.

<sup>19</sup> Gerald Rothberg, “LSD,” *Clyde*, December 1965, 17, folder “LSD Experiences,” box 8, Stafford Papers.

<sup>20</sup> Rothberg, “LSD,” 19.

Another journalist witnessed a group session in a Brooklyn apartment that further illustrates this spiritual import, but also challenges the notion that LSD use was essentially a youthful and revolutionary phenomenon. Furthermore, the journalist of a supposedly conservative newspaper took quite seriously the claims of mystical experiences induced and seemed quite fascinated by the religious atmosphere that gradually filled the room - he noticed, for instance, that one participant, who was sitting cross-legged in a corner of a room, looked like “a great benign Buddha.”

The room was decorated and arranged to offer the most supportive setting. It featured candles, burning incense, and objects such as a fragment of driftwood, an oval stone, some coral, and a ball of glass that could break the light into several patterns. These objects had been purposefully left on the table “to be touched, scrutinized, mused over.” The five people - a 37-year-old photographer and host (Ben), a 34-year-old engineer, a 23-year-old secretary, a 24-year-old male student at an acting school (Michael) and a 20-year old (Kathryn) who worked for a suburban newspaper - sat on a canvas mattress and were silent and meditative, in order to favour a positive and spiritual experience. The host had taken the drug three times in the past, but he refrained on this occasion in order to control the session and act as a “guide” – or even as a spiritual teacher. Likewise, the secretary would only smoke cannabis on that night and refrain from taking LSD. Though Ben knew Michael, he had not expected him to partake that night and privately gave him additional instructions, amongst which, he would have to remain quiet and follow his guidance.

The Host produced the Book of Tao and read excerpts to give the LSD experience a mystical dimension: “Tao is a vast immeasurable void. [...] Looked for, it cannot be seen; it is invisible. Listened for, it cannot be heard; it is inaudible. Reached for, it cannot be touched; it is intangible [...] it is the greatest mystery.” Later, two participants went to sleep, but Michael became restless and panicky, so Ben told him to rest his head against his leg to establish a

physical contact and tried to reassure him by reading excerpts of Leary, Metzner, and Alpert's *The Psychedelic Experience*, which they had based on the Tibetan *Book of the Dead*: "The movement is in the fire of life from which we all come, [...] Join it, It is part of you." These words seemed to soothe him, but he would still occasionally experience bouts of discomfort. Ben took care of him by re-stating his role as a guide in the session: "You must trust me. You must not fear me."<sup>21</sup>

The spiritual potential of psychedelic drugs was also apparent in the way some users considered these substances as genuine sacraments. A critical moment in the social history of LSD was the arrival of a powerful tableted kind of LSD, Orange Sunshine, which acquired a mythical status in the psychedelic counter-culture.<sup>22</sup> One LSD dealer, who had just moved to NYC from California, touted it as a sacrament and spoke of it in near-mystical terms - when asked if he dealt other drugs, he clearly preferred Sunshine and hashish and dismissed "new" drugs like MDA "because there hasn't been any new visionary God trip since LSD." Remembering the first time he acquired the drug, he was told that "it was meant for one to see God." He added that

There is a fantastic Karma to this LSD. If you get on the dealing trip and do not abuse it – trying to make outlandish profits – you realize that you have a lot of power in your hands with a tremendous responsibility for a lot of heads. You realize that you are not just selling drugs, but are selling to people a great and important part of their existence; therefore you have to make sure that your motives are guided by a central flow of positive energy.<sup>23</sup>

Their missionary zeal was in part the result of Leary's ideas: they dealt LSD so that people could then follow his precepts. They read Leary's books, as well as the *I Ching* and the *Book of Tao*. In particular, they liked Leary's teachings, because "He enables us to grow on

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<sup>21</sup> Jay Levin, "LSD in New York," *New York Post*, June 6, 1966, folder "LSD – NY Post," box 8, Stafford Papers. The author altered their real names.

<sup>22</sup> Schou, *Orange Sunshine*.



our own individual trip. Unlike [the Eastern guru] Maharishi who says ‘If you want to see god follow me,’ as said [another Eastern guru] Meher Baba and many others. Timothy Leary says ‘Get into yourself and you will see God.’”<sup>24</sup> This was a fitting illustration of the post-modern spirituality that departed from orthodox religious dogma and that encouraged many Americans to seek God within themselves, rather than in religious scriptures.

### **Leary’s Brand of Psychedelic Religion**

In 1966, Timothy Leary split somewhat radically from his early approach to the use of LSD and psychedelics. Facing a lengthy jail sentence, he reframed his conception of psychedelic drug use along much stronger religious lines to legitimize it, and soon announced the incorporation of the Millbrook community into a non-profit religious institution: the League for Spiritual Discovery – the acronym tellingly spelt “LSD.” By 1966, LSD was no longer an obscure drug used by the cultural vanguard or New York City’s bohemian elements: Graboi remembers being stunned by the amount of requests to join the new church and felt that “The LSD revolution had spread beyond the colleges and seemed on its way to becoming a vast grass-roots movement.”<sup>25</sup>

During a party held at Billy Hitchcock’s (Peggy’s brother and equally supportive of the psychedelic movement) Manhattan penthouse late in 1966, Leary entrusted Graboi to chair the New York center for the newly founded League. He saw her as perfectly suited for the job, in part because she was so aware of the necessity to have a serene setting to lead the psychedelic way of life: “You’ve created a sanctuary in your apartment, an atmosphere that is a haven in

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<sup>23</sup> “Sunshine Supermen,” interviewed by Jaakov Kohn in the *East Village Other* Vol. 4(28), June 19, 1969.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Graboi, *One Foot in the Future*, 202.

the middle of the city. It's this atmosphere that we want at the Center. I've also watched you with the hippies. They trust you, they listen to you. You often talk about how important it is to prepare them for the trip... Well, here is your chance."<sup>26</sup>

Although she eventually accepted the position, which involved putting an end to the Third Force Lecture Bureau and divorcing her husband, she still had mixed feelings about it: "By now I had seen some of the casualties of the psychedelic experience. Some of the young people had their slight hold on consensus reality broken by the influx of too much that they could not absorb." Graboi wanted no part in a reckless promotion that would lead to more casualties, but in the end she reasoned that regardless of the legislation, teenagers would be drawn to LSD use: "As head of the New York Center I could do much to prepare those who were determined to try it, discourage those to whom it would be detrimental, and counsel those who were trying to integrate the experience."<sup>27</sup>

Leary and Graboi settled for an old and dilapidated store-front at 551 Hudson Street intended at capturing the essence of the Millbrook communal experience. For Graboi, the location fitted because of the eclectic population in the Village that would barely notice the influx of psychedelic enthusiasts in the area. Following some financial misfortunes, they had to call for volunteers to help set up the Center that required a great deal of renovation. The young people's initial enthusiasm rapidly waned in face of the hard work. Graboi grew frustrated by their lack of enterprise and dedication, but at least they all respected the rule that stated that no drugs were allowed on the premises.<sup>28</sup>

On September 19, 1966, Leary announced the forming of the League at a press conference at the New York Advertising Club on Park Avenue. He appeared before the journalists wearing a button that read "Legalize Spiritual Discovery" and revealed that the

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 207.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 208.

founding of the church would be a way of making a case for the legal use of LSD for inward-directed spirituality: “Like every great religion of the past we seek to find the divinity within and to express this revelation in a life of glorification and worship of God. These ancient goals we define in the metaphor of the present – turn on, tune in and drop out.”<sup>29</sup> Ultimately, the church hoped to provoke a re-enchantment of the world in a somewhat evangelical way: “We are out to change the spiritual level of the United States and eventually the world [...] There are many obvious signs of secularization and materialization. We are frankly out to change your society, to uplevel it and make it more spiritual.” According to Leary, the religion had a 15-member board of guides, who all lived at Millbrook and had quit their jobs to dedicate themselves to the new religion, and 411 members at the time of the announcement.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, the Center was able to open on a limited basis while restorations carried on. It featured mandalas and a poster-sized portrait of Leary on the windows of the center,<sup>31</sup> clearly indicating that he had assumed the leadership of this new unorthodox religion. Leary displayed a statue of the Buddha donated by one of the teenagers who had helped with the renovations, added some candles and flowers, and he and Graboi enjoyed the first meditation in the Center. According to Graboi, “It took on the character of a shrine, a refuge from the ugliness and violence outside.”<sup>32</sup> For the official opening, the Center boasted an impressive cast of characters. Leary, Alpert, and Metzner were joined by the poets Ginsberg, his partner Peter Orlovsky, and Gergory Corso, as well as William Burroughs.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 216.

<sup>29</sup> Robert E. Dallos, “Dr. Leary Starts New ‘Religion’ with ‘Sacramental’ Use of LSD,” *New York Times*, September 20, 1966.

<sup>30</sup> Peter Weinberg, ““On this Cube Will I Build my Church,”” *East Village Other* Vol. 1(21), October 1 – October 15, 1966.

<sup>31</sup> Don McNeill, “An Opening to the West: Ashram on Hudson Street,” *Village Voice*, February 23, 1967, folder “League for Spiritual Discovery,” box 9, Stafford Papers.

<sup>32</sup> Graboi, *One Foot in the Future*, 229.

<sup>33</sup> McNeill, “An Opening to the West.”

Eastern spirituality was very present throughout the meditation sessions. Graboi pinned to one of doors a sign that read “Let us honor the meditation room by sitting up like the Buddha.”<sup>34</sup> Graboi, Leary, and Alpert decided against having a psychedelic art gallery, which might have made followers feel forced to buy a piece before proceeding to the meditation room. Instead, they chose to run the Center on a donation basis (“love money”), with suggested contributions written down on the weekly schedule. This made things tricky financially, as a sizeable amount of the crowds that frequented the Center were young drop-outs, who were trying to survive on the streets.<sup>35</sup>

Graboi led meditation sessions in which a surprisingly diverse pool of individuals duly took part: “Some of these kids were innocent of any knowledge of meditation. Others were astonishingly sophisticated about mysticism, East and West, the I Ching, Astrology, and other esoteric subjects.”<sup>36</sup> More broadly, she felt that she was visited at the Center by individuals who frequently challenged her preconceptions: “spaced-out mystics, the Messiahs, the fanatics, the saintly souls, and the hippies – the true flower children, the bearers of the new consciousness.”<sup>37</sup>

Though the rules of the Center clearly stated that no drugs were allowed, it did not stop people from turning up after turning on. Parks and natural environments were always good places for psychedelic experiences, but the Center also offered a supportive environment 24 hours a day. One reporter noticed the presence of Eastern elements such as “the whining of the sitar, the ringing of the tabla, the smell of incense, the droning voices in another room.” One attendee sat perfectly still with his legs tucked away, with his eyes fixed on a Buddha statue.

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<sup>34</sup> Graboi, *One Foot in the Future*, 229.

<sup>35</sup> The Center had to close in the latter part of the 1960s due to lack of funds. Graboi did try to secure more funding from Leary, but this was at the time when he and the Millbrook residents were subject to police harassment and exhausting funds on bails.

<sup>36</sup> Graboi, *One Foot in the Future*, 218.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

All six participants were “trying to lose their identities and achieve a sense of unity with their environment.”<sup>38</sup> Occasionally, someone undergoing a difficult LSD experience would burst in and be led to the meditation room: “It was becoming known in hippie circles that the good vibes that radiated from the Center could be felt for blocks.”<sup>39</sup> As a result, it became one the major psychedelic hotspots in the city.

The artist Martin Carey remembered going to the Center sometime in the 1960s, shortly after his first LSD experience and being drawn to its supportive environment:

There was a light machine going in the front and soft Indian music playing, and there were candles and incense. . . . All of a sudden, I felt I was tripping. For a moment I was really scared, and I thought, well, if it has to happen, this is the place for it. Of course as soon as I stopped being scared, it stopped. Richard Alpert was speaking, and there were pictures of Timothy Leary along the wall. The whole room – the whole environment – there was a sense of a Catholic martyr trip about it. I sat way in the back. It was a very large, narrow room [...] Sitting in a room like that with a lot of other people who were turning on to a very high level and being drawn together because of it.<sup>40</sup>

Graboi met a lot of people who reported spiritual psychedelic experiences or who took interest in religion as a result of their chemical experimentation. One user had taken LSD during his freshman year at college and was now determined to become a saint.<sup>41</sup> Another reported seeing light around individuals when using the drug, which Graboi understood as being people’s auras. He also told her he had undergone uncanny out-of-the-body experiences: “when I, like, slip out of my body. Like, I’m over there (he points across the room), or up there (he points at the ceiling), and I see me over *here* (pointing to himself), but I’m *there!* I know it sounds crazy, believe me! But it’s true!” Again, Graboi had explanations for these unusual phenomena, asserting her authority on the subject by alluding to the literature: “A trip

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<sup>38</sup> Clyde Haberman, “That New-Time Religion: The Rites of LSD,” *New York Post*, March 14, 1967, folder “League for Spiritual Discovery,” box 9, Stafford Papers.

<sup>39</sup> Graboi, *One Foot in the Future*, 233. Similar psychedelic rescue services were set up across the country.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

is really a journey into the unknown territories of the mind, whether you get there by fasting, chanting, whirling, meditating, controlling the breath. What they all have in common is that they change the chemistry of the brain.”<sup>42</sup>

In a comparable way, Graboi once discussed with a Millbrook resident helping out at the Center the similarities between Native American and Buddhist rituals.<sup>43</sup> What she implied here was that means of reaching altered states of consciousness had existed for millennia and often been used as a gateway to genuine spiritual experiences. Around that time, scholars of religion had contemplated the possibility that there existed a universal core of the religious experience triggered by drug use. As Nicolas Langlitz found, some anthropologists investigating drug-induced shamanism across the world attempted to demonstrate the universality of the psychedelic experience.<sup>44</sup> Some of them were sympathetic to some counter-cultural ideas and it is indeed highly likely that Graboi’s interpretation was so widespread that it permeated the academic realm.

Meditating on her numerous psychedelic experiences, Graboi reached several ontological conclusions that illustrate how life-changing they had been for her: “Most of my trips during that time took me to impersonal realms where I saw that a calm equilibrium underlies the seeming chaos, and that energy, or the vibrations it causes, is the ultimate reality. I saw that to surrender is to win, and that one vast, immense, everlasting cosmic wind blows through all and everything and keeps is in motion – alive, changing, growing.”<sup>45</sup> This conception of a form of cosmic energy uniting everything was widespread amongst the psychedelic movement. Where Leary had suggested that “your brain is God,” because one’s

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 227.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 235.

<sup>44</sup> Langlitz, *Neuropsychedelia*, 12–3.

<sup>45</sup> Graboi, *One Foot in the Future*, 264.

brain was intimately connected to a much greater design, Graboi realized something similar: “I knew that I am God [*sic*].”<sup>46</sup>

Despite its obvious spiritual nature, the Center was also a critical place for the psychedelic counter-culture. During Leary’s first lecture at the new Center, the High Priest spoke in front of a packed crowd and issued a strong subversive message: “Think for yourself and question authority.”<sup>47</sup> He also argued in favour of deep consciousness-expansion to probe the untapped potential of the human brain. Other lecturers included Metzner, Alpert, and Ginsberg, and the Center also served the purpose of giving information and counselling about positive psychedelic drug use. To that effect, the Center had a handful of books (for the most part donated) about altered states of consciousness, esoteric knowledge or Eastern spirituality.

As part of Leary’s strategy to fight the prohibition of psychedelics, he argued that the ban was a form of religious persecution and summoned the League’s high-profile attorney Martin Garbus to fight it legally. Garbus requested a declaratory judgement from the New York County Supreme Court and asked the court “to rule that the current laws governing the possession of marijuana, LSD, peyote, psilocybin, etc. be ruled as not applicable to the Guides and Members of the [League] when these Sacraments are used by League Members in designated shrines and in the presence of specified visible aids to worship.”<sup>48</sup> After securing such privileges, the League stored and freely used those psychedelic drugs.

Psychedelic churches that officially incorporated in New York State have attracted some scholarly attention,<sup>49</sup> but even in New York City there were established churches – or cults, depending on one’s charity. In September 1968, the police raided the Church of the Mysterious Elation. It was run by Susan Swede and her husband Southworth (both 24),

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>48</sup> “League for Spiritual Discovery,” manifesto, 4, folder “League for Spiritual Discovery,” box 9, Stafford Paper.

reportedly the son of a West Coast millionaire, and holder of a degree in divinity from a school in India. The Church had about 35 followers and had conducted weddings. Law-enforcers seized a staggering quantity of psychedelic drugs, along with speed, hashish, and various books on drug-manufacturing. Agents described the cultists as living in a state of squalor amongst several psychedelic ornaments.<sup>50</sup>

But even earlier, and without Leary's probable influence on psychedelic religion, there was some religious activity in the psychedelic subculture. Sometime around the end of 1963, Ed Rosenfeld started the Natural Church at 52 Bond Street, where his followers took psychedelics in a spiritual setting. The church was highly eclectic and syncretic and shows how well informed the young Rosenfeld was at the time. The guides were "curanderos," just like the Amerindians who use peyote or mushrooms in healing rituals. They charged \$100 for a session for which participants were required to attend a pre-session meeting, before coming back for the actual drug experience.<sup>51</sup> Rosenfeld also used some key texts to structure the sessions: "I used to guide people using the I-Ching and we guided people on trips and there were three or four of us who were associated with the church. [...] the reason I used the I-Ching is because it seemed to me to be the fusion of Daoism and Confucianism - Daoism being extremely spiritual in its insights and Confucianism having to do with how people organize themselves. And govern us and real important issues." He borrowed strongly from Buddhism and Hinduism, and enjoyed *The Psychedelic Experience*, even though in retrospect he finds it a little naïve.

Long before Leary, Ed Rosenfeld had reasoned that incorporating as a church that used psychedelics as sacraments might protect their use of illicit drugs: "it seemed to me that this

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<sup>49</sup> Lander, "Start Your Own Religion."

<sup>50</sup> Edward Kirkman and Henry Lee, "Raid Hippie Cult, Seize \$6M Dope," *Daily News*, September 27, 1968, folder "Drugs Crackdown (2)," box 5, Stafford Papers.

<sup>51</sup> Ed Rosenfeld, "nccc," June 2, 1965, folder 5, box 64, Leary papers.



was a way to [...] make use of the laws to do with religious freedom and the sacraments.” But in 1965, the church was raided and the police confiscated all the materials. Fortunately, Rosenfeld had been corresponding with Kleps for a while and thanks to the Chief Boo Hoo, he was ordained “Boo Hoo at Large.” Later, he visited Kleps and his then wife Sally at Cranberry Lake and took LSD with them. Though he remembers Kleps as an intelligent but zany character, he was taken to him because he was also reasoning that psychedelics might be legalized in the United States by invoking the principle of religious freedom.

In spite of this religious discourse, both Rosenfeld and Kleps were never too serious about their spirituality: “We certainly tripped in order to have fun. It made everything fun. Sometimes it wasn’t quite so fun. But at the same time it revealed an incredible depth I had only read about in the mystical literature.” Some trips were more hedonistic in nature – Rosenfeld was not totally rigorous about respecting set and setting. But others were reportedly very spiritual: “I remember being at the Cloisters one day and looking at the Hudson and seeing the pattern of the river and saying ‘oh, my God! That’s the pattern of life! Of course, we’re all part of this. We’re all made of water.’”<sup>52</sup>

### **Critical Voices**

Unsurprisingly, the idea that LSD and psychedelics could trigger a genuine spiritual experience did not appeal to everyone. LSD could be used as a short-cut to reach the Divine in a way that classic religious sects could not offer, according to Peter Stafford: “There are very few religious ‘experiences’ today, like speaking in tongues.”<sup>53</sup> But if the validity and legitimacy of the psychedelic religious experience was criticized to various extents, the idea of

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<sup>52</sup> Rosenfeld, interview.

<sup>53</sup> George Dugan, “Minister Extols Benefits of LSD,” *New York Times*, July 4, 1966.

building a whole religious institution around it was hardly ever accepted. Tensions between this often iconoclastic and unorthodox form of spirituality and the established cultural order were rife, but as ever, there also were moments of understanding.

For instance, the League of Spiritual Discovery attempted to transcend these tensions by building bridges between orthodox religion and psychedelic spirituality. Leary passed on to Graboi an invitation to talk about the new psychedelic religion at the Riverside Drive cathedral – albeit in a 60-seat capacity room. Here, the audience differed greatly from the crowds she was used to: “The faces that scrutinized me as I stood behind the lectern were young, in their twenties and thirties. Some were open, but reserved. Others betrayed the closed hostility I was familiar with from some of the visitors at the Center.”<sup>54</sup> But the talk went well as she managed to slip in a few jokes: “Until a year ago I was law-abiding citizen. Then I smoked marijuana and became a criminal.” After extolling the benefits of chemically induced ego loss to minimize the fear of death, some of the attendees seemed convinced enough to ask where they could get their hands on LSD.<sup>55</sup>

The Reverend David DuPlessis was one of many religious figures to take issue with the drug. At a conference at the New York Statler-Hilton in October 1969 before the Regional Convention of the Full Gospel Business Men’s Fellowship International, he dismissed psychedelic religion as fake and declared that “Young people today are simply craving for visions so they turn to LSD [...]”<sup>56</sup> Even Anaïs Nin who had experimented with the drug took issue with the burgeoning psychedelic religion that was coming about as a result of the ontological uncertainties that often accompany the psychedelic experience. In particular, she disliked its syncretic appearance: “They adopted ready-made religions. [...] Leary appeared as

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<sup>54</sup> Interviewed by Graboi in Graboi, *One Foot in the Future*, 239.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>56</sup> John Moore, “Through the Magnifying Glass,” *Worker’s World*, December 16, 1969, folder “Religion + LSD,” box 12, Stafford Papers.

a priest of a new religion. The films and the happenings were absurd at times, no art, no invention, a bastard mass from Eastern rituals.”<sup>57</sup> Still another commentator felt that claims of spiritual experiences through LSD use were unsubstantial and hardly ever well-narrated: “Too often it is the same old dreary record, something like listening to a Watch Tower pamphlet being read aloud.”<sup>58</sup> During a conference in NYC, Humphry Osmond contended that one of the greatest dangers of the LSD experience was to get carried away by its spiritual dimension, thus leading to what he called “an overbearing spiritual arrogance.”<sup>59</sup>

The perennial tension between science and religion was echoed in some of the debates surrounding the use of LSD in spirituality. One New York MD took issue with chemically-induced connections with the Divine and clearly dismissed as fake, if not even sinful:

Sacred tradition as well as individual intuition tells us that some of the ultimate gifts of evolution are creativity, love, and experiences of God. It is the longing for these gifts which keeps man struggling along the hard road of moral evolution. [...] But if we take the incentive away by giving man through drugs what we ought to earn through moral efforts, we may have committed the one unforgivable sin, the sin against the meaning of his earthly existence.<sup>60</sup>

Inevitably, many religious figures that actually came across LSD in society were appalled. During psychedelic seder held by Peggy Hitchcock, one Rabi was present and seemingly did not mind the liberal LSD use in the house. One Episcopalian priest, however, was deeply offended. At one point in the evening, Bill Haines went up to a separate floor of the house to meditate in the dark corner of the library. The distraught priest came in, unaware of his presence, and telephoned his bishop to tell him how everybody was behaving in an

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<sup>57</sup> Nin, *The Diary of Anaïs Nin*, 343.

<sup>58</sup> Hank Malone, “Hippies – the New Aristocracy?,” *The Fifth Estate*, August 1 – 15, 1967, 9, folder “Hippies Yippies,” box 7, Stafford Papers.

<sup>59</sup> “LSD Meets ESP,” *Innerspace*, 1966, page unavailable, folder “Innerspace,” box 21, Stafford Papers.

<sup>60</sup> Quoted in Cashman, *The LSD Story*, 76.

insane way. Haines found it outrageous that one of Hitchcock's guests' would report this and thought of "bombing" him – by giving him LSD without his knowledge or consent.

Haines had a brief discussion with Kleps and Leary about the ethics of "bombing," but all three came to the conclusion that the case warranted an exception. Kleps recalled the scene:

With great aplomb, Haines walked around behind his target's table and deftly demonstrated that the hand is quicker than the eye. It became evident, an hour later, that the priest loved the stuff. The transformation was abrupt. One moment he was grimly sitting in a corner sipping his gin and the next moment he was on the dance floor with Peggy, putting on an exhibition of pelvic-thrust, head-jerk dancing worthy of the most primitive teenager.<sup>61</sup>

The priest went apparently unharmed and enjoyed the experience; yet, this anecdote illustrates how flawed the ethics of the psychedelic movement was. Leary in particular had devised a simple maxim ("Thou shalt not alter the consciousness of thy fellow men") to forbid LSD enthusiasts from forcing the experience on someone without consent. But the movement often found itself guilty of not practising what it preached.

Kleps thought that Hitchcock had conceived the party with a genuine belief in the psychedelic experience and was suffused with the popular notion that LSD led to great enhancement. But what he ultimately preferred about the party was the way it had made a mockery of an ancient Jewish tradition: "In contrast to what I think Peggy intended, the thing about the party I liked best was the spirit of hilarity and irreverence that LSD produced in the teeth of one of the world's most savage celebrations of tribal vengeance, primitive supernaturalism and cruelty to children." This brand of iconoclasm was one of the trademarks of his own Neo-American Church that was partly intended at making a mockery of established

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<sup>61</sup> Art Kleps, "The Yankee and the King Sold as Slaves," in *Millbrook: A Narrative of the Early Years of American Psychedelianism, Recension of 2005* (San Francisco: Original Kleptonian Neo-American Church, 2005), page unavailable, <http://okneoac.org/millbrook/> (accessed September 12, 2013).

religion: “I don’t see Psychedelianism as blending and refining supernaturalist religions into some higher and finer froth. They are all rotten to the core.”<sup>62</sup>

Michael Itkin of the Brotherhood of the Love of Christ had far more nuanced views. Indeed, Itkin had also devised a psychedelic church called the Psychedelic Peace Fellowship in New York City. In a draft manifesto, he outlined the principles of his Fellowship, where he acknowledged that “Recent years have seen an unprecedented interest in exploring the inner depths of man, an interest precipitated in large part by the widespread dissemination of the psychedelic experience.” He also connected consciousness-expansion with a greater socio-political awareness and argued with apocalyptic overtones that an improved spiritual life was critical given the increasingly oppressive presence of war, technology, routine, and bureaucracy.<sup>63</sup>

On October 29, 1966, the Fellowship held its first meeting at a restaurant on East 7<sup>th</sup> Street, where the manifesto was read in front of some 80 people. The crowd was described as eclectic, “ranging from a well-traveled seaman in his sixties through a variety of young to middle-aged family types to a scattering of very young ecstasies.” Mostly, those attending were “hoping to find in the PPF a social structure through which they could work out their hopes and fears for the larger social order.”<sup>64</sup>

Itkin had joined Leary’s International Foundation of Internal Freedom in 1963 and collaborated with Leary for one of his “Psychedelic Celebrations” (“The Reincarnation of Jesus Christ”). He took issue with his conception of psychedelics as “sacraments,” however, which departed too radically from the “proper” definition of a sacrament as “an outward and visible symbol of an inward and spiritual operation of the Holy Spirit.” For Itkin, psychedelics

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Michael Francis Itkin, “Psychedelic Peace Fellowship,” undated draft manifesto, folder “Psychedelic Peace Fellowship,” box 12, Stafford Papers.

were tools or aids to help meditate “in a Christian or other context.”<sup>65</sup> These tools had nothing inherently sacred about them, and if one considered them as such, one ran the risk of using them too frequently, thus never getting “beyond the need for the tool.”<sup>66</sup>

Itkin also felt that Leary was offering a form of reckless proselytizing under the mask of psychedelic spirituality that ultimately advocated “nothing more than to stay ‘high’ perpetually.” As a spiritual councillor working in the City, he had personally witnessed several people hurt themselves “mentally and spiritually, indeed physically also.” This damage ranged from social withdrawal and paranoid-schizophrenic outbursts, to attempted suicide that led to “callous reactions on the part of persons present in the apartment where at least one of these suicide attempts occurred.”<sup>67</sup>

It is important to emphasize that even though Itkin sought to stay clear from Leary, he was one the middle-of-the-road voice endorsing the use of psychedelics as adjuncts to religious life. For instance, he had seen members of his clergy experiment with psychedelics before the 1965 Drug Abuse Control Amendment and testified before the Subcommittee on Executive Reorganisation of the Senate Committee on Government Operations on May 26, 1966 in Washington, D.C.. There, he had contended that the discovery of LSD had been followed by “an accelerated religious evolution in human consciousness.”<sup>68</sup> He made it clear that while LSD should not be used recreationally, it held important therapeutic and religious value <sup>69</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> “Psychedelic Peace Fellowship Founded in New York,” *Innerspace*, 1966, page unavailable, folder “Innerspace,” box 21, Stafford Papers.

<sup>65</sup> Michael Francis Itkin, “An Open Letter to Timothy Leary,” November 27, 1966, 1, folder “Itkin, Michael Francis,” box 7, Stafford Papers.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>68</sup> Michael Francis Itkin, “Statement,” submitted to the Subcommittee on Executive Reorganisation of the Senate Committee on Government Operations, Washington, D.C., May 26, 1966, 2, folder “Itkin, Michael Francis,” box 7, Stafford Papers.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-7.

Likewise, he sided with Leary and Kleps in the way he argued against the prohibition of psychedelics and framed the prohibition as a violation of basic constitutional rights. He branded the law as lending itself to “anti-life and anti-religious forces,” but more to the point, he felt that the prohibition of psychedelics might be followed by the prohibition of research into metaphysics or mysticism. The rhetoric he used to hammer his point home was one that equated the prohibitionists to America’s more reviled enemies, a strategy that Kleps also used to attack to them: “This was, indeed, the step undertaken in 1934 in Hitler’s Germany and in 1921 Soviet Russia.”<sup>70</sup>

The Unitarian Walter Kring offered another well-informed opinion of Leary’s brand of psychedelic spirituality in a sermon on October 23, 1966. He had attended one of the League’s “services” at the Village Theater and was impressed by the attendance (all 2800 seats of the auditorium were occupied) and the subsequent financial success. He noticed that the crowd was mostly composed of people in their early twenties (with a few people above thirty) and believed that they were genuine in their quests for “answers to some of the riddles of life.”<sup>71</sup> He also thought that the artistic dimension of the service was well-worth seeing: “If nothing else, the evening was an aesthetic experience, and I think a good one.”<sup>72</sup> Likewise, one woman who attended one of Leary’s celebrations felt that “It wasn’t much of a religious experience [...]. But it was it was great to look at; it was good theater.”<sup>73</sup>

Kring sympathized with Leary’s character and felt that he was a serious, good-humoured, and intelligent prophet. Despite finding his syncretic religion a little simplistic and

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 8. On page 2, Itkin also referred to Thomas Jefferson to summon ideals of liberty in the face of tyranny.

<sup>71</sup> Walter Donald Kring, “Dr. Timothy Leary’s ‘Church,’” a sermon given at The Unitarian Church of All Souls, New York, October 13, 1966, 1, folder “League for Spiritual Discovery,” box 9, Stafford Papers.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>73</sup> Jay Levin, “Leary Leads the Rites of LSD,” *New York Post*, September 21, 1966, folder “League for Spiritual Discovery,” box 9, Stafford Papers.

superficial, he saw Leary as part of a longer part of Old Testament prophets “who made people angry by criticizing their pleasures and their sins.” If he drew such support from the young, it was because he was articulate in the way he criticized the superficiality and shortcomings of American society.<sup>74</sup>

But although he found himself agreeing with much of what Leary had to say, he could not help but think that he was closer to a charlatan offering a good show, than to a true prophet offering a good religion. Leary’s religion lacked the discipline of Native American peyotists and ran the risk of fostering withdrawal from the “real” world. Kring also felt that Leary ultimately failed to present the psychedelic experience under a favourable light and thus counter the media scare surrounding LSD – the show Kring attended had a tragic ending with a murder. Additionally, Leary was building a religion based on LSD that was by now illegal and thus carried too many legal and medical hazards to lead to positive religious experience.<sup>75</sup> Though he also believed that under the right circumstances psychedelics had a genuine religious import, he suspected that Leary’s attempt to clothe the LSD experience in religious meaning was a ploy to find support for his upcoming trial for smuggling cannabis.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, his lawyer had suggested as much.

Leary’s psychedelic religion was also criticized by prominent figures of the counter-culture. David McReynolds, who had strongly condemned the psychedelic movement’s resentment of the anti-war movement, admitted finding Leary’s show excellent from an artistic perspective, but felt it had no other redeeming qualities: “As a religious experience I think it’s an almost total failure. As a religious movement, close to fraud.” He branded Leary a “Phoney” and opposed his show to many examples of “true” transcendence. While he sympathized with Leary for his legal troubles surrounding his drug use, he took issue with the

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<sup>74</sup> Kring, “Dr. Timothy Leary’s ‘Church,’” 2.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-5.



post-modern nature of his religion (“It implies that one’s personal reality is the ultimate reality”) that ultimately shut oneself to the world around. Given the context of war and poverty, it also ran the risk of making its followers oblivious to important causes.<sup>77</sup>

By contrast, other religious figures were ready to acknowledge the validity of genuine psychedelic spirituality. During a 1966 sermon, the minister Donald McKinney reminded his audience that mind-altering substances had been used throughout human history and connected the attraction for psychedelics with a broader American “drug culture.” He condemned the indiscriminate use of LSD for “kicks,” but acknowledged that some psychiatrists saw these substances as promising aides. He then admitted that these drugs had the potential to trigger a genuine religious experience under favourable circumstances. Psychedelics could “lead the mind into the kind of heightened awareness that is truly spiritual.”<sup>78</sup> In spite of McKinney’s belief that LSD had the potential to reinvigorate religion, he was suspicious of Leary’s cult: “The ecstasy of LSD and its cultish trappings, where it is being employed – responsibly – by men like Timothy Leary, happens to offend my own sense of proportion and approach to religious understanding.”<sup>79</sup>

Another minister from Brooklyn, William Glenesk of the Spencer Memorial Presbyterian Church, was equally enthusiastic about the spiritual import of the psychedelic experience, claiming that LSD contained properties that “contribute to creation and the glory

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>77</sup> David McReynolds, “LSD Is Important ... Leary’s ‘Show’ Isn’t,” *The Vancouver Sun*, February 17, 1967, folder “League for Spiritual Discovery,” box 9, Stafford Papers.

<sup>78</sup> Donald W. McKinney, “LSD and Religious Freedom,” sermon given to the First Unitarian Church, Brooklyn, New York, May 8, 1966, 3, folder “Religion + LSD,” box 12, Stafford Papers.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 4. For similar views on the problem of socially organizing a psychedelic religion, see Huston Smith, “Do Drugs have Religious Importance?,” in *LSD: The Consciousness Expanding Drug*, ed. David Solomon (New York: Putnam, 1964), 155-169; Margaret Mead, “Psychedelics and Western Religious Experience,” in *Shaman Woman, Mainline Lady: Women's Writings on the Drug Experience*, ed. Cynthia Palmer and Michael Horowitz (New York: Morrow, 1982), 208-9.

of God.” Despite the legislation, and although he had not taken the drug himself, he felt that it could lead to a “valid spiritual breakthrough,” if used properly. He also reported several cases of non-churchgoers undergoing a deep religious experience with the help of LSD and several users experiencing “atonement” and “rebirth.” Moreover, he did not see psychedelics and Christianity as fundamentally incompatible: “Christianity with a kick in it might be good for us.”<sup>80</sup>

### **Conclusion**

As in the rest of the country, the consumption of LSD and psychedelics in New York City seemed to trigger a kind of spiritual awakening that in turn led to complex religious facts. Psychedelic spirituality can be defined in its broadest sense as a deep awareness of the sacred in everything surrounding the individual. This could then be integrated into rituals and religious systems like Christianity or Judaism, Eastern spirituality such as Buddhism, Taoism, and Hinduism, but also less orthodox beliefs like animism or pantheism. Hence, it offered new readings of scriptures like the *Bible*, the *I Ching* or the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* and in some cases led to the creation of new, less orthodox writings like the *Boo Hoo Bible*. On the surface, the turn to Eastern spirituality might seem as a Western projection on exotic cultures, but as Jeffrey Kripal contends, “American visionaries saw their own altered states accurately, fantastically reflected in the mythologies and mystical systems of Asia. [...] That is why they loved India, Tibet, Nepal, and Japan.”<sup>81</sup> He adds that “It was much more a combination of

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<sup>80</sup> George Dugan, “Minister Extols Benefits of LSD,” *New York Times*, 4 July 1966.

<sup>81</sup> Jeffrey J. Kripal, “Mind Manifest: Psychedelia at Esalen and Beyond,” in *Esalen: America and the Religion of No Religion* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 126.

partial observation, an intuitive sympathy for Asian countercultures, selective borrowing, and almost perfect timing.”<sup>82</sup>

In spite of this richness, psychedelic spirituality was always tied to controversial and counter-cultural discourses - as well as illegal substances - that ultimately denied it its legitimacy. As the last chapter of this dissertation discusses, it laid the ground for competing spirituality in the form of charismatic gurus who promised to heal the ontological wounds opened by psychedelic experimentation without the use of drugs. In spite of these shortcomings, many psychedelic enthusiasts carried on with their spirituality using LSD as an adjunct, and in some cases continued to argue against the existing legislation, which they saw a form of religious persecution.

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 127.

## Chapter 7 Psychedelic Art

The use of a drug like LSD could trigger vivid visions of swirling patterns, iridescent light, and other-worldly encounters, and cause profound alteration of the ordinary waking states of consciousness. It not only led to the production of a new type of visionary art, but also to new aesthetic sensibilities that resulted from the use of psychedelics, rather than mere exposure to the psychedelic subculture. These substances were instrumental in the popularization of this new form of art that extended beyond plastic arts like painting: psychedelia permeated theater and cinema, and led to the development of multimedia and interactive installations that bombarded the senses in a way reminiscent of the psychedelic experience.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter studies the artistic productions that came about as a result of psychedelic drug use and ties them with some of the other themes examined in this dissertation – in particular with spirituality. It argues that art was the least contentious aspect of psychedelia: even if there were some minor disagreements as to how this art should be defined, most of it was well received and treated seriously. It was also a form of maturation of the psychedelic subculture and became arguably its only source of cultural legitimacy. The recycling and commercialization of this art signalled that it had moved away from its associations with deviance and subversion of the cultural order. Ultimately, this art was the arguably the most fitting illustration of the richness and complexity of psychedelia.

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<sup>1</sup> The study of the influence of LSD and psychedelics on music and literature is beyond the scope of this section, which only refers to these topics as notes in passing and concentrates on less-known aspects of psychedelic art as a whole. For some works on these topics, see Nicholas Bromell, *Tomorrow Never Knows: Rock and Psychedelics in the 1960s*

## Art Revisited

Though drugs were instrumental in the development of psychedelic art, it was helped by a favourable cultural substrate that enabled the new medium to blossom. One reporter saw it as emanating from the merging of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Dadaism and its emphasis on spontaneity and anarchy; Robert Rauschenberg's "Combines" that mixed conventional art with other media; Allan Kaprow's "Happenings," that pioneered the development of total environments "involving lights, taped sounds, textures and human antics;" Op art and the creation of hypnotic and illusionist patterns; and kinetic art that creates an impression of movement in the viewer's eyes.<sup>2</sup> For Masters and Houston, psychedelic art is partly a tributary of surrealism. "Psychedelic artists, like surrealist artists, are concerned with depth probes of the psyche and create a basically psychological art." Yet, they also added that both movements differed in many ways, notably because psychedelic artists were more concerned with the personal and spiritual growth they could take away from their art, when surrealism openly courted madness and the bizarre.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, Barry Schwartz holds that both movements question the very nature of reality, but contends that psychedelics ultimately offered far deeper and complex visions than what the surrealists could ever achieve.<sup>4</sup>

For Melvin Ross, of the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, "one reason artists experiment with psychedelics [...] involves the kinds of pressures society puts on the artist to do what the ordinary human being can't do. Many artists are panicky. They are searching for some perhaps magical way to remain in touch with themselves and still comply with the

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(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Lindsey Banco, *Travel and Drugs in Twentieth-Century Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> "Psychedelic Art," 68.

<sup>3</sup> Masters and Houston, "Art and Psychedelic Experience," 97.

<sup>4</sup> Barry N. Schwartz, "Context, Value and Direction," in *Psychedelic Art*, ed. Robert E. L. Masters and Jean Houston (New York: Grove Press / Balance House, 1968), 133.

irrational demands of society.”<sup>5</sup> Yet, while these substances were influential, they had no inherent artistic efficacy and did not automatically lead to the production of ground-breaking art. During the landmark psychedelic exhibition at the Coda Gallery in June 1965, for example, artists were invited to comment on the usefulness of these drugs in relation to their work. They made it clear that while they had the ability to open up the senses and henceforth new avenues of artistic awareness, artistic work remained challenging. One craftsman, for example, said he ultimately preferred to stay away from LSD for his work, because it made him too anxious.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Masters and Houston were just as cautious: “The artist, not the chemical, has to provide the intelligence, feeling, imagination, and talent. The psychedelic experience is *experience*, not injected talent or ingested inspiration, although the artist may draw inspiration from thought or perception, whatever the situation or the occurrence.”<sup>7</sup>

There were also disputes over just what and who qualified as psychedelic art and psychedelic artists. For Masters and Houston, “the psychedelic artist is an artist whose work has been significantly influenced by psychedelic experience and who acknowledges the impact of the experience on his work.”<sup>8</sup> For Schwartz, “psychedelic art must be defined as that art which deliberately attempts to re-create, introduce, stimulate, or convey the nature or essence of the psychedelic experience.”<sup>9</sup> But others saw the very concept of psychedelic art as problematic and contentious. One artist who had experimented with psychedelics contended that “anything presented as a work of art that inspires the mind, emotions, and sense with even

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<sup>5</sup> Howard Junker, “LSD: ‘The Contact High’,” *The Nation*, July 5, 1965, page unavailable, <http://www.thenation.com/article/156988/lsd-contact-high#> (accessed November 16, 2013).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Robert E. L. Masters and Jean Houston, “Psychedelic Art and Society,” in *Psychedelic Art* ed. Robert E. L. Masters and Jean Houston (New York: Grove Press / Balance House, 1968), 18.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>9</sup> Schwartz, “Context, Value and Direction,” 129.

a glimpse of the total awareness of consciousness being could be termed psychedelic art.”<sup>10</sup> As Schwartz elaborates, this would mean that just about all art would be psychedelic and, not surprisingly, Ivan Karp of the Castelli Gallery in Manhattan stated the reverse obvious: “it doesn’t exist.”<sup>11</sup> Another art critic from the *Village Voice* offered a more balanced definition when he contended that “all art can also be viewed as ‘psychedelic’ if the term is divorced from its drug context and used in the wider sense of ‘mind expanding.’”<sup>12</sup>

Semantic discussion notwithstanding, the psychedelic art that came about in the 1960s had fairly consensual characteristics. For Schwartz, “Psychedelic art is generally kinetic, vibrant, and filled with a burning restlessness.” Additionally, it “tends to be organic, molecular, cellular, with the ever-present sense of living tissue, as in the works of Isaac Abrams or Arlene Sklar-Weinstein.” Psychedelic art also shared four major possibilities in common - “the creation of a nonrational situation, the creation of acceptable illusions, the alteration of consciousness, and the introduction of spontaneity.”<sup>13</sup>

Though it is hard to assess the drug’s impact on New York’s art scene, one 33-year-old painter, who had taken the drug some 30 or 40 times, claimed that it was widespread in those circles: “almost all the people I know who are in any way connected with art or writing have tried it.”<sup>14</sup> In 1967, Stanley Krippner conducted the first major study on psychedelic artists that gives a good indication of their profiles.<sup>15</sup> He contacted and interviewed 91 artists who had allegedly undergone one or several psychedelic experiences. There were 78 men and 13

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<sup>10</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>14</sup> Jay Levin, “LSD in New York,” *New York Post*, June 7, 1966, folder “LSD – New York Post”, box 8, Stafford Papers.

<sup>15</sup> Krippner, “The Psychedelic Artist.” For the most part, it is never clear in the study where the artists were from. Thus, I present here an overview of Krippner’s findings, rather than an in-depth analysis to avoid an inaccurate and irrelevant assessment, and present the voices of New York artists when their names are available.

women, who were mostly from the New York area, though some came from other parts of the US and from Europe. Artists described their activities as follows: drawing (47); painting (44); light-shows or lumia (19); mixed-media (19); film (16); prose (15); photography (13); instrumental music (13); poetry (12); collage (4); sculpture (4); theater (4); and happenings (3). The choice psychedelic was LSD (for 84 people). An overwhelming majority (65) underwent their first psychedelic experience in the 1960s, with another seventeen in the 1950s and another three in the 1940s. Most of them agreed on a rather broad definition of psychedelic art. Sixty four artists admitted that the psychedelic experience had led them to revisit their work in some way or another; that it had allowed them to look beyond the barriers of their culture; or that it had created new unusual vantage points to look at the world. Allen Atwell believed that the psychedelic experience had profoundly changed his work and made him “more apocalyptic.”<sup>16</sup> Many artists found extra inspiration by working as groups. The light-show artist Don Snyder argued that psychedelics could help share ideas, but could also create a “collective mind.” During several psychedelic experiences, he also reported experiencing “intense feelings, under LSD, of entering into another person’s thoughts and becoming that person.”<sup>17</sup> Sklar-Weinstein claimed to better appreciate “the joy of details.”<sup>18</sup>

With their power of altering the mind and, according to some users, to expand consciousness, psychedelic drugs offered novel possibilities of experiencing various types of art. The video artist Andy Mann remembers watching Stanley Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey* under the influence of LSD and becoming even more eager to make films in the aftermath: “There was no screen [...] It was 3-D...it was beyond 3-D...it was 3-D all around

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 172.



me...”<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Krippner recalls attending a play in New York City called *The Golden Apple*, based on Ulysses’ odyssey after the Trojan War, the day after his first psilocybin experience. He was still under the influence: “The costumes and music transported me back to my expanded conscious state of the previous night.”<sup>20</sup> On another occasion, he took LSD in Brooklyn with some friends, and then proceeded to paint a Volkswagen bus. After that, he took them to the pictures to see *Freaks*, which featured characters with pointed heads. Some of those who attended began to feel their heads stretch out and point, just like in the film. Krippner, though, is quick to point out that it was an “artistic experience,” rather than some amusing activity to do under the influence of the drug.<sup>21</sup>

More broadly, the use of LSD could create significant ontological shifts, to the point where users took on new perspectives in their lives. In the aftermath of a psychedelic experience, several LSD users reported important changes in the way they perceived the world around them. As Masters and Houston comment, “colors and textures may be seen as having a beauty and richness never known before. Lines, too, are seen with exceptional clarity, and attention fastens on objects or details of objects and invests them with intensified meaning and emotional charge.”<sup>22</sup> For instance, the Brooklyn chemistry professor Gerald Oster had a meaningful psychedelic experience with LSD and began to paint psychedelic art as a direct result. He first heard about psychedelic drugs through Huxley’s writings, but was particularly intrigued as a leading authority on the scientific and aesthetic appraisal of Moiré patterns. On December 18, 1964, he presented his findings in front of a crowd of artists and psychologists at a staff seminar of NYU’s Research Center for Mental Health. Oster noticed that the

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<sup>19</sup> Andy Mann, interview by Davidson Gigliotti, December 27, 1999, page unavailable, <http://www.davidsonfiles.org/andymanninterview.html> (accessed November 8, 2013).

<sup>20</sup> Krippner, *Song of the Siren*, 24.

<sup>21</sup> Krippner, interview.

<sup>22</sup> Masters and Houston, “Art and Psychedelic Experience,” 89.

illusions of the moiré patterns were curiously close to the visions induced by LSD and admittedly speculated that such drugs could trigger a “screen” in each eye that was similar to moiré patterns.<sup>23</sup> “What struck him particularly was the ‘stunning magnificence of phosphenes,’ those dancing dots, spirals, radial lines and other luminous images that one can see when the eyes are closed or the fingers are pressed against the lids.”<sup>24</sup>

Arlene Sklar-Weinstein was one of many artists impressed by the vivid visions of the psychedelic experience, under the guidance of a psychologist. “There were myriad emerging and dissolving forms, pulsating colors, rising and falling. A series of mythic dramas were imaged. Everything was experienced as participating in the unitive rhythms of life.”<sup>25</sup> That single LSD experience, which she found very meaningful, was enough for her to radically revisit her art. As she recalls, “work prior to LSD, developed over a twenty-year span, was competent but largely derivative since there was no clear center of emanation. Areas of color and detail were arbitrarily closed. In effect, the LSD experience made available again the ‘lost’ and forgotten visual modalities one has as a child.”<sup>26</sup>

Allen Atwell’s art was also loaded with spiritual elements that further underscore the intertwining of art and religion. In his Upper East Side apartment, he had painted “monstrous forms – daemonic, fantastic beings, clusters of eviscerated organs, and other horrors” over the walls and the ceiling to create an “environmental” work intended as a psychedelic temple. Atwell had studied Eastern spirituality and lived in the Far East, and thus painted “in the tradition of the Tibetan masters: mentally projecting visual images upon the space before him and then painting what was seen.” Masters and Houston felt that the temple was remarkable in

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<sup>23</sup> John A. Osmundsen, “Device Simulates Mind-Drug Effects,” *New York Times*, December, 19 1964.

<sup>24</sup> “Psychedelic Art,” *Life*, 66. For an account of his experience, see Gerald Oster, “Moiré Patterns and Visual Hallucinations,” *The Psychedelic Review* 7, (1965): 33-40, <http://www.maps.org/psychedelicreview/n07/n07033osl.pdf> (accessed August 13, 2014).

<sup>25</sup> Masters and Houston, “Art and Psychedelic Experience,” 119.

that it contained no typical iconography in key places like an altar (“except for a mandala over the fireplace”); instead the whole environment was “a sweeping iconography, a spiritual organism.” They also contended that the reconciliation of the grotesque and the spiritual represented a worthwhile artistic accomplishment, because he had “given a satisfying, if temporary and aesthetic, resolution to the old theological problem of the existence of evil in the world.”<sup>27</sup> Finally, John Perreault of the *Village Voice* added that psychedelics had made possible a renewed appreciation of Eastern art, philosophy, and spirituality: “previously impenetrable forms of non-Western art are now for the first time accessible to a large group of people.” In particular, he thought of “Tibetan banners with their peculiar hypnotism of repeated forms; Near-Eastern carpets with their intricate, maze-like, organic patterns that twist and intertwine in a flatline infinity of form and color; and the universal, multi-directional symmetry of the mandala.”<sup>28</sup>

Although many artists were allegedly influenced by their drug use, some like Isaac Abrams, who had allegedly painted nothing before his first LSD experience in 1965, embraced a new artistic career as a direct result. His experimentation with psychedelics was indeed life-changing and helped develop a new sensibility that was both aesthetic and counter-cultural: “I had been taught that the most important things in life were to look neat, act nice and make money. Yet I knew that something was missing. There was something to do that I wasn’t doing.” In 1962, his psilocybin experience made him realize how empty his life had been (he tried mescaline a few months later in the country).<sup>29</sup> His conversion to art came later,

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 119–20.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 122–4. This recalls Huxley’s contention that the psychedelic experience could enable one to transcend dualism such as good and evil. See Aldous Huxley, “The Doors of Perception,” in *The Doors of Perception and Heaven and Hell* (New York: Harper, 2004), 17.

<sup>28</sup> John Perreault, “Psychedelic, It’s Not,” *Village Voice*, March 30, 1967, folder “Art,” box 2, Stafford papers.

<sup>29</sup> Krippner, “The Psychedelic Artist,” 177-8.

but he immediately realized the tremendous potential of psychedelic substances. After watching the ceiling move under the influence, he and his friends decided to go to the Charles movie theater to see some experimental films, which made a massive impression on him: “We were at the movie theater and we walk in, and there's like a hand-painted film going on. Like abstract films. There were rocket ships, there were some Jack Smith films.”<sup>30</sup>

Although Abrams turned to writing, it was only after his 1965 LSD experience that he started drawing: “As I worked, I experienced a process of self-realization concerning the drawing. When the drug’s effects wore off, I kept on drawing.” To perfect his art, he studied with the visionary artist Ernst Fuchs in Vienna and then underwent psychoanalysis to help him externalize his experience.<sup>31</sup> His first two paintings (“All Things Are One Thing” and “Flying Leap”) were purchased by influential New Yorkers, which underscores how quickly psychedelic art gained cultural legitimacy in the city. The first was acquired by Reed Erickson, who had a sex-change operation and became a woman. Erickson was a tremendously wealthy person, who founded the Erickson Educational Foundation to support the study of transsexualism, as well as Masters and Houston’s research. His daughter Monica still owns the painting. The second painting was purchased by the economist Stanley Scheinbaum - famous for organizing the defence of Daniel Ellsberg and for founding People for the American Way.<sup>32</sup>

Nina Graboi had one her most memorable experiences with psychedelics in 1968 at the home of Rachel and Isaac Abrams in Brooklyn. Isaac’s psychedelic art greatly appealed to her, because it had the ability to recall part of the psychedelic states of awareness: “He filled large canvases with bold splashes of brilliant color that revealed, when viewed with eyes cleansed by a psychedelic, image after image within the abstract form. [His] work reflected dimensions

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<sup>30</sup> Isaac Abrams, interview.

<sup>31</sup> Krippner, “The Psychedelic Artist,” 177-8.

accessible only to the turned-on eye.”<sup>33</sup> Her trip was a strong aesthetic experience in which she saw herself and her companions fathoming the heavens on a spaceship. From above she saw the Earth “full of Adam and Eves who gradually evolve and master technology throughout the ages. They went through a scene of war that soon made way for the prosperity and consumerist frenzy of the previous decade. Then, they moved back into the Sixties with its music, love and innocence.”<sup>34</sup>

In the realm of literature, Anaïs Nin wondered whether LSD use could enable Americans to better understand her writings: “another thing that attracted me to the use of LSD was that people who had not understood my work before, suddenly did under its influence. I felt perhaps this was the key to the stone wall between Americans and my work.”<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, she took issue with Leary in the formative years of his psychedelic research because he did not want to explore altered states of consciousness without the use of psychedelics and because he adopted a scientific language to study these experiences, when similar language had long been devised by mystics and poets – for instance, she found silly his attempts to prove Herman Hesse had written under the influence of drugs.<sup>36</sup>

Other forms of art became equally subjected to the influence of psychedelic drug use. In spring 1967, Leary was approached by the filmmaker Otto Preminger, looking for information about LSD for his film *Skidoo* (with Groucho Marx’s final appearance on screen). Leary thus organized an LSD session in Preminger’s luxurious apartment in Manhattan. Even for Leary, veteran of hundreds of trips, this was a fascinating and novel aesthetic experience, as he came “from three years in romantic Arcadia to Otto’s plastic-fantastic white-and-

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<sup>32</sup> Isaac Abrams, interview.

<sup>33</sup> Graboi, *One Foot in the Future*, 257–8.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

<sup>35</sup> Nin, *The Diary of Anaïs Nin*, 341.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 342. It is worth noting that Nin wrote this in Fall 1963. Leary became increasingly idiosyncratic as the decade unfolded.

chrome, futuristic projection room, which bristled with dials, lights, levers, and other control-panel paraphernalia.”<sup>37</sup>

This contrasted greatly with the usual appropriate setting (with, for example, candles, and religious symbols) Leary had conceptualized to guarantee a near-systematic positive experience. But the uncanniness of this particular session extended far beyond the mere setting. Indeed, after the LSD swung into action, Preminger became hyperactive and decided to turn on the television, changing channels, but also the colours and focus. At first, Leary saw this as counter-productive, because it favoured escapism rather than introspection or profound interaction with the environment. He looked for some Ravi Shankar records (a classic artist for psychedelic connoisseurs) to try and channel the trip into something more manageable, but he could only find film scores in his collection. Preminger switched on two other television sets and Leary wondered how he could stare “with gleeful satisfaction at a screen flickering with random patterns and dots,” until he had an epiphany that was to give a new direction to his philosophy: as a director, Preminger “took on the godly task of inventing a reality – he selected plot, location, actors. He then externalized his vision on film and marketed it so that millions of human beings could inhabit his creation.” This led Leary to realize that all the great philosophers were those who had been bold and gifted enough to impose their conception of reality to the multitude, when it had originated from their brains. Following this session, Leary felt that advanced information and communication technology had the power of extending the brain and could ultimately lead humankind to the next stage of evolution.<sup>38</sup>

Several artists sought to replicate the psychedelic experience without using drugs (or by using drugs as adjuncts) and devised multimedia light-shows<sup>39</sup> to stimulate the senses and

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<sup>37</sup> Leary, *Flashbacks*, 281.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 262.

<sup>39</sup> Andy Warhol’s “Exploding Plastic Inevitable” has been purposefully omitted from this discussion, because it has too often been considered a landmark of psychedelic art.

create a form of sensory disorientation that recalled the psychedelic experience. Though Thomas Wilfried had pioneered the medium in his “Lumia” compositions in the 1920s,<sup>40</sup> it was further developed in the 1960s and became a trademark artistic manifestation of the psychedelic subculture. Artists used various devices on light projections to create stimulating and experiential environments. As Masters and Houston acknowledge,

they frequently use light boxes that project on a wall or screen an endless variety of shifting, dissolving color forms that recapture the early unorganized visual imagery of the psychedelic experience. The nonrepetitive experiential flow is intended to suggest “the infinity of mind.” The viewer loses himself in this flow somewhat as one may do while looking at a fire. The effect is hypnotic, and trancelike states may be induced in some persons. In these hypnoid states, suggestibility is heightened, with the result that the beauty of the experience is enhanced. Unlike a motion picture, these projections have no beginning and no end. One stays as long as one wishes, and consciousness is changed according to capacity and circumstances.<sup>41</sup>

The 1960s light shows were always loosely connected to psychedelia and sought to mimick or reinforce the psychedelic experience through sound and light designs. Another reporter wrote that,

all light shows used every means possible to achieve bigger and better freak-out effects – flashing strobe lights, 16mm and 8mm film loops, old Betty Boop shorts projected on four walls and superimposed images of nudes and faces. But the most effective portions of the show were the liquids, achieved by squeezing colorful watercolor paints and oils on transparent clockface dishes, which turned around on top of overhead projectors and jiggled about to the beat of the music. The pulsating amoebas and swirling kaleidoscopes of color created those infamous insignia which made light shows such a trip.<sup>42</sup>

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Warhol and his crew were consumers of heroin and amphetamines, rather than psychedelics, but as Edwin Pouncey notes, Warhol’s Plastic was derided by the psychedelic circles when he took the show to the west coast in the summer of 1966. See Edwin Pouncey, “Laboratories of Light: Psychedelic Light Shows,” in *Summer of Love: Psychedelic Art, Social Crisis and Counterculture in the 1960s*, ed. Christoph Grunenberg and Jonathan Harris (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), 158.

<sup>40</sup> For a discussion on Wilfred, see Donna M. Stein, *Thomas Wilfred: Lumia, a Retrospective Exhibition* (Washington, DC: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1971).

<sup>41</sup> Masters and Houston, “Art and Psychedelic Experience,” 84.

<sup>42</sup> Blair Sabol, “The Heavy Light Shows,” *Show*, April 1970, page unavailable.

Altered states of consciousness were achieved either through soothing contemplation, allowing the viewer to gently experience the moment or through what became known as “sensory overload” that was deemed close to the psychedelic experience. For another commentator, “psychedelic art is not nearly so potent as LSD or other mind-expanding drugs, but most of its techniques do have a direct physical and mental effect, either tranquilizing or disturbing.”<sup>43</sup> One of the stated purposes of these processes was “to decondition the mind, break through the categories of thought, undercut the constancies of perception,” in order to develop a new psychedelic awareness.<sup>44</sup> Isaac Abrams concurred, but linked this to a broader psychological deconditioning: “And I felt that what I saw were people who believed that the process of being an artist has to do with the obliteration of self. In a certain way, it was a small mirror of revolutions, of obliterating the old structure and treating it as if it was evil.”<sup>45</sup> Thus, although multimedia light-shows were the consequence of LSD use, artistic inclinations and technological innovations, they also carried a philosophical dimension that can be tied back to some of the more militant discourses of the psychedelic Sixties.

Gerd Stern produced his art with USCO, a group of multimedia artists with backgrounds in poetry, painting, sculpting, weaving, or electronics, and who became famous for their experiential light-shows that they showed in North America and Europe. Their stated ambition was to create total environments through audio and visual techniques and design “primarily for use in education, but with a view towards entertainment *as* education.”<sup>46</sup> The group was strongly influenced by McLuhanism and by the emerging information and communication theories. Initially, Stern’s group preferred the sensory overload model: “when

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<sup>43</sup> “Psychedelic Art,” *Life*, 65.

<sup>44</sup> Masters and Houston, “Art and Psychedelic Experience,” 84.

<sup>45</sup> Isaac Abrams, interview.

<sup>46</sup> Gene Youngblood, “Part Six: Intermedia,” in *Expanded Cinema* (New York: Dutton, 1970), 348, [http://vasulka.org/Kitchen/PDF\\_ExpandedCinema/part6.pdf](http://vasulka.org/Kitchen/PDF_ExpandedCinema/part6.pdf) (accessed November 6, 2013).



you walk down the street you take in, say, 50-million inputs – sights, smells and so forth. You process and cope with them on many levels. Here, we create an overload situation where you can't bring in all of your critical baggage. The technique blocks out the analytical and judgemental faculties and allows the information to get straight through as emotional input."<sup>47</sup> Stern saw this model as potentially close to the LSD experience and "thought that if you could put enough stuff out there, you could kind of blow people away, that they would get to a point of openness by overwhelming them." The purpose of that experience, whether induced by media overload or LSD, "was to break through that linear time and space dimension so that you could go someplace else."<sup>48</sup>

But after December 1965, they realized that the model was problematic because of the pain and disorientation that ultimately clashed with the meditation techniques the group was practising.<sup>49</sup> More broadly, this model became a source of contention in the larger psychedelic community. Masters and Houston took issue with USCO (and the other artists working with that model), because they were "working rather crudely with a concept of 'sensory overload' that itself is primitive" and dismissed as an ersatz of psychedelic experience that did "not constitute a valuable expansion of consciousness."<sup>50</sup>

Though this innovative medium was primarily artistic, it also carried a strong religious element that further underscores the complexity of the psychedelic subculture. USCO created a total environment at the Riverside Museum, where spectators enjoyed their multimedia light-shows that also summoned other senses through audio collages and incense smells. In the first of the three rooms, they created a "light garden" in which spectators could "activate flowers made of lights by walking on floor switches." In the second room ("the cave"), they

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<sup>47</sup> Grace Glueck, "Multimedia: Massaging Senses for the Message," *New York Times*, September 16, 1967.

<sup>48</sup> Quoted in Oren, "USCO: 'Getting Out of Your Mind to Use Your Head,'" 78.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

“lay down on a rotating couch, and contemplated the pictures of demons, gods, and humans painted on the ceiling and the walls around them.” The third room dubbed “Creation” was a meditation space full of spiritual imagery: “In it were five nine-foot high paintings representing the planets in their orbits, the seven spheres, the Tree of Life, a male figure of Shiva, Hindu god of energy. His outflowing energy was symbolized by a central, pulsating light from which painted lines radiated.”<sup>51</sup> They called the performance a “be-in,”<sup>52</sup> because rather than simply look at the show passively, the audience was supposed “to exist in the show” and fully experience the disorientation and – potential – transcendence through external stimuli.<sup>53</sup> They also produced a cross-country road show called “We Are All One” that used “slides, movies, strobos, oscilloscopes, stereo tapes, a dancer and a heart beat.”

Upon experiencing their installation, Jonas Mekas was so overwhelmed by the combination of sounds and lights that he deemed it a form of religious experience that heralded a new era:

There are moments at the Dom [a psychedelic discothèque], and at the Riverside Museum, when I feel I am witnessing the beginnings of new religions, that I find myself in religious, mystical environments where the ceremonials and music and body movements and the symbolism of lights and colors are being discovered and explored. The very people who come to these shows have all something of a religious bond between them. Something is happening and is happening fast.<sup>54</sup>

Another of those seminal artists was Rudi Stern, who in the mid-1960s went to the Bridge Theater on St. Mark’s Place. There, he saw awe-inspiring “projections of circles, handmade circles, from two slide projectors with somebody’s fingers alternating between the lenses. You changed the slides with your palm, and you covered the lens and you created an

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<sup>50</sup> Masters and Houston, “Art and Psychedelic Experience,” 125.

<sup>51</sup> Naomi Feigelson, “Who R U?,” *Cheetah*, May 1968, 35, folder “Drugs Crackdown,” Box 4, Stafford papers.

<sup>52</sup> The word was coined by USCO and based on a play on words – removing the “g” of “human being.” Stern, e-mail to Chris Elcock, March 3, 2014.

<sup>53</sup> “Psychedelic Art,” *Life*, 65.

animated rhythm.”<sup>55</sup> That same evening, he met Jackie Cassen, who became his close collaborator for several years. They walked back to Stern’s place and took LSD – for Stern, allegedly the first time. They spent most of the night looking at a candle on the other side of a bombsight lens. Stern reported that the room became like an M.C. Escher painting.

It is quite likely that the show at the Bridge Theater combined with that LSD experience was a turning point in his artistic life. The next day, he and Cassen, who had already been working with light projection for at least two years, began working together at the Polish National Home on St. Mark’s Place. Later, they got involved with Isaac Abrams and wound up meeting Leary and stayed at Millbrook for a while.<sup>56</sup> They also held light-shows in their apartment on 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 24<sup>th</sup> Street. They made the projections on a rear screen in the loft and called their program the “Theater of Light.” As Stern recalls, “It was a completely black room, hung with black cloth, the only light when the audience came in was a fish tank, a little aquarium with fish in the center, with two projectors projecting into the tank. Because the water wasn’t clean, the projections were very visible. There was a lot of stuff in the tank so you could see the projections.”<sup>57</sup>

In his highly influential book *Expanded Cinema*, the media arts theorist Gene Youngblood argues that Cassen and Stern’s art “is contemplative and peaceful as opposed to the chaos of most intermedia environments. They seek to sharpen one’s consciousness, not to overwhelm it.”<sup>58</sup> But arguably what really makes Stern and Cassen stand out as light show artists, is that they subsequently extended their work beyond the realms of art or psychedelia

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<sup>54</sup> Quoted in Masters and Houston, “Art and Psychedelic Experience,” 126.

<sup>55</sup> Rudi Stern, interview by Davidson Gigliotti, December 1999, page unavailable, <http://davidsonfiles.org/rudisterninterview.html> (accessed November 7, 2013).

<sup>56</sup> Rudi Stern, interview.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Gene Youngblood, “Part Six: Intermedia,” in *Expanded Cinema* (New York: Dutton, 1970), 345–398, [http://vasulka.org/Kitchen/PDF\\_ExpandedCinema/part6.pdf](http://vasulka.org/Kitchen/PDF_ExpandedCinema/part6.pdf) (accessed November 6, 2013).

and into the world of radical politics (for the most part). Sometime around 1968, they made a video program that offered a 360 degree experience with footage of “Richard Nixon, a couple making love in a forest near Woodstock, demonstrations, Weathermen, riots in Berlin and Paris.” They made videos for the Black Panthers, the Weathermen, the Yippies, the Puerto Rican Young Lords, or the Gay Activist Alliance.<sup>59</sup>

Cassen’s collaboration with Ralph Metzner for the 1966 show “DMT” also illustrates how these events, which depended on technological innovation, carried a strong scientific element. One reporter described the event: “[...] slides and movies are projected onto a proscenium size [*sic*] piece of white opaque plastic. The whole thing is very organic [...] dancers move both in front and behind the screen and are responsible for its expansion and contraction.” Metzner, who was in charge of the sound, admitted that his motivations were both aesthetic and scientific, because “DMT” was “an experiment in the expansion of consciousness.”<sup>60</sup>

Other groups and artists were equally influential in the development of light shows. Tony Martin, though he would do most of his work in California, deserves to be mentioned as one of first light show artists, who created visual systems for the Electric Circus nightclub and become an artist-in-residence for NYU’s Intermedia Department.<sup>61</sup> Yet, Martin has also stayed clear from the notion that LSD (which he only tried once in San Francisco) had ever been the driving force behind his art. While he was a seminal figure in that realm, “it was as a painter who created light shows, not as an individual taking those drugs – I had no interest in that, nor

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<sup>59</sup> Rudi Stern interview.

<sup>60</sup> “Ladies of the Night,” *East Village Other* Vol. 1(10), April 15 – May 1, 1966.

<sup>61</sup> Ellen Pearlman, “Breakthroughs in Light: The Work of Tony Martin,” *The Brooklyn Rail*, March 1, 2002, page unavailable, <http://www.brooklynrail.org/2002/03/art/breakthroughs-in-light-the-work-of-tony-martin> (accessed November 7, 2013).

would I have been able to create the other, far more significant works I made in that era if I had.”<sup>62</sup>

Elsewhere, Pat Firpo co-founded the Pablo group, which performed at the Fillmore East, the Electric Circus show and the First International Psychedelic Exposition. Firpo also owned ran “Pablo’s Dispensaria of Joy” at 9 Bleecker Street, which also became a meeting point for anarchist groups like the Diggers and the Yippies.<sup>63</sup> The group was set up “in hope of providing environmental artists with maximal working conditions at the same time providing a structure for the marketing of their products.” Pablo also made available reproduction machinery for artists and groups at cost (*Innerspace* donated a mimeograph machine), as well as “a large neutral room in the back for experimentation in the environmental use of light and sound.”<sup>64</sup>

The Joshua Light Show was (and still is) an important group making multimedia shows.<sup>65</sup> Their first light shows with rock bands were conducted at the old Anderson Yiddish Theater and sponsored by Peter Stafford’s *Crawdaddy!* magazine. From 1968 to 1971, they performed every week-end as resident artists at Bill Graham’s Fillmore East for such seminal Sixties groups as the Grateful Dead, Jimi Hendrix, the Doors, Janis Joplin, or the Who.<sup>66</sup> The

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<sup>62</sup> Tony Martin, e-mail to Chris Elcock, February 26, 2013.

<sup>63</sup> Jimmy Jellinek, “Times a-Changin,” *NYMag.com*, date unavailable, <http://nymag.com/nymetro/realestate/neighborhoods/features/1081/>. 9 Bleecker Street became home of the Yippie Museum, which closed in 2014.

<sup>64</sup> “Communications,” *Innerspace*, 1966, page unavailable, folder “Innerspace,” box 21, Stafford Papers.

<sup>65</sup> For an account of White’s involvement with light-shows and Bill Graham’s Fillmore, see Edwin Pouncey “‘I Never Stopped Loving the Light’: Joshua White and the Joshua Light Show,” in *Summer of Love: Psychedelic Art, Social Crisis and Counterculture in the 1960s*, ed. Christoph Grunenberg and Jonathan Harris (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), 163-178. For another history of the Joshua Light Show that understands it as a form of cinema or of “paracinema,” see Gregory Zinman, “The Joshua Light Show: Concrete Practices and Ephemeral Effects,” *American Art* 22, no. 2 (2008): 17–21.

<sup>66</sup> For a description of the Joshua Light Show’s techniques, see <http://www.joshualightshow.com/about-classic/joshua-light-show-1967-68> (accessed November 13, 2013).

director of the crew Joshua White used to work for television, but had been unsatisfied by the medium, finding it too commercial and restrictive. But at the apex of psychedelia in 1967, he realized that there was a tremendous call for multimedia and experiential experimentation. For White, however, the light shows needed to be “subservient to the music.”<sup>67</sup>

Close to Rudi Stern and Jackie Cassen lived the psychedelic artist Richard Aldcroft, where he organized sessions with his “Infinity Projector” he had designed to offer a more personal variation of the light show. This consisted of a pair of goggles that allowed each eye to see separate shifting images – rather than a conventional binocular vision – that the mind then tried to assemble. They projected a series of slow-flowing and changing patterns that ultimately created disorientation, feelings of space and time disruption, and even colored visions reminiscent of the psychedelic experience that could be “ecstatically beautiful – or terrifying.”<sup>68</sup> Aldcroft organized projections at the New Theater in June 1965 and later ran more in various homes on a non-commercial basis.<sup>69</sup>

### **The Psychedelic Movement’s Artistic Productions**

If the use of psychedelics gave birth to a tangible artistic community, it also became an important way for the psychedelic movement to spread its message in the mid-Sixties. Leary and his followers organized several events that were intended to promote psychedelia through a combination of art, spirituality, and technology, and by collaborating with groups of artists. The result was an important publicity stunt that was noticed both by the media and the

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<sup>67</sup> Lillian Ross, “Videomagnifier,” *The New Yorker*, August 28, 1971, page unavailable, <http://www.joshualightshow.com/press-new-yorker-1971/new-yorker-1971> (accessed November 12, 2013).

<sup>68</sup> “Psychedelic Art,” *Life*, 64.

<sup>69</sup> Ball, “Triptape: An Interview with Richard Aldcroft,” 5.

increasingly visible audience that found an impressive expression of the psychedelic counter-culture.

On 5 April 1965, a group of Millbrook residents that included Allan Watts and the jazz musician Charlie Mingus (but not Leary, who was in India at the time) organized the first happening of their Psychedelic Theater at the Village Vanguard – a 123-seat basement jazz club located on Seventh Avenue. The purpose of the event was to replicate the sensory bombardment of the psychedelic experience, but without using any drugs. Instead, the audience was offered a complex sensory experience: Tibetan incense; stroboscopic lights; images of Mount Rushmore or the Buddha; music (jazz and the Beatles); and dancers.<sup>70</sup> Despite the best of efforts to offer a disquieting experience to the audience, the reception was lukewarm. As one reporter wrote, “A hundred would-be experiencers were turned away, business at the bar was slow, and the audience was rapt and curiously split.” Indeed, one Greenwich Villager resented the presence of non-Village elements amongst the crowd, underscoring how important this area had become for the psychedelic subculture: “There’s an awful lot of uptowners here.”<sup>71</sup>

In June 1965, Leary and Hollingshead went to NYC and to the New Theater (a 229-seater), which Billy Hitchcock had loaned them for one night. They spent the afternoon admiring the moving art of the light-artists, which Leary found delightful:

To externalize their visions these artists shot electric light through optical devices, through vials of colored gelatin, tumbling crystals, ellipsoid structures. This meta-light splashed on screens and reflected back to the audience, through the focusing mechanisms of corneas, through irises dilating and contracting with the 3.500 to 8.000 angstroms, through nerve fibers that collect and feed impulses to the brain, reaching cerebral zones that had never been activated with such Niagaras of exploding colors and

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<sup>70</sup> Michael Hollingshead, “The Millbrook Happenings,” in *The Man Who Turned on the World* (New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1973), page unavailable, <http://www.psychedelic-library.org/hollings.htm> (accessed September 6, 2012).

<sup>71</sup> “Incense and Bass: LSD Show Is S.R.O.,” *New York Times*, April 11, 1965.

wiggling patterns, except when very high on psychedelic drugs. The light-artists stimulated with pinpoint accuracy those areas of the brain that light up when one is lit up.<sup>72</sup>

They selected a few artists for the show and let others set up their devices in the lobby to create a preliminary stimulation for the incoming visitors. Then, Metzner gave a lecture on the capacities of the sense organs and Leary followed with a presentation of his theory of the various circuits of the brain and how they could be activated. The performance was in Leary's view quite successful, given the high attendance (with many NY jet-setters) and the favourable media coverage, which was intrigued by "the notion of turning on without drugs."<sup>73</sup>

In the summer of 1966, Leary and his associates organized a pageant at Millbrook, where they held a psychedelic light and sound show. An enthusiastic young producer and acquaintance of Billy Hitchcock, David Balding, then approached Leary and offered to organize a similar event in the East Village. The stated aim underscores the uniquely multifaceted nature of New York psychedelia and further indicates how psychedelic drug consumption led to complex cultural productions: "our aim was to produce multi-media re-enactments of the great religious, scientific, and philosophic myths using psychedelic techniques to activate the archetype circuits of the brain."<sup>74</sup>

To help promote the event, Leary and his surroundings officially incorporated as the League for Spiritual Discovery and announced the event during a press conference that drew considerable media and critical attention. Graboi made use of her apartment on 12<sup>th</sup> street as a base camp for the cast and crew. Leary, his then wife Rosemary, and Metzner became actors, while Jackie Cassen and Rudi Stern designed the light show – they collaborated with Richard Aldcoft for the occasion. From Rudi Stern's perspective, this multimedia art was a way of returning to a very basic form of theater: "[Antonin] Artaud first envisioned a theater taking

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<sup>72</sup> Leary, *Flashbacks*, 229–30.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.



the form of mythic structure – light, sound, and shadow replacing narrative, pantomime replacing acting.”<sup>75</sup>

The first show, called *The Death of the Mind*, intended at dramatizing Hesse’s *Steppenwolf*, opened at the Village Theater on September 20, 1966, soon to become Bill Graham’s Fillmore East (Graboi remembers the location as being “a shabby theater that featured mostly Yiddish plays.”<sup>76</sup>) According to Stern, it was a landmark for the psychedelic subculture. Most of the people who attended were under the influence of psychedelics. Upon entering the theater, they could listen to Peter Walker playing Ragas on his guitar to help create a meditative atmosphere. For the actual show, they had set up complex light-show equipment with three screens. “The light passed through, the image stayed, the light passed through to the next and to the third. [It] passed through but stayed enough so it became quite magical.” For one sequence called, they also added pictures of women who had their faces and mouths played through the screens. Another sequence used red paintings and was designed to simulate “a trip in the bloodstream of Harry Heller and [...] to visit the Magic Theater of *Steppenwolf*.” The impression of totality of the show was also magnified by the erosion of the audience/crew separation. Indeed, Stern gave his orders to assistants through a walkie-talkie that the whole theater heard very clearly.<sup>77</sup>

When Leary appeared on stage, Stern remembers how charismatic the High Priest of LSD looked: “the house lights would dim, Timothy came out with these white Indian pants and Indian shirt, and his white sneakers. Very youthful looking, beautiful looking guy. He’d look like 35, he was really then about 45. Glow in his eyes, wearing some beads, he looked fantastic.” Leary would regularly “weave between the three screens and his shadow was

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<sup>75</sup> Richard Goldstein, “Inside the Psychedelic Shell,” *The Village Voice*, October 20, 1966, folder “Leary, Timothy,” box 9, Stafford Papers.

<sup>76</sup> Graboi, *One Foot in the Future*, 206. According to Rudi Stern, this was the last remaining theater to run Yiddish plays.

played against the screens.” Apart from the light-show, which, according to Stern, only lasted about 45 minutes out of an hour and a half or two hours, Leary was the main center of attention.<sup>78</sup>

The show was an instant success (Stern remembers that “the crowds [...] stopped traffic on Second Avenue”<sup>79</sup>) with sell-out crowds for six weeks,<sup>80</sup> global press coverage and favourable critical reception. This prompted Leary to organize a second show, *The Resurrection of Jesus Christ* (this would be followed with *The Illumination of the Buddha*, *The Trial of Giordano Bruno*, *The Mischief of Georges Gurdjieff*, *The Rebellion of Ralph Waldo Emerson* and *The Assassination of Socrates*), which Leary described as “a pagan triumph.” Cassen and Stern shot a misty reversed-negative film of a man walking in Harlem, and super-imposed sides narrating the life of Christ and the history of the Roman Catholic Church, with its saints, virgins, and martyrs. To accompany the play, was a samba version of “Missa solemnis.”<sup>81</sup> For Leary, presenting the life of Christ through a psychedelic lens allowed “the average Christian [to] gain a deeper understanding of the power, the energy and the ancient meaning of the Christ figure.”<sup>82</sup> As a result, it would help the subculture become more acceptable by building bridges with orthodox religion.

Although the play carried explicit religious themes, it also illustrates Leary’s iconoclastic suspicion of dogma and established monotheistic religions. Indeed, during the play, the audience could see Jesus climb on a cross behind a screen (for, in Leary’s words, “some dumb reason or another”). Leary then walked to him on stage and cautioned him against his suicidal tendencies and the impact it may have on Western culture: “Hey, Jesus, if

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<sup>77</sup> Rudi Stern, interview.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Stern, however, remembers the show going on for 16 Tuesdays.

<sup>81</sup> Leary, *Flashbacks*, 255.

you go through with this you'll leave a 2,000-year-old tradition of pain and guilt. Centuries of Christian soldiers marching with bloody swords to avenge you. Billions of gloomy followers dressed in black, trying to match your suffering. Don't do it, JC." Instead, he suggested that Jesus accompany him for some beers and "sassy girls" and suggested that they "start a religion that laughs and sings to the love of life." Leary then went behind the screen and appeared to pull out the nails from the cross.<sup>83</sup>

If the end result of these performances can be seen as artistic in the larger tradition of New-York's avant-garde scene, it is quite apparent that they extended far beyond the realm of art. *Death of Mind* began with Leary reciting the following prayer that aptly illustrated the burgeoning psychedelic spirituality: "We pray for the courage and clarity to share with you our revelation. We pray for freedom from fear and from selfishness [...]. We pray [that] the energies released by the new substances we use will be used for the benefit of mankind and all sentient beings, and not for our material benefit and psychological enhancement."<sup>84</sup> As Krippner sums up, "It took on the trappings of a church service."<sup>85</sup>

Years later, Leary remembered how they designed the light shows as of means of transcending the individual: "In the early '60s we studied how great religions have used lights to dazzle eyes and imprint vulnerable brains of the faithful. Stained glass windows. Candles. Reflecting jewels. Gregorian chants. Bells."<sup>86</sup> Just before the beginning of the performance, cast and crew gathered on stage behind the closed curtains, holding hands. Leary reminded everyone that they were here "to serve the spirit" rather than themselves. Graboi felt a strong

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<sup>82</sup> "Love Leary LSD," *Los Angeles Free Press*, January 13, 1967, folder "League for Spiritual Discovery," box 9, Stafford Papers.

<sup>83</sup> Leary, *Flashbacks*, 255–6.

<sup>84</sup> Stephanie Harrington, "Dr. Leary's Formula: Turn On, Tune In, Drop Out," *Village Voice*, September 29, 1966, folder "League for Spiritual Discovery," box 9, Stafford Papers.

<sup>85</sup> Krippner, interview.

<sup>86</sup> Leary, *High Priest*, xxvii.

bond coming from him: “He was clad all in white; a glow seemed to emanate from his person.” The group then intoned “OM” and was soon ready to perform. It also seemed that “This brief moment of rededication to the spirit had a revitalizing effect on us all. When the curtain went up a few minutes later, the stage and the performers were ready, and the magic spread through the theater and embraced spectators.”<sup>87</sup>

If Leary held that theatre needed not be confined to art and was inherently religious, then it is no surprise that he saw more conventional art as missing an essential component. Thus, he took issue with contemporary plays written by “careerist intellectuals” and dismissed the plays of Tennessee Williams as “the memoirs of a neurotic.” Instead, he stated that “Art must involve the senses. All original drama is psychedelic. The theater, remember, was originally a religious experience. It all stems back to religious motives – someone with a vision turns other people on.”<sup>88</sup>

Likewise, light-show artists often saw their medium as a way of inducing altered states of consciousness and frequently borrowed from various spiritual traditions to make it more intelligible. For Jackie Cassen, they had the ability to “release” the mind and favour meditation. But beyond that dimension, certain light shows borrowed various elements of Eastern spirituality to incorporate them into their visuals. One journalist acknowledged the complex syncretism of the USCO light show:

In a nine-foot-high painting [...] stands a male figure representing Shiva, the Hindu god of creation, whose outflowing energy is symbolized by the central, pulsating light from which painted lines radiate. Superimposed upon the Shiva is a seated Buddha who is on an “inward journey,” his “divine light” immersed in the center of his being. At the edges of the canvas, red lights throb in the steady rhythm of a beating heart. These luminous fluctuations, allied with the symbolic imagery, are intended to induce contemplation.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Graboi, *One Foot in the Future*, 206.

<sup>88</sup> Richard Goldstein, “Inside the Psychedelic Shell,” *The Village Voice*, October 20, 1966, folder “Leary, Timothy,” box 9, Stafford Papers.

USCO and Leary ran shows once a week at the New Theater in midtown for about eight weeks and gave the proceedings to the Castalia Foundation to support their psychedelic movement. Isaac and Rachel Abrams moved all the paintings they had used for their psychedelic gallery to the New Theater in 1965.<sup>90</sup> The “Psychedelic Explorations” were a fitting example of the complexity of this novel art form that was impossible to reduce to one of its single dimensions. One reporter described the multimedia installation:

At the New Theatre the media are a half dozen film and slide projectors which wander and blend images over a huge screen which fills the proscenium arch, two “analog projectors” which are forms of lumia or color-organs developed by Richard Aldcroft, four diffraction hexes which are boxes in which revoke hexagonal figures studded with diffraction gratings (they break up the light like a prism) two NO-NOW-OW boxes which flash those combinations of letters with much clicking, as in an electronic brain, one presentation oscilloscope the size of a TV set, a strobe light which danced behind the screen; several sound channels ranging from the Beatles to erotic breathing; as well as a live drummer and, for the opening moments of the session, sitting on mattresses amid the media, a live “voyager” and two “guides,” one of whom would - if it were for real - go up, while the other remained down, to serve as ground control.<sup>91</sup>

During the event, Leary also gave lectures about psychedelics, which dealt with “the technology of consciousness-expansion, the practical and theoretical problems of psychedelic research.” These lectures and discussion served as a “theoretical background necessary for an understanding of the new techniques of audio-olfactory-visual alteration of consciousness [...]” In turn, the Theater served to illustrate all these discussions. Both the lectures and the Theater were intended at presenting the various themes related to psychedelia in science, religion, psychology, art, politics, and society.<sup>92</sup> The lectures also indicated that the

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<sup>89</sup> “Psychedelic Art,” *Life*, 62.

<sup>90</sup> Isaac Abrams, interview.

<sup>91</sup> Howard Junker, “LSD: ‘The Contact High,’” *The Nation*, July 5, 1965, page unavailable, <http://www.thenation.com/article/156988/lsd-contact-high#> (accessed November 16, 2013).

<sup>92</sup> “Castalla Foundation and USCO Present: Psychedelic Explorations,” folder “Castalla,” box 3, Stafford papers. In February 1966, Leary and Metzner gave a lecture on psychedelic consciousness that was accompanied by two films by Henri Michaux that attempt to replicate the psychedelic experience. See “Lecture Notes – Timothy Leary and Ralph

burgeoning psychedelic subculture had blossomed into something far more visible. Isaac Abrams remembers how the Theater was absolutely packed with psychedelic drug enthusiasts. At one point Leary asked: “‘Well how many people here have had the psychedelic experience? Gotten high?’ Suddenly, everybody raised their hand [laughs]. And suddenly it was a moment – really transformative moment.”<sup>93</sup>

Much to the dismay of Gerd Stern and his colleagues, however, “Timothy was kind of a dry, boring lecturer in those days. He got more lively as time went on. But we were appalled; it was the middle of this really turned-on show, and here was this professor standing up in the front going on and on.”<sup>94</sup> The Beat poet Michael McLure had given USCO a tape of Antonin Artaud screaming on a radio program as he was locked in the asylum and played it to interrupt Leary and create confusion in the audience – and thus give the show a more experiential dimension.<sup>95</sup> They also played audio excerpts of USCO members undergoing a difficult LSD experience and shouting “Oh God, oh God!”<sup>96</sup>

More broadly, the collaboration with USCO further reveals how psychedelia was riddled with disagreement. As Stern remembers, “the ‘Psychedelic Theater’ showed up a lot of schisms between our group and their group.”<sup>97</sup> He suggested that while Leary, Alpert, and most members of the psychedelic movement had moved away from social conformity as a result of their drug use, he, by contrast, had become more lucid and rational – something they had always resented, because it challenged the conception of LSD as a deconditioning agent.<sup>98</sup> Additionally, there was a rift between both groups because one of Stern’s friends wanted to

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Metzner on “The Language of Ecstasy” – second of three lectures delivered in New York Feb. 1966 at \$2 a shot,” folder “Castalla,” box 3, Stafford papers.

<sup>93</sup> Isaac Abrams, interview.

<sup>94</sup> Stern, “From Beat Scene Poet,” 91.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> Gerd Stern, interview.

<sup>97</sup> Stern, “From Beat Scene Poet,” 91.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

get in for free. Leary's group felt that "there were nothing but spongers" trying to dodge the cover charge.<sup>99</sup>

Others still were unimpressed by their attempts to re-create the psychedelic experience without the help of drugs. Though she managed to get an invitation, Lisa Bieberman did not fail to notice the staggering \$40 cover charge for one of their shows. Upon entering the venue Leary ended up admitting that "it wasn't really going to be like LSD, which was an understatement." She described Leary's show as "cluttered;" the mixed-media as "weird and confusion [*sic*];" and the electronic performance as "dissipating." She concluded that "The pretence that one could be enlightened by staring at light shows was eventually abandoned as people learned that I just didn't work."<sup>100</sup>

Still, the show was a success, even if a little chaotic for Leary, who asked Stern if USCO could do a show on the life of the Buddha - which Leary ended up doing with Cassen and Rudi Stern. For Gerd Stern, on the other hand, the show became a fantastic meeting point for psychedelic artists. USCO were happy to leave the door open for any artist to contribute and people like Aldcroft, Abrams, Stern, and Cassen became acquaintances who took part with their various instruments and projection tools.<sup>101</sup>

USCO also collaborated with the filmmaker Jud Yalkut, who produced disorienting films allegedly in an attempt to "find another way to hit people, to dislocate them, and then re-center them at the end - very much a trip analogy."<sup>102</sup> Masters and Houston described his art as "a torrent of hurtling colors and lights, forms blinking, whirling, and surging. Image follows image in rapid-fire succession, distorting awareness of time and space as the sensory

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<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>100</sup> Lisa Bieberman, "Bulletin," *Psychedelic Information Center*, 19, August, 1968, 2, folder "Drugs Crackdown (2)," box 5, Stafford Papers.

<sup>101</sup> Stern, "From Beat Scene Poet," 92.

bombardment continues.”<sup>103</sup> For Gerd Stern, a testimony of Yalkut’s use of psychedelics is apparent in his heavy use of the in and out zoom,<sup>104</sup> as can be seen in his collaborations with the polka-dot artist Yayoi Kusama.<sup>105</sup>

On March 1, 1968, Kusama presented her “Self Obliteration” at the Cooper Square Arts Theater in front of a crowded audience. To accompany the happening, a band composed of late-teenagers called “The Dayz Beyond” played psychedelic rock. Kusama entered from behind the stage, “dressed in red leotards with white dots sporadically covering her outfit and wears a long-furred black coat.” She was soon followed by three semi-nude men who wore US flags around their waists. As she began to paint dots on their skin, more naked or near-naked participants joined in. Then, a fake policeman arrived on stage, swinging his club and shouting that everyone was under arrest. He was wrestled down to the floor and stripped. Kusama then produced a print of the *Mona Lisa* and began painting dots on it, while a film partly made and edited by Yalkut appeared on a screen, just above the band. The whole event was intensified by flashing strobes.<sup>106</sup>

## Conclusion

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<sup>102</sup> Quoted in Gregory Zinman, “Dream Reeler: Jud Yalkut (1938-2013),” *The Brooklyn Rail*, September 4<sup>th</sup>, 2013, <http://www.brooklynrail.org/2013/09/film/dream-reeler-jud-yalkut-1938-2013> (accessed November 8, 2013).

<sup>103</sup> Masters and Houston, “Art and Psychedelic Experience,” 83.

<sup>104</sup> Gerd Stern, e-mail to Chris Elcock, November 8, 2013. Yalkut also produced a film called *D.M.T.*.

<sup>105</sup> See for instance Jud Yalkut, “Kusama’s Self-obliteration,” 1967, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n6wnhLqJqVE> (accessed November 9, 2013). This was scheduled at the Black Gate Theater in June 1967. See “Slumgoddess,” *East Village Other* Vol. 2(14), June 15 – July 1, 1967.

<sup>106</sup> Allan Katzman, “Jesus Runs Amok Crowd of Fags,” *East Village Other* Vol. 3(14), March 8 – March 14, 1968.



Psychedelic art was a critical component of the broader psychedelic subculture and a fitting illustration of its complexity. It created a new way of making, understanding, and revisiting art, as well as new forms of socializing centered around communal and transcendental experiences that were simultaneously religious, entertaining, and aesthetic. It found itself at the crossroads of technological innovations, a desire to probe the mind in a near-scientific way, and an expression of a new form of spirituality, usually removed from dogmatic imperatives - Masters and Houston aptly proposed that this art “might be called a scientific-religious or a mystical-scientific art.”<sup>107</sup>

Moreover, this particular form of art can be linked to the aesthetic philosophy of John Dewey. Although a full discussion on psychedelic art and his ideas is far beyond the scope of this conclusion, it is worth noting that Dewey argued that the philosophy of fine arts should be undertaken by restoring continuity “between the refined and intensified forms of experience that are works of art and the everyday events, doing, and sufferings that are universally recognized to constitute experience.”<sup>108</sup> For Dewey, the aesthetic philosophy of the idealist tradition elevated fine art to something transcendent, ethereal, but consequently divorced from the context in which it was produced. Dewey, who resented Cartesian dualism, argued against this separation because it failed to acknowledge that a work of art was both a natural and cultural experience. The rejection of dualism was also an important component of psychedelic intellectuals like Huxley and Watts, because the experience of drugs like LSD often led to the reconciliation of dichotomies (inside/outside; object/subject; nature/culture).<sup>109</sup> For a psychedelic artist like Abrams, the experience indeed made him realize the unity of the universe: “everything I do becomes a part of myself – an exchange of energy. [...] You are the

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<sup>107</sup> Masters and Houston, “Art and Psychedelic Experience,” 98.

<sup>108</sup> John Dewey, “Art as Experience,” in *Art and its Significance: An Anthology of Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Stephen David Ross (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 204-20.

wave but you are also the ocean.” Moreover, the reconnection with things of everyday life Dewey sought took place after his experimentations, which gave him a much stronger aesthetic sensibility: “Psychedelic drugs gave me a sense of harmony and beauty. For the first time, I can take pleasure in the beauty of a leaf, I can find meaning in the process of nature.”<sup>110</sup> Abrams thus seemed to embody this link: his aesthetic experience enabled him to integrate the aesthetic characteristics of nature and then build on this sensibility to produce works of art.

The cultural legacy of psychedelic art is an important one, albeit difficult to assess. The art critic Ken Johnson has recently put forth a bold argument that sees the use of psychedelic drugs, but also psychedelia (as the cultural outcome of such consumption), as a major catalyst in the historical coming about of modern art.<sup>111</sup> While this thesis is undoubtedly provocative, it is quite clear the Sixties saw important transformations in the arts and that psychedelics and psychedelia played a major part in that shift. As Masters and Houston predicted in 1968, “the coming arts of consciousness grounded in neurophysiology and psychedelic phenomenology may eventually bring to near-extinction the graphic arts as we have known them. These then would be integrated into mixed-media creations produced not by solitary artists but by teams of different kinds of artists working with scientists, engineers, technicians, and others.”<sup>112</sup> *Life* magazine was ominous when it wrote about it in September 1966: “psychedelic art is invading not only museums and colleges but cultural festivals, discothèques, movie houses and fashion shows. Like other major art movements, it is sure to

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<sup>109</sup> For more on this, see Elcock, “From Acid Revolution to Entheogenic Evolution.”

<sup>110</sup> Stanley Krippner, “The Psychedelic Artist,” in *Psychedelic Art*, ed. Robert E. L. Masters and Jean Houston (New York: Grove Press / Balance House, 1968), 177-8.

<sup>111</sup> Ken Johnson, *Are You Experienced? How Psychedelic Consciousness Transformed Modern Art* (New York: Prestel, 2011).

<sup>112</sup> Masters and Houston, “Art and Psychedelic Experience,” 124.

affect furnishings, clothes, ads and other aspects of everyday life, becoming – like Pop and Op – another household word.”<sup>113</sup>

Even if psychedelic art gained credibility to a point where it ended up becoming culturally sanctioned, it was never homogenous and riddled with internal disagreement over what constituted proper art. As Schwartz sums up, “it is appreciated that there are individuals who pass themselves off as psychedelic artists when their only commitment is to be thought of as associated with the current excitement.” But even if this new art had gained in visibility to a point where its codes were openly recycled in the post-war consumerist culture, the burgeoning psychedelic art had a long way to go to become officially recognized: “Psychedelic art is in part, as other avant-garde movement have been, a product of the galleries.”<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> “Psychedelic Art,” *Life*, 61.

<sup>114</sup> Barry N. Schwartz, “Context, Value and Direction,” in *Psychedelic Art*, ed. Robert E. L. Masters and Jean Houston (New York: Grove Press / Balance House, 1968), 153.

## Chapter 8

### The Metamorphosis of the Psychedelic Subculture

The psychedelic subculture had come a long way from its early days, when drug users first discovered LSD. By the end of the 1960s it had matured, radicalized, and developed different facets that occasionally made it appear more respectable; it underwent important changes that considerably altered its identity. The psychedelic counter-culture gradually waned, as some LSD users grew tired of life in the city. They found themselves challenged by other drug subcultures and a tougher legislation that introduced strong penalties for possession and distribution. This created a black market full of poor quality materials and an incentive to use non-psychedelic and addictive drugs. The crackdown on LSD was accompanied with attacks on Timothy Leary and the psychedelic movement, which could no longer promote psychedelic drugs along messianic and utopian lines, and caused LSD to lose its aura of a wonder drug. Psychedelic spirituality was also challenged by new religious movements that dismissed the claims of chemically induced mystical enlightenment as fake and lured former LSD users into joining their groups by offering a form of post-psychedelic religion.

But the greatest changes arose as a result of the subculture's own accomplishments and its visibility, and further illustrate how some of New York City's key attributes contributed to its identity. Psychedelia may have appeared marginal and deviant, but it was sufficiently present for the market to start taking interest – the final proof that the subculture had reached maturity. As its visibility increased and fell into the laws of the market, it acquired a greater cultural legitimacy that was no longer incompatible with the mainstream it supposedly criticized. In particular, its artistic productions were the critical elements that favoured this

graduation. Psychedelic art was present in art galleries and subject to the same laws of supply and demand as for more “orthodox” forms of art. Some LSD users set up psychedelic “head shops” where one could acquire a great deal of apparatuses that could enhance psychedelic experiences. Corporations hired psychedelic artists for advertising campaigns. Other entrepreneurs designed hip psychedelic discothèques that attracted New Yorkers regardless of class and age. Psychedelia even had its own television channel, albeit in the form of a theater.

Thus, psychedelic idealists retired from that scene. They converted to unorthodox spirituality, moved out of the city to live in more rural and sometimes communal areas or simply stopped using psychedelics. Meanwhile, the subculture, devoid of its idealism, was slowly assimilated into a much broader illicit drug subculture. This chapter synthesizes these changes in order to better historicize the unfolding of the psychedelic subculture and balances the thematic approach that has formed the bulk of this study.

### **Changing Drug Trends at the Turn of the Decade**

The borders between so-called good and bad drugs became even more porous towards the end of the decade. As one user sums up, “The Seventies was a terrible time [...], when the drug culture, the good - if you want to call it good part – disappeared [*sic*].”<sup>1</sup> Exactly when the psychedelic counter-culture was assimilated by a larger illicit drug subculture is hard to determine, but there are some clues. In 1970, the *East Village Other* journalist David Walley felt that the psychedelic ethos had waned and that “heads” had become “dopers,” who used drugs indiscriminately and without a greater purpose. He noticed that several teenagers had turned to addictive drugs and lived in a state of squalor. Additionally, LSD dealers appeared to have shunned the sense of duty so many were suffused with in the mid-Sixties: “There used to

be a time when the dealer was your friend, your dealer had some responsibility for what he sold and more importantly, who he sold it to.” Instead, the chances of finding fair-priced quality materials had dwindled – never mind the chances of befriending a dealer.<sup>2</sup>

In part, the shift occurred as a result of the prohibition of LSD and other major psychedelics. When authorities moved to increase penalties for possession of psychedelic drugs, some users concocted new unusual “legal highs.” One anonymous letter to the *East Village Other* described how to “get high” with an “Instant Icer” or “Frost-a-glass” (an instant glass chiller for liquids). This involved spraying some of icer into a leak-proof plastic bag and letting it warm in room temperature. Then, you only needed to inhale the contents deeply and hold your breath to be under the influence for about 60 seconds.<sup>3</sup> In 1967, many also tried smoking dried banana skins to replace cannabis. The substitute high that many reported, though, proved to be a placebo, as the psychoactive effects of the fruit are non-existent. “Dealers” sold the “drug” in the East Village and some entrepreneurs on the West Coast even set up the mail-order company Mellow Yellow to “peddle” banana skins across the country.<sup>4</sup> Ed Rosenfeld published *The Book of Highs* in the 1970s because he was concerned “that they were trying to legislate our ability to alter consciousness. So this book has 250 ways to alter consciousness without drugs. My motivation for doing that is: you can’t legislate this. You won’t be able to do it. There are too many different ways.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Brad, interview.

<sup>2</sup> David Walley, “Heads and Dopers: A Continuing Saga,” *East Village Other* Vol. 5(24), May 12, 1970.

<sup>3</sup> “Zonk,” letter to the *East Village Other* Vol. 2(22), October 1 – October 15, 1967.

<sup>4</sup> As McMillan thoughtfully contends, this is not just a bizarre and silly hoax, but it also illustrates the influence of the subterranean press in shaping patterns of deviant or illicit drug use and acting as a nationwide voice for the counter-culture from the underground, rather than just through rock-stars and other celebrities. See John McMillian, “‘Electric Bananas:’ The Underground Press and the Great Banana Hoax of 1967,” in *Smoking Typewriters: The Sixties Underground Press and the Rise of Alternative Media in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 66–81.

<sup>5</sup> Rosenfeld, interview.

But even before New York State provided stronger penalties for possession and trafficking of LSD, other psychedelic drug enthusiasts began to look into other more obscure, but legal drugs, such as “morning glory” seeds. They contain an LSA alkaloid with a chemical structure close to LSD, but their preparation is fastidious and their bitter taste and nauseous side-effects were not to everyone’s liking. One reporter once took some seeds in a New York apartment, because he had previously sampled peyote and undergone a pleasant experience, and wished to further probe the depths of his psyche. It seemed, though, that the drug had gained some sort of popularity, because many of the stores he visited were out of stock.<sup>6</sup> His trip had many ups and downs, but following a lengthy moment of introspection, he claimed to have found complete peace with himself and ultimately classified it as his “first truly ‘religious’ experience.” Weeks later, he claimed that he felt more open and caring towards other people.<sup>7</sup>

Yet, the main the shift away from classic psychedelics occurred under the influence of addictive drugs. One 18-year old psychedelic drug user begged Leary for help because he was trapped somewhere in between the awe of the psychedelic experience and the addiction of heroin, speed, or barbiturates: “When I trip I reach illumination [...], but when I return to my ego, I find myself taking the same narcotics.” He understood this tension along spiritual lines and also felt that he needed to learn “how to perform certain acts of growing up.”<sup>8</sup> This was a classic case of existential crisis caused by the ontological uncertainties of the psychedelic experience, but also possibly because he had experimented in his adolescent years.

Walley recalled an interaction with a sixteen-year old Black man who had used the vast majority of illegal substances. Although the teenager threatened him with a peace of

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<sup>6</sup> Arthur Roberts, “Consciousness Expanding Drugs,” *Clyde*, January 1965, 77, folder “Morning Glory,” box 10, Stafford Papers.

<sup>7</sup> Roberts, “Consciousness Expanding Drugs,” 79.

<sup>8</sup> Fred Pincas to Timothy Leary, October 1969, folder 5, box 73, Leary papers.

broken glass and forced him to give him five dollars, Walley decided to learn about his life and drug habits and described the interaction as a moment of communication between the two subcultures – “the junkie and the freak.” He had been sent to reformatory school and had been living on the streets and using heroin for six months, and allegedly killed two people in Harlem in order to rob them.<sup>9</sup> For Walley, this typified the new drug scene that was far removed from the psychedelic ethos: “Smack makes no demands and raises no questions which acid, mescaline or even thoughtful introspective grass smoking used to do.”<sup>10</sup>

The teenager had also used LSD – during one trip, he allegedly saw the faces of those he had killed infested with snakes. Walley ultimately branded him an LSD “casualty:” he first tried the drug sometime in 1966, when he was merely twelve years of age, probably to “escape from boredom.” More broadly, he felt that the increased media exposure of the psychedelic drug culture had been a mixed bag: “The summer of 1967 may have been a revelation to thousands of middle-class kids, but drugs for others were an excuse, an escape, a kick, a non-confrontation.” He also wondered: “What happened to the mystique of acid? There was a time when an acidhead was the holy guru of the psychedelic world, the most together one who experienced and learned from the trip into and away from the Self [...].”<sup>11</sup>

This meeting can be re-framed along the lines of class to better appreciate how addictive drugs differed from psychedelics. Where a drug like LSD tends to heighten awareness, heroin does the opposite by numbing the senses. Thus, it is understandable that a teenager coming from a harsh socio-economic background should find more comfort in using opiates than in using LSD. By contrast, it is more possible that an educated journalist will likely be more interested in using LSD and build on the experience for his own betterment.

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<sup>9</sup> David Walley, “Conversation with a Sixteen Year Old Junkie,” *East Village Other* Vol. 5(10), February 11, 1970.

<sup>10</sup> David Walley, “Heads and Dopers: A Continuing Saga,” *East Village Other* Vol. 5(24), May 12, 1970.



Towards the end of the decade the changing patterns of drug use had a major impact on counter-cultural enclaves like the East Village. As one observer put it, “The glamour of living in a crash pad is gone, no one talks about changing society by dropping out, and wide eyed naivete has given way to hollow cheeked survival.”<sup>12</sup> Amelie Edwards noticed the changes in the East Village. After going to California in 1967 and coming back to New York, she stayed with her parents for a while, but soon left home again. In 1968, she ended up in another commune that was mostly composed of amphetamine and heroin users. “They were thieves, they were heroin addicts. They did everything bad. I mean, they had me go to the department store with a phony credit card and charge things.” There was little LSD available and the people there soon realized that Edwards was a liability because they had to prepare the amphetamine needles for her to use.<sup>13</sup>

There were much broader changes as well. By 1967, LSD had gained such a sensational reputation (for better or worse) that many New Yorkers had preconceived ideas about it, regardless of whether they had experimented. Joe Gross, a practising psychiatrist near Central Park, had joined Kleps’ Neo-American Church and visited Millbrook a few times. He occasionally smoked a joint, which made him feel a little paranoid, but had not tried LSD, fearing that “he would turn into a ravening monster if he took acid, and perhaps murder his mother and rape the nearest Scandinavian blonde, or vice versa.” But oddly enough, he became drawn to the Millbrook scene and claimed to believe in the power of the psychedelic experience.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Walley, “Conversation with a Sixteen Year Old Junkie.”

<sup>12</sup> John Garabedian, “East Village: A Bad Trip,” *New York Post*, July 3, 1968, folder “Drugs Crackdown,” Box 4, Stafford papers.

<sup>13</sup> Edwards, interview.

<sup>14</sup> Art Kleps, “Sir Launcelot and Knights to the Rescue,” in *Millbrook: A Narrative of the Early Years of American Psychedelianism, Recension of 2005* (San Francisco: Original Kleptonian Neo-American Church, 2005), page unavailable, <http://okneoac.org/millbrook/> (accessed September 12, 2013).

Even the New York upper class seemed to endorse a wide range of illegal drugs. On Christmas Eve in 1967, Kleps attended a party and realized “how unconcerned with legality people had become in ‘cafe society’ and show-biz circles in New York.” Indeed, the hosts had provided the guests with liberal doses of cocaine and hired a man to roll cannabis joints. But what struck Kleps was how those who did not partake were totally indifferent to the scene and did not see such behaviour as shocking.<sup>15</sup>

In experiential nightclubs and total environment, there was a similar shift that was marked by the diversification of drug use amongst psychedelic drug users. Larry Vigus of the Cerebrum nightclub recalls:

I personally smoked marijuana every day and hash very often and so did most of us. At least a couple of the 18 people on staff at CEREBRUM took LSD almost daily. I saved psilocybin and LSD for special occasions. Occasionally I smoked opium, sampled cocaine or used Amyl Nitrate. I didn't enjoy “speed” or “uppers” and downers weren't very popular until Quaaludes arrived big a couple of years later. I didn't regularly use cocaine until the mid-70s.<sup>16</sup>

For the light-show designer Joshua White, cocaine signaled the end of psychedelic innocence and made him turn away from the artistic medium. His coworkers had always been open to constructive arguments and remained open and gentle. But after the 1969 Woodstock festival and the arrival of cocaine, the serene atmosphere dramatically waned. “It was very cheap, everybody took it, and suddenly everything got much meaner. When people on cocaine are threatening to kill you, even though I wasn't afraid, I just felt it was time to move on.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Art Kleps, “The Battle of the Sand Belt,” in *Millbrook: A Narrative of the Early Years of American Psychedelianism, Recension of 2005* (San Francisco: Original Kleptonian Neo-American Church, 2005), page unavailable, <http://okneoac.org/millbrook/> (accessed September 12, 2013).

<sup>16</sup> Larry Vigus, e-mail to Chris Elcock, November 9, 2013. Only one couple used LSD daily.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Edwin Pouncey “‘I Never Stopped Loving the Light’: Joshua White and the Joshua Light Show,” in *Summer of Love: Psychedelic Art, Social Crisis and Counterculture in the 1960s*, ed. Christoph Grunenberg and Jonathan Harris (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), 176.

For someone like Leary who had placed tremendous faith in psychedelics to naturally bring about social and political change to the United States, amphetamines had also become nothing short of a counter-revolutionary chemical, and admitted that this had dented his hopes of a swift psychedelic revolution: “I didn’t anticipate speed [...], I suppose because I’m such a high energy person myself and optimistic.”<sup>18</sup>

The quality of LSD had widely changed. Jean Houston was one of many who cautioned against fake LSD: “It’s as bad as bathtub gin. It’s an unknown psychochemical that contains goodness knows what.”<sup>19</sup> While the Orange Sunshine brand of LSD had become almost legendary on account of its potency, other kinds of LSD doses contained so many additives that many deemed them not to be LSD anymore. One dealer clearly discriminated between pure LSD like Sunshine and the average mediocre street doses: “Beware of ‘Orange Wedge’, which started out as a relatively good product, but has been messed with since. They have Strychnine and Belladonna and god knows what other weird, fucked-up, bad Karma drugs into it. It is extremely dangerous.”<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Stanley Krippner referred to an analysis of black market LSD that estimate that less than 10% of street LSD was pure, and not altered with methedrine, heroin, atropine, and strychnine.<sup>21</sup>

In particular, methedrine was another drug that typified the changing patterns of drug use in the late Sixties. As the radical left-wing activist Abbie Hoffman put it, “There’s a notable absence of LSD, and a very high increase in the use of meth. It’s a very self-

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<sup>18</sup> Ron Rosenbaum, “Leary’s Final Dropout: ‘This Time Around’?,” *Village Voice*, January 8, 1970, folder “Village Voice,” Stafford Papers.

<sup>19</sup> Susan Szekely, “Teen Talk,” *World of Women*, September 15, 1966, 8, folder “Masters + Houston,” box 9, Stafford Papers.

<sup>20</sup> “Sunshine Supermen,” interviewed by Jaakov Kohn in the *East Village Other* Vol. 4(28), June 19, 1969.

<sup>21</sup> William Slattery, “Researcher Argues Pot Laws Hurt, not Help, Society,” *Staten Island Avenue*, November 17, 1969, folder “Krippner, Stanley,” box 7, Stafford Papers.

destructive drug, and so there's a lot of violence."<sup>22</sup> New York Provo claimed that the drug had become popular in the psychedelic subculture, because it was quite close to psychedelics in its effects, even though it was addictive. Moreover, Provo linked the rise of methedrine-laced LSD with the Mafia's involvement in the trade. Where an LSD user would perhaps take the drug no more than once or twice a week, a methedrine user might take it four or five times a day to satisfy the craving. It thus made economic sense to mix the drug with psychedelics to gradually lure LSD users into using methedrine on a daily basis.<sup>23</sup>

The *East Village Other* also published an anonymous letter that cautioned against fake Sunshine and claimed that only a handful of people in NYC dealt the real Sunshine, who could be recognized as holy people who shunned profit.<sup>24</sup> The paper was an important source of information about illicit or obscure drugs and had a moral obligation to caution about dangerous drugs: "since EVO's editorial policy has it that every head should know how he got that way, we mean to detail the latest information available to us on the New Psychedelics." On one occasion, it cautioned against smoking hydrangea, because of "certain possible unhealthy factors concerning the hydrangea high," such as carbon dioxide overload in the bloodstream. Instead of that new exotic drug, the paper recommended licking "magic toads" that contain bufotenine.<sup>25</sup> On another occasion, the MD Eugene Schoenfeld (a regular contributor to the paper) issued a warning against anaesthetic cyclopropane (Trimethylene), which was mistaken for laughing gas (nitrous oxide), and could cause arrhythmia of the heart, respiratory failure, nausea, or vomiting.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Garabedian, "East Village: A Bad Trip."

<sup>23</sup> "Mafia Acid," New York Provo Statement, July 20, 1967, folder "LSD – Mafia," box 8, Stafford Papers.

<sup>24</sup> "Intergalactic Union Doprogram," *East Village Other* Vol. 5(16), March 27, 1970.

<sup>25</sup> "Cyanara," *East Village Other* Vol. 2(10), April 15 – May 1, 1970, folder "Banana High, Pepper, etc.," box 2, Stafford papers.

<sup>26</sup> Eugene Schoenfeld, "Hip-pocrates," *East Village Other* Vol. 4(22), April 30, 1969, folder, *East Village Other*, box 18, Stafford Papers.

New powerful psychedelics such as STP (2,5-Dimethoxy-4-methylamphetamine) arrived on the streets of New York in the second part of the Sixties and became an even greater health hazard. STP is much more powerful than LSD, but its effects also last longer. Back then, however, little was known of its pharmacology. At the same time, the drug had no legal status and possession was not a misdemeanour. Don McNeill of the *Village Voice* estimated that as of April 1967 approximately 100 New Yorkers had tried the drug. One user who experienced it was overwhelmed: “You feel like your body is a conductor for tens of thousands of volts.” Another female user reported that the drug lacked the disorienting features of LSD: “everything looks like it does when you’re straight. [...] There also seems to be less identity confusion than under LSD. You know who you are.”<sup>27</sup> Still, many in the East Village soon spread the word that STP was dangerous and far less manageable than LSD. Amelie Edwards, who took the drug once and saw the walls crawling with insects, recalls it created confusion and paranoia in the psychedelic scene: “So people would start to be afraid of taking acid because – you’d always ask: ‘does it have STP in it?’ ‘Is it STP?’”<sup>28</sup>

Powerful “drug cocktails” also appeared in the New York drug scene. One teenager who had run away from his parents and turned his apartment into a “crash pad” where people could stay as long as they pleased, tried a “peace pill” that combined LSD, mescaline, belladonna, and phenobarbital on 6 April 1969. “I’m after a total life experience. [...] I had a total aphrodisiac experience. I loved everything. Sometimes I think the total experience I’m after may be simply dying.”<sup>29</sup>

### **Shifting Geographies of LSD use**

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<sup>27</sup> Don McNeill, “Is Acid Obsolete? The New Letters Are STP,” *Village Voice*, April 12, 1967, folder “STP,” box 13, Stafford Papers.

<sup>28</sup> Edwards, interview.

Though LSD use gradually increased throughout the decade, several users realized that the urban spaces of New York City were ill-suited for psychedelics and for the blossoming of psychedelia. The LSD experience basically made the immediate environment more intense and sometimes difficult to cope with. Because the drug has the effect of amplifying sensory perception, users under the influence might feel uncomfortable when confronted with crowds at rush-hour. As Leary bluntly put it, “You don’t make love in the turmoil of Times Square. Neither do you take LSD there. It’s risky to make love with strangers.”<sup>30</sup>

Thus, several users came to the conclusion that taking psychedelic drugs in the city increased the risk of having disquieting or even negative experiences. Psychedelics could amplify the senses to a point where users could feel intimately and intensely connected with their immediate environment. For Leary, “The last thing a New Yorker needs is a chemical that induces hypersensitivity, that exposes the ‘aliveness’ of everything. For someone just passing through, New York was a wonderful seething place to experience LSD; for those who lived and worked there psychedelic drugs tended to overload the system.”<sup>31</sup> Leary even confessed to Nina Graboi that he hated the city: “Someday, they’ll tear up all that concrete and put the metal back underground. There’ll be grass and flowers growing on Times Square in five years, take it from me!”<sup>32</sup>

Leary’s comments illustrate how many LSD users ultimately shunned the grey concrete spaces and turned to more natural settings. The feeling of unity that they could experience tended to be far more pleasurable if they were surrounded by trees, grass or flowers. As a result, some New York LSD users realized that places of green made for good

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<sup>29</sup> Susan Braudy, “Sunday at the Fountain,” *New York*, July 28, 1969, 43, folder “New York,” box 26, Stafford Papers.

<sup>30</sup> Leary, *High Priest*, 170.

<sup>31</sup> Leary, *Flashbacks*, 200.

spots to enjoy their experience amidst the overcrowded urban spaces. One user told Graboi, “Mostly I turn on with Jim and Rick. We go to the park in Brooklyn [likely Prospect Park]. We have a ball.” During their trips, they saw natural elements with new eyes: “We see things. You know – the trees dance and everything is, like, alive! It’s like we don’t have to talk to each other because we’re tuned in.”<sup>33</sup>

Central Park was also a green haven amidst the urban jungle and became a well-known spot for taking LSD or for socializing with LSD enthusiasts. Amelie Edwards also enjoyed taking LSD by the fountain: “We just tripped. And there were some people that were out of school that used to trip all the time. We used to just sit on blankets and just take LSD and just – I remember just kind of running through the fountain.”<sup>34</sup> The 1967 Easter Be-in in Central Park was the East Coast counter-point to the San Francisco Be-in. Around twelve thousand people attended. The idea originated from USCO’s Riverside Museum installation, which was partly based on the idea that the audience should actively participate in the show, rather than just attend.<sup>35</sup> The first mentions of the Be-In appeared in the *Village Voice* courtesy of Howard Smith, who suggested that the event would see plenty of LSD. “This gave the Parks Department so much an acid indigestion that they cancelled the permit.” As a result, there were no planned events. Instead, “The people provided their own entertainment and each had room ‘to do his own thing.’”<sup>36</sup> “Virtually everyone was on acid,” remembers Graboi.<sup>37</sup>

But at the same time, others carried on taking the drug on the streets. One LSD dealer, who took the drug on a daily basis, admitted that he preferred to enjoy the experience at home,

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<sup>32</sup> Graboi, *One Foot in the Future*, 145.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

<sup>34</sup> Edwards, interview.

<sup>35</sup> According to Gerd Stern, “it was the elimination of the ‘g’ from human being that birthed the expression.” Gerd Stern, e-mail to Chris Elcock, March 3, 2014.

<sup>36</sup> Pat Patterson, “Underground Uprising,” source unavailable, date unavailable, 12, folder “Be-ins,” Box 2, Stafford papers.

<sup>37</sup> Graboi, *One Foot in the Future*, 246.

but forced himself to do it on the streets: “Otherwise I would be living in my own little world and wouldn’t be aware of what’s happening around me. I wouldn’t be aware of other people’s ideas and the trips they are on.” Yet, he also liked to observe the environment and saw the country as a safety-valve that he could turn to if the pressures and stress of his activities were to become too intense: “If I become deranged from the pressure I shall split the scene, go out into the country and recover my head.”<sup>38</sup>

The gradual distrust of the city as an area in which one could take psychedelics and the realization that natural spaces offered more positive experiences ultimately assumed the form of an urban exodus. Many LSD users had grown tired of tripping in New York’s urban spaces and its green havens were no longer enough. It is thus quite likely that LSD and psychedelic drugs played an important part in fermenting a greater environmental awareness that best expressed itself in a rejection of the urban and an embrace of the rural. For instance, one psychedelic drug user suffered a deep existential crisis following his experimentation and realized that he had “become intensely aware of the spiritual suffocation of the city life.” This father of two children, who had recently separated from his wife, decided to look for a community “composed of really tuned-on people who would have a sense of responsibility towards the community and its members.”<sup>39</sup>

For Leary, those experienced with psychedelics, and who saw there was something wrong with American society, were faced with two choices. They could either “stay in the system” and change it gently from within, or they could join the exodus: “You can drop out entirely. Leave the city. Head to the land. Stay high. Breed. Tune in to nature.”<sup>40</sup> During a 1970 talk at the Electric Circus nightclub, he re-affirmed his view that the city did not make

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<sup>38</sup> “Midipusher,” interviewed by Jaakov Kohn, *East Village Other* Vol. 4(8), January 24, 1969.

<sup>39</sup> Shelly Urso to Timothy Leary, September 18, 1967, folder 4, box 77; Leary papers.



for an ideal setting to take LSD and argued that pristine and quiet locations were the best: “Three days ago my wife and I were high on 100 micrograms on a mountaintop and up there we could see absolutely nothing man-made. And there the world was all worth looking at. People who take LSD and go into a New York City subway, well that’s no place to spend several billion years.” Instead, he told his audience that New York State alone had many untouched mountains that lent themselves much better to his psychedelic way of life.<sup>41</sup>

In May 1970, Graboi, who had moved to Woodstock, New York, after the Center was forced to close down, felt that the “decaying city” was no longer a suitable place for the use of LSD, after having lived with the supportive Woodstock community.<sup>42</sup> Likewise, the Abrams moved to Woodstock around 1967 when they had their daughter, because Rachel was aware of the climate of urban decay and wanted to raise her in a better setting: “we were going to the park and she was crawling around picking up cigarette butts and empty beer cans. And I was just disgusted with it.”<sup>43</sup>

During the First International Psychedelic Exposition, Merrill Mushroom discussed the life in the city with a man called Jason (both were under influence of LSD). As a result of his psychedelic experiences, Jason no longer wished to remain in the city, because he found it to be too crowded and chaotic: “There’s too much coming in through these open doors of perception, too much violence, hate and paranoia.” Instead, he now wanted to be surrounded by like-minded individuals in a more communal setting, like he had been for a week during the Exposition: “[...] I want to live like this all the time, in community with people I love, people who’ve had experiences similar to my own, people I can share a dream with.”

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<sup>40</sup> Timothy Leary, interviewed by Jaakov Kohn in the *East Village Other* Vol. 5(3), December 24, 1969.

<sup>41</sup> Ron Rosenbaum, “Leary’s Final Dropout: ‘This Time Around’?,” *Village Voice*, January 8, 1970, folder “Village Voice,” Stafford Papers.

<sup>42</sup> Graboi, *One Foot in the Future*, 294.

<sup>43</sup> Rachel Abrams, interview.

It is quite possible, then, that this phenomenon also accounts for the gradual decline of a visible and unified counter-culture in New York's psychedelic enclaves. Those who still had strong ideals and utopian fancies felt that the psychedelic way of life was incompatible with the city, its everyday stresses and the competing drug subcultures. At the same time, it also deserves to be connected with the rejection of the urban way of life and the rise of communal living in a more rural setting.

Mushroom concurred, but was more ambivalent. On the one hand, he had often felt that the hectic life of the City was too much: "so many of the feelings I experienced were really not my own but came from other people crowded together with myself in the tightly-packed spaces through which we moved and lived. People were too closely crammed against each other, even to the point of intruding across psychic boundaries." This led him to stop using the stronger psychedelics within the confines of the city, because they seemed to amplify the daily stresses of the urban life. On the other hand, he still loved life in the city, regardless of the violence and paranoia, because of the innumerable experiences it could still offer. Yet, "Someday, I knew, this would pall, and I would join the outwardly mobile hippie stream in search of that Great Commune in the Sky, but that was not yet."<sup>44</sup>

The changing patterns of drug use are also connected to the geography of drug use and to the exodus. The increased presence of physically addictive substances was responsible for an exodus away from the city and into other places that seemed to be better suited for psychedelia. As David Walley concluded in 1970, "all the heads that I know have either been busted, fled to the hills, started communes, or continued to be heads in a dying world cosmology."<sup>45</sup> With the crackdown on psychedelics at the end of the 1960s, several psychedelic drug enthusiasts from all around the country's major cities looked elsewhere to

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<sup>44</sup> Meril Mushroom, "The First International Psychedelic Exposition," in *Psychedelic Trips for the Mind*, ed. Paul Krassner (New York: Trans-High Corp., 2001), 15.

satisfy their needs, with some of them ending up in Oaxaca, Mexico where psilocybin mushrooms grow naturally, despite the Mexican authorities' attempt to quash the exodus.<sup>46</sup>

### **Commodification**

While the changing patterns of drug use were an important cause behind the transformations in the psychedelic subculture, market interests also explain this. With psychedelia's growing popularity came its inevitable commodification, with crafty entrepreneurs cashing in on the psychedelic scene. But just like the psychedelic showcase on Carmine Street and the First International Psychedelic Exposition in Forest Hills, this phenomenon must be analysed cautiously and not reduced to the obvious conclusion that psychedelia "sold out." Rather, it further illustrates the notion that a subculture – or a counter-culture – does not operate outside the dominant structure it criticizes or seemingly shuns. It demonstrates fluidity between these borders and reveals how psychedelic pluralism could include business, and supports the work of the cultural historian Thomas Frank, who contends that business is best understood not as conservative, dull, and immutable, but as something dynamic, in perpetual reinvention, and always on the look-out for new trends. Frank also argues that a binary opposition between mainstream capitalist corporations and counter-culturists is not only simplistic, but historically inaccurate:

Like the young insurgents, people in more advanced reaches of the American corporate world deplored conformity, distrusted routine, and encouraged resistance to established power. They welcomed the youth-led cultural revolution not because they were secretly planning to subvert it or even because they believed it would allow them to tap a gigantic youth market (although this was, of course, a factor), but

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<sup>45</sup> Walley, "Heads and Dopers."

<sup>46</sup> "Hippies Flocking to Mexico for Mushroom 'Trip,'" *New York Times*, July 23, 1970.

because they perceived in it a comrade in their own struggles to revitalize American business and the consumer order generally.<sup>47</sup>

The appearance of “head shops” signalled that at least some people saw ways of profiting from the subculture, as well as helping it reach its peak. In 1966 Jeff Glick opened the Head Shop on 9th Street with merely \$300 worth of merchandise bought on consignment. But in 1967 it was selling a battery of psychedelic paraphernalia like “psychedelic art posters, bright-colored paperweights and diffraction jewelleries – silvery disks that radiate colors of the spectrum and which can be worn as cuff links, earrings or pasted on the forehead like a third eye.”<sup>48</sup> The store expanded into two branches and was even planning to open a “psychedelic department store.” One of the owners boasted that the funds to open that store had been easily found and that he had to turn down potential investors. His customers (between 200 and 500 daily) were mostly young and middle-class, but some of them turned up in a chauffeured Cadillac.<sup>49</sup>

Several psychedelic shops followed. The Electric Lotus sold the usual artefacts, along with sitar records, Hindu water pipes, or “day-glo” posters. Another shop on St Mark’s Place called Underground Uplift Unlimited offered buttons with psychedelic or counter-cultural messages and the owner Randolfe Wicke made plans to expand after grossing \$50,000 in 1967.<sup>50</sup> The “Psychedelicatessen” shop at Avenue A and 10<sup>th</sup> Street became a major focal point for the psychedelic subculture to acquire its distinctive accessories and apparatus. The owners, however, did far more than sell trivial apparatus to the psychedelic subculture. Indeed, on June 22, 1968, the police raided the shop and found magic mushrooms along with

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<sup>47</sup> Frank, *The Conquest of Cool*, 9.

<sup>48</sup> “Psychedelic Art,” 68.

<sup>49</sup> Newman, “Call it Psychedelic.”

<sup>50</sup> Al Van Starrex, “Hippie Businessmen,” *Mr. Magazine* Vol. 12(7), May 1968, 39, folder “Drugs Crackdown,” box 4, Stafford papers.

what appeared to be hashish, cocaine, cannabis and pills likely to be LSD.<sup>51</sup> Even the nightclub Cheetah also began licensing its name to make psychedelic jewellery, home furnishing, and clothing.<sup>52</sup>

Some head shop owners became overtly cynical about the lure of profit. They sold “mass-produced psychedelia such as posters and buttons and [were] more interested in ringing the cash register than in singing about love or peace.” One commercial operator of a store admitted that “Psychedelia is big business now [...]. If hippies don’t want to make money, somebody must.” He even went as far as to employ people to simply stand in the store all day banging a tambourine and chanting “Hare Krishna.” Other stores featured vending machines that sold psychedelic posters or offered paraphernalia through mail order, including “do-it-yourself hippie kits, strobe light kits, button machines, even wigs and beards for instant hippidom.”<sup>53</sup> In an anonymous letter, one psychedelic drug enthusiast denounced this “psychedelic capitalism” and took issue with the way head shops exploited artists and craftspeople by taking a 50% cut on each item.<sup>54</sup>

Yet, it would be reductive to equate psychedelic shops with simple hip capitalism. Mark Goldring opened the Bead Game on 236 Sullivan Street. His venture was met with much success, to the point where he also opened additional branches in the City. But he allegedly realized that his enterprise had become too profitable and decided to turn it into a cooperative venture that employed six people. Everyone was paid a modest \$30 a week. Goldring decided that they should shun unnecessary profit or risk losing their soul: “If we

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<sup>51</sup> “Hippie Delicatessen Is Raided by Police for Way-out Food,” *New York Times*, July 23, 1968.

<sup>52</sup> Newman, “Call it Psychedelic.”

<sup>53</sup> Van Starrex, “Hippie Businessmen,” 65.

<sup>54</sup> Anonymous to editor, *Innerspace*, 1966, page unavailable, folder “Innerspace,” box 21, Stafford Papers.

become too big the business will control us and we'll no longer be free."<sup>55</sup> The organizers of the First International Psychedelic Exposition even contended that "The bulwark of the Psychedelic Movement has undoubtedly been the thousands of small shops which have opened across the country in the last three years."<sup>56</sup> As Stanley Krippner concurs, these shops provided an important platform that allowed psychedelic art to be present in many East Village apartments.<sup>57</sup> In sum, these places embodied the pluralism of the psychedelic subculture by selling products that allowed some to explore new commercial avenues, but that also helped "people to alter their minds – and even their societies – through meaningful drug use."<sup>58</sup>

Another sign that the subculture had reached some sort of maturity was that some observers noticed the codes, language, and attitudes of that community and began to parody it through artistic productions. In 1967, Ken Shapiro (who went on to make "Groove Tube" in the Seventies) and Lane Sarasohn launched Channel One at 62 East Fourth Street. There, patrons sat down in a theater that featured three television sets and watched a satire of the psychedelic subculture. As Shapiro explained, "We concentrate on humor, psychedelic satire. The heads are a gorgeous subculture, with their own language, their own jokes – and since so little of it can be broadcast over regular media, drugs and sex and such, it gives us a whole world of totally new material to work with. We like to think we're providing heads with their own CBS."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Van Starrex, "Hippie Businessmen," 41.

<sup>56</sup> *First International Psychedelic Exposition* (Millbrook, NY: Kriya Press), date unavailable, folder "Drugs Crackdown," box 4, Stafford Papers.

<sup>57</sup> Krippner, interview.

<sup>58</sup> Joshua Clark Davis, "The Business of Getting High: Head Shops, Countercultural Capitalism, and the Marijuana Legalization Movement," *The Sixties* 8, no. 1 (2015): 28. Davis also argues that head shops made important contributions to movements seeking to reform drug laws.

<sup>59</sup> D.A. Latimer, "Chanel One," *East Village Other* Vol. 2(16), June 15 – July 1, 1967.

Even the mass market and advertising jumped on the psychedelic bandwagon, realizing that psychedelia could “provide maximum dramatization of an otherwise mundane product.”<sup>60</sup> As one journalist noticed, several companies began to recycle some elements of psychedelia in an effort to appear fashionable. The Best & Co. department store hired Jackie Cassen and Rudi Stern for a window promotion using multimedia light-show techniques. LSD also inspired a fashion designer to make electronic dresses that allegedly recalled the psychedelic experience. Other leading garment manufacturers also realized the new trend and started to design “psychedelic fabrics.” Another corporation called Youth Concepts did a presentation at the Village Gate nightclub called “What Turns Alice On” using “dance, music, film and exotic lightning effects” in front of a group of 110 executives of a food manufacturing company. One spokesman of the company admitted that while they had no interest in taking psychedelic drugs, they took the psychedelic subculture seriously: “We’re telling the industry that if you’re looking for a new form, choose one they understand and dig, that they will groove to. It’s not based on the fact that your audience is taking drugs and will turn on when they look at a TV set.”<sup>61</sup>

Though psychedelic art is one of the features of New York’s psychedelic moment that has survived throughout the ages, it was not immune to cooptation in the 1960s. Arguably the most fitting example is the work of Peter Max. The millionaire Max, whose work is still remembered in the Beatles’ *Yellow Submarine*, or for the posters of the 1967 Easter Be-in in Central Park, made a fortune in advertising by recycling the psychedelic codes (kaleidoscopic patterns and Day-Glo colours) and making them more accessible. He coined the concept of “Transit Art” that he produced on behalf of the Metro Transit Advertising that owned an advertising franchise on about 20,000 vehicles and was looking for new ways of attracting

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<sup>60</sup> Frank, *The Conquest of Cool*, 114.

clients. His art was an off-shoot of psychedelic posters that had gained legitimacy as an art form in the latter part of the Sixties and under the increasingly visible psychedelic subculture. As of 1969, his company had printed 2.5 million posters and his designs had appeared on over 40 products, but also in boutiques and restaurants. As one of his clients summed up, he “has serious interest in making money [...]. He’s made everyone realize that there’s a demand from the youth market.”<sup>62</sup>

But even if Max can be remembered as a hard-nosed entrepreneur, who had enough flair to see the commercial potential of psychedelic art, it is important to underline that the psychedelic experience had made a genuine impression on him. For all the talks of shallow commercialism, Max was drawn to the spiritual import of psychedelic drugs: “They bring peace to the nervous system, [...] so you can receive all the transmissions of the cosmos.” He met Swami Satchidananda in Paris and conversed about the rising psychedelic scene in the United States, and persuaded him to move to New York to assist psychedelic drug users in their spiritual quests – to that effect they collaborated at the Integral Yoga Institute.<sup>63</sup> Max was not the only one to have become aware of psychedelia’s commercial potential. In 1968, advertisers were also using psychedelic jargon to sell their products. For example, one shoe brand suggested that you “take a trip down and get the shoes that will really turn you on.” A vodka brand also advertised “Turn on a White Christmas.”<sup>64</sup>

Towards the end of the decade, light shows also acquired greater cultural legitimacy. As one observer noticed, “it’s not surprising to find a big, trippy light show used for the

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<sup>61</sup> Leroy F. Adams, “LSD Is Taking a Trip Uptown,” *New York Times*, February 19, 1967

<sup>62</sup> “Insult Me, Comrade!” *Newsweek*, April 14, 1969, 112 folder “Art,” box 2, Stafford papers.

<sup>63</sup> “Peter Max: Mastering the Color Explosion,” *Village Voice*, August 31, 1967, folder “LSD + Art,” box 8, Stafford Papers.

<sup>64</sup> J. Anthony Lukas, “The Drug Scene,” *New York Times Magazine*, January 8 - 12, 1968, 6, folder “Drugs,” box 4, Stafford papers.



climax of 2001. But it's more than a little mind-blowing to observe that ABC-TV incorporates light-show techniques in its spot announcements of future programming.” New York University opened an intermedia department and in 1969 the impresario Jay Hoffman produced a light show for children at the New York City Center, with Jackie Cassen narrating *The Little Match Girl* through light and the Joshua Light Show performing *A Magic Clown's Theater*. For Hoffman, light shows had to move out of the obscure music scene it was confined to: “Light shows need to be given that chance to be freed from the rock world. [...] Nowhere is such a fresh and rigorous art so mistreated and discredited as the light show.”<sup>65</sup> For Joshua White, however, light-shows and rock n' roll had become nothing short of a lucrative commodity for greedy entrepreneurs: “After Woodstock I could see how the light show was being adapted for corporate use and that the things they wanted I was unwilling to give.”<sup>66</sup>

Multimedia light shows also became novel publicity stunts for executives. In 1967, the *New York Times* reported that “the multimedia technique is helping to convey information, provide entertainment, create aesthetic experience, sell products and even further medical research.”<sup>67</sup> The article cited the case of a company that increased its sales by 11% “with aid of rock ‘n’ roll music, slide and movie projections and a battery of pulsing strobe lights.”<sup>68</sup> One company, Sensefex, even began offering advice on multimedia environments for corporations looking to improve their marketing strategies. Tellingly, the directors of Sensefex revealed that “our three muses are Tim Leary, the Beatles and McLuhan.” Gerd Stern took issue with that co-optation by claiming that multimedia art goes “against the whole

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<sup>65</sup> Sabol, “The Heavy Light Shows.” Hoffman had plans to organize an off-Broadway “Festival of Light” for 1971.

<sup>66</sup> Quoted Pouncey “I Never Stopped Loving the Light,” 76.

<sup>67</sup> Grace Glueck, “Multimedia: Massaging Senses for the Message,” *New York Times*, September 16, 1967. USCO collaborated with the Albert Einstein Medical Research Center in Philadelphia to work on an “overstimulator environment” to study endocrinological response.

grain of the acquisitive society,”<sup>69</sup> because unlike a Picasso or a Rembrandt, no one can own this type of art.

Theater was also influenced by psychedelia. On September 20, 1967 Robert Joffrey’s *Astarte* premiered at the City Center. This “psychedelic rock ballet” interpreted the myth of the love goddess. It featured two dancers who coordinated with the music, as well as a kinetic scenery that displayed psychedelic images that sometimes ended up superimposed on the dancers. As one observer noted, “The film images dwarf the dancers, and they try out their puny love on a naked forestage, while behind is a wall of giants, images of themselves embracing, moving together, challenging, one image cutting across another, and yet another as the screams on [...]” This commentator saw it as highly innovative and described it as “a theater of the senses that might be a crudely produced trailer to the theater of tomorrow.” Although he acknowledged the borrowing of “psychedelic techniques,” he contended that this piece had taken multimedia art to a new stage: “This was the mixed-media animal stirring out of the avant-garde caves and pop-clubs. It was mixed media moving into Establishment foundation-style art, even prowling up Broadway.”<sup>70</sup>

In the realm of entertainment, light-shows and multimedia techniques were also summoned to give a new direction to discothèques, using innovative techniques to stimulate all the senses and create a feeling of disorientation in an attempt to either replicate or amplify the psychedelic experience. Nightclubs owners realized the potential of these innovative experiential devices and hired several light-show artists to create uniquely interactive environments that departed from the classical formula of drinking and flirting, “turning on

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Glueck, “Multimedia.”

<sup>70</sup> Clive Barnes, “Dance: The Joffrey’s Psychedelic Trip,” *New York Times*, September 21, 1967. For an excerpt of the ballet, see “Film Excerpt: The making of Joffrey’s ‘Astarte,’” <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/episodes/joffrey/film-excerpt-the-making-of-joffrey%E2%80%99s-astarte/2395/> (accessed February 12, 2014).

their patrons with high-decibel rock n' roll combined with pulsing lights, flashing slide images and electronically tinted 'color mists.'"<sup>71</sup> Their commercial success was based on a tangible psychedelic cultural substrate. As Barry Schwartz argues, "Associating the psychedelic experience with the discothèque has the same function as the posters, insofar as it announces that this is a place to which people with certain already formed tastes, interests, and curiosities will want to come."<sup>72</sup>

Of course, these novel forms of entertainment attracted LSD users who sought to amplify the LSD experience or simply enjoy it with their own psychedelic sensibility. These users tended to come from middle-class backgrounds and were sufficiently well financed. The crowded environments made for excellent hangouts for dealers. One 23-year-old LSD dealer claimed that most of his clients were "kids with plenty of money in their pockets" and who did not need to work, and added that they were "the kind of kids who've got the money to make the discotheque scene."<sup>73</sup> Indeed, another user revealed that "You can walk into half the discotheques in the city and make a contact in five minutes."<sup>74</sup>

Borden Stevenson (son of Aldai) realized the commercial potential of such ventures when he opened the nightclub Cheetah, assisted by the Frenchman Olivier Coquelin. Like other psychedelic nightclubs, Cheetah offered a total environment that involved "sound, lights, textures and movement all fused together in a total assault on the senses and emotions."<sup>75</sup> It featured a sophisticated light installation programmed to change colour and intensity according to the music, and also bounced off the walls that had mirrors and

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<sup>71</sup> Glueck, "Multimedia."

<sup>72</sup> Barry N. Schwartz, "Context, Value and Direction," in *Psychedelic Art*, ed. Robert E. L. Masters and Jean Houston (New York: Grove Press / Balance House, 1968), 149.

<sup>73</sup> Jay Levin, "LSD in New York," *New York Post*, June 8, 1966, folder "LSD – NY Post," box 8, Stafford Papers.

<sup>74</sup> Jay Levin, "LSD in New York," *New York Post*, June 9, 1966, folder "LSD – New York Post", box 8, Stafford Papers.

aluminum sheets placated and “3000 rainbow-colored light-bulbs going off and on.”<sup>76</sup> Bands played most types of rock all night long - Cheetah also hosted the Grateful Dead and the Group Image<sup>77</sup> for the first of a series of “Inter-Tribal Community Benefits.”<sup>78</sup> One young man, clearly affected by the disorientation, said that “It was like being inside a giant combination jukebox and pinball machine.”<sup>79</sup> Tellingly, the club sold no hard liquor, in an attempt to turn away the older generations. Instead, many turned up under the influence of LSD to enjoy the experience – “Lightning is the Cheetah’s only connection with drugs,” said Coquelin.<sup>80</sup> But even those who did not find their habitual waking states of consciousness altered. One female party-goer claimed that “It was taking an LSD trip without the LSD.”<sup>81</sup>

The patrons were encouraged to wear flamboyant psychedelic gear to the nightclub and foster a sense of belonging beyond social stratification. “At Cheetah, only the Elderlies stare at a silver-foil micro-skirt worn with hotpink [*sic*] tights and blinking-light bra or a white satin safari suit with cut-outs over bare hips and four-inch wide necktie.” There was also typical psychedelic apparatus such as glossy body paint, paste-on jewels or polka-dot shirts. One of the more unusual events that Cheetah organized was sew-off contest, where girls frenetically sewed for two hours, while the whole nightclub watched and listened to a band playing – this

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<sup>75</sup> “Clubs Offer Today’s Youth ‘Something to Do’ at Night,” *The Spokesman-Review*, September 17, 1967.

<sup>76</sup> John Gruen, “Cheetah – The Now Club,” *New York/World Journal Tribune*, January 29, 1967, folder “Drugs Crackdown (2),” box 5, Stafford Papers.

<sup>77</sup> The Groups Image was a psychedelic rock band, but also part of a much larger group of artists of the same name based in the Lower East Side. They organized multi-media events for discotheques and also ran the psychedelic magazine *Innerspace*. See John Garabedian, “New York’s Hippies,” *New York Post*, September 15, 1967, folder “Hippies Yippies,” box 7, Stafford Papers.

<sup>78</sup> “Scenes,” *Village Voice*, June 15, 1967, folder “Be-ins,” box 2, Stafford papers.

<sup>79</sup> “Clubs Offer Today’s Youth ‘Something to Do’ at Night.”

<sup>80</sup> Clarence Newman, “Call It Psychedelic And It Will Sell Fast, Some Merchants Say,” *Wall Street Journal*, February 9, 1967.

<sup>81</sup> “Clubs Offer Today’s Youth ‘Something to Do’ at Night.”

event was dubbed the “psychedelic sweatshop.”<sup>82</sup> It might seem that the club was re-affirming traditional gender-defined roles while simultaneously capturing the shifting trends in youth entertainment. Another reading into this phenomenon, however, reveals a connection with the broader changes in fashion in the 1960s that gave a lot more room to express individuality through clothing. As Judy Kutulas points out in her study of male fashion in the 1960s, liberation became an important rhetorical device in many of the decade’s social movements and it is understandable that the fashion industry used it to gain legitimacy.<sup>83</sup> Psychedelia was no exception, with people like Leary promoting LSD and like drugs as revolutionary assets that carried the potential to free mankind from oppression and conformity. Thus, designing clothes in a psychedelic discothèque could also be a way of expressing one’s individuality and personal tastes.

Though the night-club built its base on the younger New Yorkers who were mostly acquainted with the increasingly visible psychedelic culture, but it was not confined to that segment of population. Indeed, some of the patrons included celebrities like Peter Fonda, George Hamilton, or Catherine Deneuve and the club also hosted a gala to support Eugene McCarthy’s presidential race in 1968. In the summer of 1968, it even became a meeting ground to ease the tensions between the bohemian counter-culture and Puerto Ricans, who felt they were invading Tompkins Square. The party – dubbed the “Puerto Rican-hippie party” by the *New York Times*<sup>84</sup> - was organized by the Diggers, who gave away free tickets.

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<sup>82</sup> Angela Taylor, “They Did the Stitch at Cheetah, and the Band Played on One Measure of Success,” *New York Times*, October 31, 1966.

<sup>83</sup> Judy Kutulas, “Dedicated Followers of Fashion: Peacock Fashion and the Roots of the New American Man, 1960–70,” *The Sixties* 5, no. 2 (2012): 177. In her concise history of psychedelic clothing in the UK and the US, Cally Blackman has understood this fashion as a subcultural style and a radical alternative to fashion. See “Clothing the Cosmic Counterculture: Fashion and Psychedelia,” in *Summer of Love: Psychedelic Art, Social Crisis and Counterculture in the 1960s*, eds. Christoph Grunenberg and Jonathan Harris (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), 201-222.

<sup>84</sup> “Hippies ‘Integrate’ with Puerto Ricans,” *New York Times*, August 16, 1967.

Despite these overtures to ethnic minorities and counter-cultural elements, the club owner Stevenson had no time for the scene his club was part of and clearly saw it as a financial opportunity: “I’m not a nightclub man and the [new sound] drives me out of my mind.” Indeed, his venture was solely a way of reaping the benefits of the current youth fads, even when they included elements of psychedelia. He admitted that “it’s kind of ridiculous [...] to talk about the ‘need’ for a new nightclub, but I do believe that Olivier has a remarkable grasp of what young people are looking for in entertainment today.”<sup>85</sup> As Schwartz sums up, “The use of these [psychedelic] art forms is intended to add dimension to the experience and enhance the commercial prospects of the endeavor.”<sup>86</sup>

Another psychedelic night-club called Dynamite opened in Brooklyn in 1968, in an attempt to attract the same crowds that attended the Cheetah. Like several other psychedelic night-clubs, no liquor could be purchased and the setting was in accordance with the cultural fascination for Eastern spirituality (tatami mats, a Buddhist temple, or an Indian folk ensemble) popularized by psychedelia. One room had a stroboscopic light and another had a light show provided by Larry Levy and Len Schneider of Mind Garden. For one commentator, the discothèque may have offered some pleasurable entertainment, but the motives were quite obvious: “make no mistake, this is no utopian venture. Money is being made here, and there is little doubt that a commercial operation is at work.”<sup>87</sup>

The other major psychedelic nightclub that was made famous for its endorsement by Andy Warhol and his entourage was the Electric Circus. The club featured “lights, slide projections, mime, rock, strobe effects, dancing area, and band projection,” all which were carefully combined in a way that no single elements took precedence over another. The

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<sup>85</sup> Vincent Canby, “A New Nightclub to Have 3 Stories,” *New York Times*, April 1, 1966.

<sup>86</sup> Schwartz, “Context, Value and Direction,” 149.

visuals were masterminded by Tony Martin and became known as “Ultramedia.” They combined a series of abstract kinetic images with “floating” images that were accompanied by the pulsating strobe lights. For Schwartz, “The projections are almost always psychedelic in origin, being molecular, cellular, organic, and capable of rendering psychedelic sensory distortion.” As a result of all these complex techniques, the Electric Circus became “an enveloping visual environment related to people’s activity and also to the accompanying sound environment.”<sup>88</sup> Stanley Krippner remembers attending the venue and liked the installations and the atmosphere. “Many people were tripping when they came into the Electric Circus and danced.”<sup>89</sup>

But if Warhol’s name was invariably associated with the venue, other important figures were instrumental in its popularization. Yayoi Kusama did several happenings there and Leary also gave lectures on drugs and sex. The seminal electronic music composer Morton Subotnick collaborated with Martin at the Electric Circus. Subotnick had lived in San Francisco before moving to New York in 1966. There, he realized that there was “a five-year time lag! The multimedia aspect of what was going on in San Francisco for five years was about to hit New York.”<sup>90</sup> Subotnick played an important part in this respect. As Robert Gluck has argued, “his relocation paved the way for the development of a new center of activity in New York’s Greenwich Village, home to New York University and the East Village psychedelic culture, including the Electric Circus, a new multi-sensory venue.”<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Alex Gross, “Dynamite Discotheque,” *East Village Other* Vol. 4(5), January 3, 1969.

<sup>88</sup> Schwartz, “Context, Value and Direction,” 150.

<sup>89</sup> Krippner, interview.

<sup>90</sup> Curtis Roads and Morton Subotnick, “Interview with Morton Subotnick,” *Computer Music Journal* 12, no. 1 (1988): 12.

<sup>91</sup> Robert J. Gluck, “Electric Circus, Electric Ear and the Intermedia Center in Late-1960s New York,” *Leonardo* 45, no. 1 (2012): 51.

Like the other important psychedelic venues in NYC, the Electric Circus embodied transgression and the merging of different spheres. Subotnick, for instance, was particularly attracted to that venue, because he felt that beyond the purely musical production, there was “a feeling of integrating with the public,”<sup>92</sup> which was partly the result of having a relatively small dancing area that contrasted greatly with the large visuals that dominated the venue. Furthermore, the venue had the ambition of synthesizing the hip psychedelic subculture with classic entertainment. In Gluck’s words, it became “a second testing ground for whether creative art and commercial interests could coexist in a mutually beneficial way.”<sup>93</sup>

Elsewhere, the psychedelic discothèque The World (a refurbished aircraft hangar with 2500 crowd capacity) commissioned USCO to supply them with 2000 slides and 2.30 hours of 16-mm films, as well as building the control console to operate the equipment.<sup>94</sup> That nightclub, located in Garden City, boasted an impressive setting. The walls were “jammed with frenzied Op art patterns and 21 screens for simultaneous projection of movies and slides.” Added to that, a center screen was connected to a closed-circuit camera that could zoom in on the dancers.<sup>95</sup> According to Gerd Stern, the profits enabled USCO fund their psychedelic exhibition at the Riverside Museum, which became very popular among LSD users in search of a friendly environment in which people could trip.<sup>96</sup>

Another remarkable venue to offer a total environment and that was far more experiential and experimental was the Cerebrum,<sup>97</sup> located on Broome Street close to

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<sup>92</sup> Roads and Subotnick, “Interview with Morton Subotnick,” 12.

<sup>93</sup> Gluck, “Electric Circus,” 51.

<sup>94</sup> “Psychedelic Art,” 68.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>96</sup> Gerd Stern, interview.

<sup>97</sup> Alastair Gordon has briefly studied the very experiential Cerebrum night-club, but has not explicitly compared it to the psychedelic experience. Evidence shows, however, that the venue’s staff were heavy users of psychedelics and took these drugs in near religious settings. For Gordon’s description see, Alastair Gordon, *Spaced Out: Radical Environments of the Psychedelic Sixties* (New York: Rizzoli, 2008), 57.



Broadway, and masterminded by John Storyk, who also designed Jimi Hendrix's Electric Lady Studio. Upon entering the venue, patrons were invited to take their clothes off and put on translucent togas – most people did not keep their clothes on under their togas. Then, they arrived into a large room with a floor of over a dozen white carpeted platforms, and with flashing lights bouncing off mirrored globes and images of eyes, the Buddha, or a waterfall projected on the walls and ceiling. The participants were given stereo headphones, glowing orbs and prisms, or plastic pillows and invited to take part in games and exercises (building a tower with blocks of glass, playing with a big helium balloon, or pretending to be an angel). It had no nightclub, dance-hall or liquor licence, and did not allow smoking.<sup>98</sup>

The place was founded and built by Ruffin Cooper, the son of a Texas banker who loaned him the money. Cooper, who would later move into art photography, believed that conventional entertaining was dull and sought to offer “freedom – to do anything you want or play at being anyone you want.”<sup>99</sup> Larry Vigus, who guided patrons through the experience, remembers how Cooper first came up with idea of the venue. Cooper had been a theater student and had interests in performance arts. He and some friends (a lighting designer, a costume designer and a musician) enjoyed smoking cannabis and playing games under the influence. They would play with light, sounds, fabrics, balloons, feathers, or plastic. So they decided to create “a place where people could go and be among other people who were stoned.”<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> For a short video presentation of the Cerebrum, see “Cerebrum, Soho, 1968,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VjozaLBbrUs> (accessed November 8, 2013). Cerebrum perfectly illustrates the emphasis on game-playing in a childlike manner and supports Peter Braunstein's notion that the psychedelic Sixties saw what he calls a “culture of rejuvenation.” See Peter Braunstein, “Forever Young: Insurgent Youth and the Sixties Culture of Rejuvenation,” in *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and '70s*, ed. Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle (New York: Routledge, 2002), 243-73.

<sup>99</sup> Dan Sullivan, “Cerebrum: Club Seeking to Soothe the Mind,” *New York Times*, November 23, 1968.

<sup>100</sup> Larry Vigus, e-mail to Chris Elcock, November 16, 2013.

The venue stood out of conventional entertainment and of other psychedelic nightclubs, because its design increased the totality of the experience. For Vigus, “as a “light show” Cerebrum was different than the Joshua Light Show of the Fillmore East because it surrounded the room and even the white carpeted floor was a projection surface.”<sup>101</sup>

Additionally:

There were big and important differences between Cheetah and the Electric Circus and CEREBRUM. Cheetah and the Electric Circus were essentially nightclubs or show rooms. They were both discotheques using recorded music and live bands as entertainment for socializing and dancing. They charged an admission and sold drinks. They contained dark corners and separate rooms for socializing. They allowed cigarette smoking and had no dress codes.<sup>102</sup>

By contrast, Cerebrum was not a place for socializing, but for communal and experiential activities that echoed (or amplified) the psychedelic experience in that it had a similar liberating and detaching effect – though Vigus contends that “we didn’t want to label ourselves as imitating a trip.”<sup>103</sup> Youngblood noticed this:

People began to act out their fantasies, get into their own realities, perform anonymous little psychodramas. One refined-looking, silver-haired, middle-aged gentleman knelt and gazed lovingly at his matronly wife as she danced before him like Scheherazade, palms pressed together over her head, hips swaying in silhouette. It was, perhaps, a fantasy they had never realized in the privacy of their own bedroom. Elsewhere, a beautiful young girl who wouldn’t remove her panties was “raped” by her husband, who peeled them off beneath her gown as his friend held her arms. She squealed in mock anger and false modesty, but an hour later could be seen twirling about the room like a ballerina, her gown flying far above her shapely hips.<sup>104</sup>

Cerebrum was remarkable as a venue because it challenged and sought to reconcile several dichotomies through these total experiences. As Alastair Gordon explains, the idea was to “disorient, obliterate the body-to-ground relationship, and open the door to

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<sup>101</sup> Larry Vigus, e-mail to Chris Elcock, November 8, 2013.

<sup>102</sup> Larry Vigus, e-mail to Chris Elcock, November 9, 2013.

<sup>103</sup> Larry Vigus, e-mail to Chris Elcock, November 16, 2013.

sensation,”<sup>105</sup> with or without the help of psychedelic drugs. Youngblood, who took part in the Cerebrum experience, felt that “one is voyeur, exhibitionist, and participant. One is both male and female.”<sup>106</sup> He has also argued that venue was part of “an imminent trend that simultaneously [would] transform and unite those separate social experiences characterized by “nightclub” on the one hand and “art galleries” on the other.”<sup>107</sup> Vigus also remembers how the club tried to foster a feeling of totality by blurring other typical distinctions: “as a “theater” it was different than anything else because the participants/audience/guests were the “performers” led (guided) by the “guides.” He also contends that because everyone wore white togas, “the uniformity removed the costumes of “class” and status.”<sup>108</sup> Finally, the “total” dimension of the experience was unique in that it summoned all the sense, including touch, smell, and taste. One reporter remembers walking into Cerebrum and finding out: “the Beatles moan “Strawberry Fields Forever,” the walls blossom with pastoral projections and the scent of strawberries drips into the air.”<sup>109</sup>

Yet, for all its innovations, Cerebrum was a short-lived experiential venture that lasted only nine months. For Gordon, “instead of being the precursor of some virtual utopia, Cerebrum signaled the end of a fleeting moment. [...] Perhaps there were too many spaced-out characters lying around, staring into strobe lights.”<sup>110</sup> Additionally, one reporter criticized the club, because the translucent togas favoured voyeurism, where organizers and staff (such as Vigus) claimed that they increased freedom and communal bonding. “Several men said

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<sup>104</sup> Gene Youngblood, “Part Six: Intermedia,” in *Expanded Cinema* (New York: Dutton, 1970), 361, [http://vasulka.org/Kitchen/PDF\\_ExpandedCinema/part6.pdf](http://vasulka.org/Kitchen/PDF_ExpandedCinema/part6.pdf) (accessed August 3, 2015).

<sup>105</sup> Alastair Gordon, “What a Long, Strange Trip It’s Been,” *Interior Design*, January 3, 2007.

<sup>106</sup> Youngblood, “Part Six: Intermedia,” 363.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 359.

<sup>108</sup> Vigus, e-mail to Chris Elcock, November 8, 2013.

<sup>109</sup> Sullivan, “Cerebrum: Club Seeking to Soothe the Mind.”

<sup>110</sup> Gordon, “What a Long, Strange Trip It’s Been.”

they couldn't stop looking at the just-perceptible nude bodies all around them. They were turned on by the looking and not by the joining-in possibilities Cerebrum offers."<sup>111</sup>

At any rate, it was an important place for psychedelic drug use and reveals the overlap between leisure, art, and spirituality in this kind of night-club. While the patrons often turned up under the influence of LSD, the 18 people on staff were equally fond of drug use. Yet, Vigus makes it clear that the staff discriminated between lay and spiritual drug use. "Grass and hash were used daily but LSD and psilocybin was saved for special occasions and often treated in sacramental fashion rather than as a PARTY DRUG or just to highlight routine activities."<sup>112</sup> Vigus also makes it clear that his group discriminated between "good" and "bad" drugs, at least in the Sixties. "In general, we looked down on speed. We also looked down on people who used downers like heroin. [...] A lot of us (most of us) didn't use beer or hard liquor at all."<sup>113</sup>

All in all, a whole new market had opened for psychedelic art. Paintings, posters, jewellery were common items found in head shops and the business-motivated Cheetah even created its own boutique, where party-goers could stock-pile their psychedelic gear. But more broadly, psychedelic discothèques that borrowed heavily from artistic innovations epitomized a shift from total environments intended as artistic performances to what one reporter dubbed "total recreation,"<sup>114</sup> intended at offering psychedelia (rather than psychedelics) to the broadest audience possible. As Alastair Gordon sums up, "What had started with the avant-garde was

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<sup>111</sup> Dorothy Kalins, "Here's Looking at You: Voyeurism in New York," *New York*, March 3, 1969, 40.

<sup>112</sup> Larry Vigus, e-mail to Chris Elcock, November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2013. Only one couple used LSD daily.

<sup>113</sup> Larry Vigus, e-mail to Chris Elcock, November 16, 2013.

<sup>114</sup> "Wild New Flashy Bedlam of the Discothèque," *Life*, May 27, 1966, 72.

growing into a spectacle of extreme unpredictability that merged high with low culture, arcane mysticism with pop consumerism.”<sup>115</sup>

### **Competing Spirituality**

The finally major shift that occurred in the broad psychedelic subculture concerned spirituality. The end of the Sixties saw many LSD users acknowledge that the drug had indeed opened the doors of perception, but along came greater ontological uncertainties that remained unanswered. One man who had attended many of Leary’s lectures and avidly read his publications epitomized the problem. He had taken mescaline and LSD 26 times with allegedly positive results, but found that the effects were temporary: “After experiencing the blissful ALL, I know that I am still ‘hung up’ in my old habits and don’t know to change it.” As a result, he became interested in yoga, hypnosis, Taoism, and Zen Buddhism.<sup>116</sup> Another LSD user who worked with the New York Diggers reported a deep sense of awareness of the sacred and looked for alternative forms of spirituality to make sense of it: “LSD made us personally and directly aware of transcendent, invisible forces. And so now we’re interested in LSD’s historical antecedents – mysticism, witchcraft and magic.”<sup>117</sup> Masters and Houston began studying mystical experiences using multimedia techniques involving sound, light and other pictures and contended that “ordinary people can have profound religious experiences like those of the great Eastern and Western mystics, without the use of drugs” and suggested that these altered states of consciousness could become a valid part of everyday church life.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Gordon, *Spaced out*, 49.

<sup>116</sup> Ed Shaw to Timothy Leary, February 21, 1966, folder 2, box 59, Leary papers.

<sup>117</sup> John Garabedian, “That Old Black Magic Has Hippies in its Spell,” *New York Post*, October 21, 1967, folder Hippies, box 7, Stafford Papers.

<sup>118</sup> Edward B. Fiske, “Researchers Induce Mystical Visions without Drugs,” *New York Times*, August 26, 1970.

Many like Richard Alpert travelled to the Far East to seek spiritual guidance. Alpert returned from India in 1968 as Baba Ram Dass, having moved on from psychedelics, and began to promote his spirituality. Graboi remembers bumping into a former regular of the Center for the League of Spiritual Discovery in the East Village. Since those days, he had been ordained Surya Das (“Servant of the Sun”) by Ram Dass, delved deep into Eastern spirituality and begun painting.<sup>119</sup> On December 4, 1968 the former Harvard professor gave a talk at the Universalist Church on 76<sup>th</sup> Street. His changes were apparent in the way he dressed, “wearing meticulous Indian white,” and the way he spoke - “a mixture of the University scholar, the psychedelic hippie, the more recent holy man still a bit nonplussed by a role we Westerns don’t take seriously [...]” Alpert claimed that his drug-free religious conversion to yoga made him feel like being under the mild but constant influence of hashish – a state he could never maintain with psychedelic drug experimentation.<sup>120</sup> Kleps also remembered the presence of a girl who introduced herself as “Sarasvati” at Millbrook. Bill Haines had reluctantly accepted her in his ashram after meeting her in New York, in a surreal interaction: “Sarasvati, so called by her own election, had first appeared a few weeks earlier at a wedding Haines had attended at a fashionable synagogue in New York City. She was a junkie, a hooker, and obviously stoned on acid. In full view of the crowd on the sidewalk after the service, she had thrown herself at Bill’s feet, calling him “guruji” and begging to be accepted as an Ashramite.”<sup>121</sup>

The end of the 1960s saw an important influx of spiritual teachers, who rose to prominence by offering alternatives to psychedelics. Invariably, they dismissed drugs as an

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<sup>119</sup> Graboi, *One Foot in the Future*, 271.

<sup>120</sup> Jill Johnson, “Alpert’s Third Life & the Chemistry of Divinity,” *Village Voice*, December 26, 1968, folder “Village Voice,” box 33, Stafford Papers.

<sup>121</sup> Art Kleps, chapter 17 “A Royal Banquet,” in *Millbrook: A Narrative of the Early Years of American Psychedelianism, Recension of 2005* (San Francisco: Original Kleptonian

ersatz of spirituality and their users as fake seekers. One of these gurus was Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, who popularized Transcendental Meditation techniques and later became the spiritual advisor to the Beatles. Individuals who wished to follow him first had to cease using drugs like cannabis and LSD fifteen days prior. One of his followers, Kip Cohen, 26, once lent some of his office space to the organization on a temporary basis. Cohen, described by the author as “articulate and very hip,” had tried various drugs and saw them as a necessary, but transitory stage. Meditation, on the other hand offered all the benefits of psychedelics, without the side-effects or the legal dangers.<sup>122</sup>

On 12<sup>th</sup> Street, the Yoga Head Program was run by the Horizons Projects under the direction of Guruprem, a student of Swami Satchidananda. It offered treatment mostly for heroin addiction, but also for any kind of drug use. Guruprem himself had once been an LSD user and dealer in the East Village, but gave up his drug use after contemplating suicide and turning towards Integral Yoga.<sup>123</sup> Additionally, Allen Ginsberg remarked that “One conservative Vaishnavite Swami Bhaktivedanta moved to the Lower East Side this year and immediately dozens of young LSD freak-outs flocked to sing the Harekrishna Maha-mantra with him – chant for the preservation of the planet.”<sup>124</sup> The chanting, accompanied with cymbals, tambourines, sticks, drums, bells, and a small reed organ was, according to the Swami, “the best way to achieve self-realization in an age of destruction.” This message stood

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Neo-American Church, 2005), page unavailable, <http://okneoac.org/millbrook/> (accessed September 12, 2013).

<sup>122</sup> Lewis H. Lapham, “There once Was a Guru from Rishikesh,” *The Saturday Evening Post*, 4 May 1968, 25, folder “Meditation,” box 4, Stafford Papers.

<sup>123</sup> Linda Crawford, “Yoga,” *East Village Other* Vol. 6(26), May 25, 1971.

<sup>124</sup> Allen Ginsberg, “Renaissance or Die,” *Los Angeles Free Press*, December 23, 1966, folder “Ginsberg, Allen,” box 6, Stafford Papers.

in firm contrast with psychedelic mind-expansion, which he prohibited, along with other form of intoxicants (including tea or cigarettes).<sup>125</sup>

The American Hare Krishna movement was one of the major forms of post-psychedelic spirituality that explicitly contested psychedelia. In 1966, a Columbia dropout and LSD user named Keith Ham met Swami Prabhupada on the Lower East Side, and became Swami Bhaktipada in 1967. He went on to form what would become the largest Hare Krishna community in the country in 1968. The movement advocated a life of purity and rejected extramarital sex, drugs and alcohol.<sup>126</sup>

The First International Psychedelic Exposition illustrates how these emerging forms of spiritualities began to permeate and compete with psychedelia. The Exposition featured several spiritual organizations such as Leary's League for Spiritual Discovery or Kleps' Neo-American Church, but also organizations like the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKC), the Meher Baba Workshop or the Sri Ram Ashram living Yoga Community. The latter offered means of altering consciousness without the use of drugs, but more surprisingly, the organizers described the ISKC as "one of the best publicized psychedelic groups" and chose to give room to Meher Baba when he had been openly critical of psychedelic experimentation.<sup>127</sup>

Indeed, Baba was one of the most prominent Eastern figures to dismiss notions of drug-induced spirituality: "All so-called spiritual experiences generated by taking 'mind-changing' drugs such as LSD, mescaline and psilocybin are superficial and add enormously to one's addiction to the deceptions of illusion which is but the shadow of Reality. [...] There is no short-cut to the goal except through the grace of the Perfect Master, and drugs, LSD more

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<sup>125</sup> James R. Sikes, "Swami's Flock Chants in Park to Find Ecstasy," *New York Times*, October 10, 1966.

<sup>126</sup> Margalit Fox, "Swami Bhaktipada Dies at Age 74," *New York Times*, October 25, 2011.



than others, give only a semblance of ‘spiritual experience’, a glimpse of false Reality.”<sup>128</sup>

Like other gurus, Baba admitted that a handful of LSD users had found some kind of revelation through chemical experimentation, but the consequences of his line of thought were just as self-serving: “To a few sincere seekers, LSD may have served as a means to arouse that spiritual longing which has brought them into my contact, but once that purpose is served further ingestion would not only be harmful but have no point or purpose.”<sup>129</sup>

By turning to alternative religions and gurus, former psychedelic drug consumers joined the weary political activists who had grown frustrated and disillusioned with protest, and saw spirituality as a panacea. As Stephen Kent puts it, “many former drug users came to believe that they could acquire similar insights and visions through the adoption of religious practices that required the renunciation of drugs. On the other hand, many former activists came to believe that the adoption of these same religious practices would lead to the social revolution that they had failed to initiate through political activity.” Thus, as Kent partly suggests, these new leaders managed to reconcile the overarching tension between New Left politics and the psychedelic counter-culture.<sup>130</sup>

This shift towards alternative religions, however, was not to everyone’s taste. Kleps, for one, took issue with the former psychedelic drug researchers Masters and Houston (on “the ‘idiot wing’ of the Flower Power generation”) and their book *Mind Games* for promoting

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<sup>127</sup> *First International Psychedelic Exposition*.

<sup>128</sup> Meher Baba, *God in a Pill?* (San Francisco: Sufism Reoriented, Inc., 1966), 2, folder “Meher Baba,” box 10, Stafford Papers.

<sup>129</sup> Baba, *God in a Pill?*, 4-5. Baba conceded, however, that psychedelics had legitimate medical value.

<sup>130</sup> Stephen A. Kent, “Religion, Drugs, and the Question of Political Engagements,” in *From Slogans to Mantras: Social Protest and Religious Conversion in the Late Vietnam War Era* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2001), 7. On pages 107-113, Kent narrates the trajectory of a Berkeley student (born 1945) who embraced New Left activism, but became increasingly disillusioned, particularly after experimenting with LSD in 1965. He shunned protest and discovered the Church of Scientology in the East Village. Unsurprisingly, he was asked to cease using drugs, which he had no trouble doing.

spiritual gibberish “complete with mock King James locutions.” He saw this shift as part of a larger commodification of psychedelia and its assimilation by the New Age culture of the Seventies:

These were correctable errors, but there was nothing we could do about the cultural degradation of the spirit of the '60s that took place on all fronts in the '70s. Mass-market publishers flooded the “psychedelic” market in the early and mid '70s with brazenly fraudulent occultist, egalitarian-primitivist and “drug alternative” horseshit of all kinds, and the Boo Hoo Bible got lost in the blizzard of fakery, political infantilism, blithering idiocy and sinister lunacy that resulted. This, the media moguls declared, was the “New Age.” Spoon benders and dolphins would lead us forward.<sup>131</sup>

### Conclusion

“There was a spiritual quality last year [...]. There were bells and beads and chanting. But now it seems dismal.”<sup>132</sup> Thus spoke one counter-culturist on St. Mark’s Place in 1968, at a time when many felt that the East Village was no longer the psychedelic haven it once was. Indeed, these comments came after the murder of “Groovy” in October 1967. For many, it symbolized the death of psychedelic religion, if not of psychedelia. After the tragic event, two couples could be seen at the counter of the Psychedelicatessen before two candles lit to mourn his loss.<sup>133</sup> One observer claimed that “Crucified by gangster-Romans, he became a true martyr” and branded him “a reformer of meth swindlers.”<sup>134</sup> The waning of psychedelic religion can be explained in part by the rise of prominent gurus and their cosmologies that seemed to appeal to former LSD users, who were spiritually weary after so much chemical experimentation. But it should also be linked to the demise of the psychedelic counter-culture and its utopian ideals that often assumed the trappings of a religious movement. In the latter

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<sup>131</sup> Kleps, “The Battle of the Sand Belt.”

<sup>132</sup> Garabedian, “East Village: A Bad Trip.”

<sup>133</sup> David Hardy and Judson Hand, “A Night in the East Village,” *Daily News*, October 10, 1967, folder “Drugs Danger,” box 5, Stafford Papers.

part of the Sixties, the psychedelic counter-culture was challenged by a tougher legislation. This fostered a black market where pure LSD became a rare staple amidst a flood of other addictive and far more hazardous drugs, and tensions with locals and criminal elements did not help create an atmosphere of religious serenity.

At the turn of the 1960s, New York psychedelia had transformed and retained few of its original aspects. Its counter-cultural enclaves, attitudes and rhetoric were on the decline for a variety of reasons. As a result, the psychedelic subculture became a lot more amorphous and lacked a dynamic element that could help it discriminate between enlightening and enslaving drugs. Without a strong dedicated movement to guide it, the market pounced on the new opportunities just as charismatic new religious leaders lured the tired LSD users into their brands of post-psychedelic religion.

Yet, as the concluding chapter of this study will document, this was not to be the end of the psychedelic subculture. LSD use continued in the Seventies and beyond, though new drugs appeared and challenged LSD's status as a special drug, relegating it to a relic of the Sixties. Though people were drawn to it for that reason and to seek a pleasurable experience, others carried on to ascribe a spiritual meaning to their chemical explorations, while others still never ceased to produce psychedelic art, as they had done when they first discovered these drugs during the turbulent decade.

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<sup>134</sup> Richard Goldstein, "Love: A Groovy Idea While He Lasted," *Village Voice*, October 19, 1967, folder "Drugs Danger," box 5, Stafford Papers.

## Conclusion

### Whither Psychedelia?

The use of LSD and psychedelics in New York City gave birth to a rich, diverse, and complex subculture that originated at the turn of the 1950s, when several bohemian elements were using illicit drugs to question the postwar consensus of conformity by altering their consciousness and joined forces with idiosyncratic academics conducting research into psychedelics. When LSD entered the illicit drug scene, its power to alter consciousness, induce vivid visions or even mystical experiences made it stand out. LSD use increased drastically in the second part of the Sixties and helped the psychedelic subculture mature and become more visible. Isaac Abrams sums up its genesis:

That whole New York scene went from flat-footed in 1962, as a very private thing with a few people knowing anything about it. The whole period of 63 and 64 where we took peyote, which we got mailed to us. We smoked DMT. I had a couple more mescaline experiences. And I got the ibogaine experience. And then acid finally came. And it was finally broken loose. It was very hard to get LSD actually, until the very end of 64. But by that time, things were already shaking. Like the Coda Gallery. So many people came out and there was a tremendous sense that something was happening.<sup>1</sup>

With this new visibility, authorities feared a widespread drug epidemic and moved to ban LSD and psychedelics. Yet, this did not curb the consumption of these substances, which peaked in the second part of the decade. As the Sixties became the Seventies, psychedelics were used along with other illicit drugs with less discrimination between different classes of substances and caused the subculture to lose many of its distinctive features. Additionally, several external forces co-opted or recycled some of these features, which also explains some of major changes in the final years of the Sixties.

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<sup>1</sup> Isaac Abrams, interview.

Closely linked to the subculture were the psychedelic counter-culture and the psychedelic movement. The latter explicitly framed LSD as a miracle drug that could bring about peace, love, and understanding to humankind. At the heart of this psychedelic utopianism was a loose coalition led by Timothy Leary, who aggressively promoted the drug until his trial and imprisonment in 1970. This movement had a strong influence on part of the psychedelic subculture, which saw some of its members radicalize and embrace this idealism. This counter-culture also waned at the end of decade for similar reasons, even though some resisted by moving out of the city to find greener pastures. As a result, the media, which lost interest in LSD and like drugs around the same time,<sup>2</sup> ceased to feed on the most visible and vocal elements of psychedelia and cover its most dynamic aspects. For the most part, it reported drug arrests that occasionally revealed that LSD was still around, along with other kinds of drugs.

This study has examined and historicized these changes by focusing on some of the major characteristics of this subculture that are critical to appreciate how rich and diverse it was. This diversity has been explained by the inherent complexity of the psychedelic experience, which can be understood through the lens of politics, science, religion, and art, and often led LSD users to reconsider their ontological certainties and in some cases better appreciate the consensual nature of reality. With this approach, it has departed from part of the scholarship by arguing that the consumption of LSD and psychedelics led to a multifaceted subculture that sometimes assumed a more radical and idealistic posture.

At the same time, the specificities of New York City have supplemented this explanation. Contrasting with the California scene that many have understood as egalitarian and idealistic, the Big Apple gave birth to a psychedelic subculture that was shaped by some of the city's trademark elements: big business, mass media, advertising companies, the art

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<sup>2</sup> Siff, *Acid Hype*, 3..

world, jazz musicians, and the Beat subculture. Where the key characters of the West Coast might be figures like Ken Kesey, Owsley Stanley, and Jerry Garcia of the Grateful Dead, New York could boast Henri Luce, Isaac Abrams, and Michael Hollingshead – arguably a much more eclectic mix. The city saw the rise of Leary’s psychedelic movement that exerted a nationwide influence by promoting LSD as a life-changing substance that would bring about world peace. But even then, the history of this movement aptly illustrates how New York exerted a unique influence on psychedelia. The counter-cultural icon found the support and friendship of the millionaire Peggy Hitchcock, who genuinely believed in his crusade and allowed him to mingle with the New York jet-set. Some of the city’s famous jazz players like Florence and Maynard Ferguson and Charles Mingus were also drawn to him and took part in his movement. Beat figures like Cassady and Ginsberg, who embodied New York’s rich and avant-garde cultural traditions, also exerted a certain influence on Leary’s movement by helping him shun his academic credentials to start a movement to turn on the world and free LSD from the hands of science. The well-connected theater producer Van Wolfe was another key player who shaped the movement by suggesting that Leary present psychedelics as glamorous magic-bullets as if he were running an advertising campaign. In the final analysis, it is important to stress that LSD consumption did not disappear with the Sixties. In the 1980s, for instance, the Drug Enforcement Administration reported seizures of LSD and other psychedelics in most U.S. cities including New York. The doses were significantly milder than in the Sixties (and often mixed with other chemicals) and chiefly used as a party drug.<sup>3</sup> Other cases indicate that those who had remained in the LSD business no longer saw the drug along idealistic lines, but as a profitable enterprise. In 1979, the NYU Department of Anthropology chairman John Buettner-Janusch was arrested on charges that he was

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas O’Toole, “LSD Found to Be Regaining its Popularity,” *Washington Post*, July 21, 1983.

manufacturing LSD, methaqualone (Quaaludes), and other drugs in his university lab with the assistance of both knowing and unknowing students and with university funds to purchase the raw materials. Buettner-Janusch and his collaborators had formed an organization called Simian Expansions Inc. to channel the profits of the illicit drug trade.<sup>4</sup> During the trial, one witness informed the court that back in 1977 Buettner-Janusch had told him that he intended to make LSD because the drug was fashionable again and that “money is money, so who cares?” Another witness stated that the disgraced professor had told him in March 1979: “You are as amoral as the rest of the U.S. and therefore I can tell you that we are going to make Quaaludes in the laboratory. We need some money to keep the laboratory going.”<sup>5</sup> He was sentenced to five years, but was paroled in 1983.

Some of those interviewed for this study have offered valuable information and described rich experiences with psychedelics around that time. Brad remembers attending an opera under the influence of psilocybin in the mid-1980s. He described the opera – Wagner’s *Parsifal* – as “extremely long, mythological, and spiritual.” The opera lasts nearly six hours and while the audience was usually asleep by the end of it, but under the influence of the drug, he was deeply moved and experienced something close to transcendence. Though he had always been very cautious about planning a psychedelic experience, on another particular occasion, he wanted to impress a male acquaintance he was courting – he described him as “one of the most decadent people” he had ever met. Eager to show him a good time on a visit in NYC, they both took psilocybin for a ballet that featured the acclaimed dancers Rudolph Nureyev and Mikhail Baryshnikov: “And it was really a great idea. I was very proud of my

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<sup>4</sup> Arnold H. Lubasch, “Indictment Charges Professor Used N.Y.U. Laboratory to Make Drugs,” *New York Times*, October 5, 1979.

<sup>5</sup> Selwyn Raab, “Drug Trial of Professor at N.Y.U. Nearing Conclusion,” *New York Times*, July 12, 1980. Another university professor was also arrested at the same time for similar activities. See Arnold H. Lubasch, “L.I. Professor Admits Making Drugs,” *New York Times*, July 31, 1980.

accomplishment.” Brad admits that there was a kind of pressure that forced him to suggest that they do this: “I had to behave the way my friend wanted to behave. And I had to come across as almost as decadent as he was. So I thought I could do that, I could help that. I also thought that I would have absolutely no chance in a relationship unless I extended myself, if that’s a proper term.” His strategy of seduction worked, though the relationship soon went out of control, as that man was too unstable and took many other drugs indiscriminately.<sup>6</sup>

Yet in the 1980s the choice drug was cocaine,<sup>7</sup> rather than psychedelics and cannabis, thus affecting the psychedelic drug scene. As Isaac Abrams recalls, “It became obscured by the coke scene. Coke was the drug of choice among the new power-seeking power-centered people. But I don’t think that meant that people weren’t doing it.”<sup>8</sup> A new generation of designer drugs with no legal status also entered the scene and conveniently replaced the illegal psychedelics in the 1980s. Ed Rosenfeld remembers people were trying drugs like 2-CB (2,5-dimethoxy-4-bromophenethylamine) and the energizing, euphoria-inducing and mildly psychedelic MDMA.<sup>9</sup> On one occasion, he took MDMA in the East Village: “I took it at my apartment with a friend and I lived where you can see this development, which has red brick. And I’ve never seen a brick face (laughs), like I did on ADAM. [...] I had a friend who did light-shows here in the City. And there was a huge scene. An ecstasy scene. I was never part of that. I knew what was going on. I wasn’t taking ecstasy and dancing.”<sup>10</sup>

MDMA gained popularity in night-clubs. The drug offered far greater financial reward than LSD, because it was cheap to manufacture and sold for around \$20 in New York City

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<sup>6</sup> Brad, interview.

<sup>7</sup> David T. Courtwright, “The Rise and Fall and Rise of Cocaine in the United States,” in Jordan Goodman, Paul E. Lovejoy, and Andrew Sheratt, eds., *Consuming Habits: Drugs in History and Anthropology* (London: Routledge, 2007), 215-37.

<sup>8</sup> Isaac Abrams, interview.

<sup>9</sup> For some discussions on MDMA, see Julie Holland, ed., *Ecstasy: The Complete Guide* (Rochester, VT: Park Street Press, 2001); Tim Pilcher, *E: The Incredibly Strange History of Ecstasy* (Philadelphia and London: Running Press, 2008).



clubs. In February 2000, for instance, police arrested an Israeli drug ring that reportedly sold 100,000 tablets weekly.<sup>11</sup> Several New Yorkers took the drug, along with drugs like LSD or cannabis, to enhance the pleasure of “foam” parties – dancing in waist-high foam - at the Limelight nightclub in Chelsea.<sup>12</sup> A few years later, the club often found its doors padlocked by the police because of rampant MDMA use and trade. Other Manhattan clubs (one of them dubbed a “drug supermarket”) even hired private ambulance services to take overdosed victims to hospital.<sup>13</sup>

In 1991, several drug experts suggested that LSD was enjoying a mild comeback amongst young people. For instance, one 21-year old musician tried who experienced with LSD declared that it was “something akin to Eastern meditation” and that it had put him “in harmony with the earth.” But not all of them enjoyed the experience. In Manhattan, one 20-year male old tried the drug and underwent a spell of mild paranoia and anxiety – he imagined a white spider crawling up a friend’s back.<sup>14</sup> In 1992 the National Institute for Drug Abuse (NIDA) sponsored Leigh Henderson and William Glass to study the supposed resurgence of LSD in the early 1990s.<sup>15</sup> The drug appeared to be still used recreationally, chiefly by White suburban educated middle-class males - the authors even suggest that “LSD may be the drug of affluent discontent.”<sup>16</sup> As in the 1980s, they mainly used it out of boredom, disenchantment

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<sup>10</sup> Rosenfeld, interview.

<sup>11</sup> William K. Rashbaum, “Drug Experts Report a Boom in Ecstasy Use,” *New York Times*, February 26, 2000.

<sup>12</sup> George James, “Limelight Goes Dark as Crackdown on Drugs Reaches Major Clubs,” *New York Times*, October 5, 1995.

<sup>13</sup> David Rohde, “Ecstasy Overdoses Continue despite Nightclub’s closing,” *New York Times*, September 4, 2001.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph B. Treaster, “A New Generation Discovers LSD, and its Dangers,” *New York Times*, December 27, 1991.

<sup>15</sup> Leigh A. Henderson and William J. Glass, eds., *LSD: Still with Us after all these Years* (New York: Lexington Books, 1994).

<sup>16</sup> James McDonald and Michael Agar, “What Is a Trip – and Why Take One?,” in *LSD: Still with Us after all the these Years*, ed. Leigh A. Henderson and William J. Glass (New York: Lexington Books, 1994), 36.

with society, personal challenge, bonding, curiosity, or to find artistic inspiration. The doses were significantly smaller than in the Sixties and often adulterated with amphetamines or other chemicals. Henderson and Glass's study also suggests that media scares and misinformation about LSD were still important vectors of parental incomprehension towards youth LSD use. They also argue that the perceived increase or decrease in LSD use can largely be the result of media coverage – they note, for instance, that “in the 1980s, news stories centred on intravenous drug use (because of its connection with AIDS) and on the devastating effects of the crack cocaine epidemic.”<sup>17</sup> They conclude that “evidence of a current nationwide epidemic is not compelling.”<sup>18</sup>

In the late 1990s some were still in the psychedelic business. In 1997 police arrested a drug suspect in Queens, which led to the discovery of an LSD factory in the Far Rockaway area. There agents found 700,000 doses of the drug (with an estimated retail value of between \$2 million and \$3 million) and were led to another house that was being used to grow psilocybin mushrooms. At the time, authorities claimed that this was the biggest seizure of LSD in more than a decade, and speculated that this might lead to a surge in psychedelic drug use, which had significantly dipped in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>19</sup> Even more recently, 13 were arrested and accused of selling illicit drugs including LSD to Columbia students. The undercover agent who led to the arrests reported a bizarre conversation in which one the accused claimed he wanted to kidnap a rival dealer from Queens and torture him with LSD.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> William J. Glass, Leigh A. Henderson, and Cynthia Favret, “Summary and Implications,” in *LSD: Still with Us after all these Years*, ed. Leigh A. Henderson and William J. Glass (New York: Lexington Books, 1994), 129.

<sup>18</sup> Leigh A. Henderson, “LSD Use and LSD Users: Questions and Answers About LSD,” in *LSD: Still with Us after all these Years*, ed. Leigh A. Henderson and William J. Glass (New York: Lexington Books, 1994), 97.

<sup>19</sup> David M. Herszenhorn, “LSD Factory Is Discovered in Rockaway,” *New York Times*, April 6, 1997.

<sup>20</sup> Joseph Goldstein, “Under Cover in Drug Case at Columbia, Now Arrested,” *New York Times*, June 10, 2011. One reason LSD has become relatively hard to come by today is

If the psychedelic subculture seems to have survived the 1960s so did some of its more trademark characteristics. In many ways, psychedelia's spiritual, political, artistic, and scientific ramifications continued to intertwine and create complex cultural manifestations. Psychedelic art continued to have a strong spiritual component but psychedelic research assumed a political dimension that had not existed in the Sixties. All in all, those who still showed their colours were always aware of psychedelia's controversial past.

### **Psychedelic Science**

LSD research was impossible in the United States after the 1960s. The drug was classified as a narcotic and had a reputation of being a dangerous and subversive drug. Thus, the emphasis shifted towards new substances that were less-known to the public and could be considered under a more favourable light. The case of ibogaine shows that psychedelic research continued beyond the Sixties, even though the context was quite different.

As stated in the opening chapter, Howard Lotsof discovered ibogaine in 1962 and was freed from his opiate addiction. During the experience, he found himself thrust into a dark room where he heard a voice tell him: "You will bring ibogaine to the world, and set it free."<sup>21</sup> But it was only later on that he attempted to fulfill this mission. In the meantime, he gave the drug to Isaac Abrams, who provides a vivid account of the ibogaine experience. The drug was

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the availability of other psychedelics. In 2012, Ed Rosenfeld and some friends took some psilocybin mushrooms in the city, though everybody but him had negative experience. He has also become interested in more obscure "designer drugs" like 4-ACO (3-[2-(Dimethylamino)ethyl]-1*H*-indol-4-yl acetate). He managed to get some and following Albert Hofmann's injunction to take 25µgrs of LSD daily, he took 5mlgrs of 4-ACO daily for a while (the recommended dose is closer to 20mlgrs) and had "a grand old time." Rosenfeld, interview.

<sup>21</sup> Paul De Rienzo and Dana Beal, "Howard Lotsof," in *The Ibogaine Story: Report on the Staten Island Project*, page unavailable, <http://ibogaine.mindvox.com/articles/ibogaine-story-staten-island-project/> (accessed November 17, 2014).

slow to act, but when Lotsof thought nothing was happening, Abrams stood up: “my body flew out of my body. Like one of those telescopes that opens up. There’s 8 or 9 sections. Then my body that flew out of my body, flew out of the body that flew out of my body. And again, and again, and again. And suddenly I was extraordinarily tall.” They decided to head back to Lotsof’s house, which they barely managed on account of the ibogaine – crossing a street or opening a door assumed tremendous proportions. But when they finally found sanctuary in Lotsof’s home, Abrams had one his most memorable psychedelic moments:

I sat on the bed and I was looking at these venetian blinds and they started looking like a TV that started to go out of phase. And going up and down and lights going down, up and down, up and down, up and down. It was overwhelming. And I just fell backwards and laid back onto the bed. And when I did that it was like I tumbled down into this whirling, whirling kind of – almost like a whirlpool. And down and down and down. And I literally felt myself flowing down through this thing and I landed in this place and I realized I was inside my head. Inside my subconscious. And it was warm and it was wet. And it was sticky. And in there, there was all the people in my life - my father, a whole bunch of people came in this place. And there was all kinds of things happening. Conversations. And it went on and on like that. It went on for a long time.

Abrams then describes how he was able to visualize electricity, soundwaves and even ley lines. This was accompanied by several other uncanny experiences for three days.<sup>22</sup>

In December 1973, Howard Lotsof met Dana Beal, a strong advocate of cannabis legalization, founder of New York Provo and putative new leader of the Yippies. Lotsof gave some ibogaine to Beal, who immediately reasoned that the drug had tremendous potential. In a cultural context where activism and social protest had significantly waned, Beal saw the drug as an asset to rekindle the protest movements of the 1960s.<sup>23</sup> In the 1980s, Lotsof’s project – popularly known as the Staten Island Project - gathered tremendous resources from the YIPPIES, which constituted an important shift from lobbying for cannabis legalization, to supporting ibogaine research. This occurred in a broader context of heroin epidemic and

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<sup>22</sup> Isaac Abrams, interview.

<sup>23</sup> De Rienzo and Beal, “Howard Lotsof.”

growing activism to curb opiate use. In December 1981, Lotsof received his first major donation (\$4,000) from a woman whose boyfriend was addicted. With these funds, he reviewed a century of work on ibogaine, and found promising leads that suggested that a relationship existed between the biochemical actions of ibogaine and opiates.<sup>24</sup>

Public backing, by contrast, was non-existent. In 1983, he approached NIDA, hoping to find support in an official government agency. But upon telling them about his first ibogaine experience and subsequent heroin release, they did not take him seriously. Memories of Leary touting LSD as a cure-for-all were still fresh; yet, they failed to acknowledge that while LSD's potential lay as much in the substance as in therapist, the interruption of addiction was solely due to ibogaine's pharmacological properties.<sup>25</sup> In 1983, Lotsof and his wife Norma set up the Dora Weiner Foundation (a charity named after his grand-mother) designed to provide ibogaine as an alternative treatment for opiate addiction. But again, the cultural climate of the 1980s, embodied by Nancy Reagan's aggressive campaigning against all illicit drugs, made things tricky. "Ninety percent of the anti-drug abuse foundations were only interested in education," claimed Lotsof. Curing addiction was swiftly dismissed and the lack of empathy for drug addicts stemmed from the notion that they were responsible for their affliction. Rehabilitating the illegal ibogaine was thus out of the question.<sup>26</sup>

Towards the end of the decade, Bob Sisko, a friend of Lotsof's, who had shrugged off his cocaine and tobacco habits thanks to ibogaine, began treating addicts in New York. When he gave the drug to a long-time addict in April 1989, the improvement was so dramatic that a stunned Beal decided to give ibogaine the same priority as legalizing cannabis. Sisko then

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<sup>24</sup> Paul De Rienzo and Dana Beal, "The Staten Island Project," in *The Ibogaine Story: Report on the Staten Island Project*, page unavailable, <http://ibogaine.mindvox.com/articles/ibogaine-story-staten-island-project/> (accessed November 17, 2014).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. NIDA ultimately expressed interest in the drug and funded preliminary studies on ibogaine.

gave the drug to a 34-year old woman named Linda, who had been an unrepentant heroin addict for years. Following a profound and life-changing experience, not only did she manage to shun her habit, but she also found that her Catholic faith had been strengthened as a result.<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, a cocaine user named Charlie Kritsky had been monitoring the ibogaine scene since the late 1970s. Kritsky had connections in the club scene and used them to find supporters (which would include Madonna and Billy Idol) and publicity for the drug.<sup>28</sup>

The ibogaine movement carried on into the 1990s. On March 23, 1990, the Black Panther Dhoruba al-Mujahid (formerly known as Richard Moore) was released from prison after the State Supreme Court overturned his 25-year-to-life prison sentence for attempted murder of two NYPD officers. Wahad had been actively involved in curbing heroin use amongst Blacks in the city and met Beal, who gave him a summary of information on ibogaine.<sup>29</sup> Early in 1991, Beal proposed that Wahad call to support a coalition around ibogaine and shun the needle exchange campaign he was backing, to halt heroin use. Entangled with legal issues surrounding cannabis trafficking, Beal nonetheless organized a July 10 protest called “Storm NIDA for Ibogaine.”<sup>30</sup>

In 1991, Sisko found he was drinking heavily again and re-treated himself and found that it “really refreshed [his] memories of the first time [he] did it.” Just like Linda, he found his Jewish faith reinvigorated. He expressed a desire to take ibogaine at Mt Sinai “to see if he might be able to talk to Moishe Rebbineu.” Since his second treatment, he attends the

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Paul De Rienzo and Dana Beal, “Bob Sisko,” in *The Ibogaine Story: Report on the Staten Island Project*, page unavailable, <http://ibogaine.mindvox.com/articles/ibogaine-story-staten-island-project/> (accessed November 17, 2014).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Paul De Rienzo and Dana Beal, “Dhoruba Moore,” in *The Ibogaine Story: Report on the Staten Island Project*, page unavailable, <http://ibogaine.mindvox.com/articles/ibogaine-story-staten-island-project/> (accessed November 17, 2014).

synagogue every Friday night and makes himself available on Saturdays.<sup>31</sup> If the ibogaine experience could be interpreted along religious lines, it could also be promoted as an asset for religious practice. After the first elements of favourable media coverage in the early 1990s, Wahad openly endorsed the project and gave it major publicity in 1992, when he claimed that ibogaine did not violate Muslim teachings and could be used to cure addiction. This led several Black Panther veterans to endorse the drug.<sup>32</sup>

Later that year, ibogaine received more coverage when Beal appeared in court for another adjournment on his probation violation. He argued before the judge that ibogaine offered a ground-breaking treatment for opiate addiction. The story was picked up by the Philadelphia *Inquirer*, which published a longer piece on the history of ibogaine treatment. Yet, Lotsof was frustrated that the article omitted important aspects of the movement, such as the support of the Black community – while ACT UP was only briefly mentioned. Instead, the piece used loaded words that echoed the media coverage of the 1960s psychedelic movement: “Lotsof has become the guru of a small band of ibogaine evangelists, who speak of the drug almost reverentially.” The article described Lotsof’s “followers” as “an alliance of aging hipsters, Lower East Side political activists and drug-decriminalization advocates.”<sup>33</sup> Thus, ibogaine passed for an obscure drug that some touted as a magic bullet, very much like Leary had done in the 1960s with LSD.

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<sup>30</sup> Paul De Rienzo and Dana Beal, “Jon Parker,” in *The Ibogaine Story: Report on the Staten Island Project*, page unavailable, <http://ibogaine.mindvox.com/articles/ibogaine-story-staten-island-project/> (accessed November 17, 2014).

<sup>31</sup> De Rienzo and Beal, “Bob Sisko.”

<sup>32</sup> Paul De Rienzo and Dana Beal, “Carlo Contoreggi,” in *The Ibogaine Story: Report on the Staten Island Project*, page unavailable, <http://ibogaine.mindvox.com/articles/ibogaine-story-staten-island-project/> (accessed November 17, 2014).

<sup>33</sup> Andrew Maykuth, “To Help Battle Addiction, He Advocates the Use of a Drug,” *Inquirer*, July 4, 1992, [http://articles.philly.com/1992-07-04/news/26027493\\_1\\_ibogaine-howard-lotsof-heroin-and-cocaine](http://articles.philly.com/1992-07-04/news/26027493_1_ibogaine-howard-lotsof-heroin-and-cocaine) (accessed November 27, 2014). Fortunately for Lotsof, another journalist from the *Boston Globe* produced the most favourable article on ibogaine then.

In 1993, Beal attempted to organize protest at NIDA and the FDA, and had further plans to lobby for a community-based Phase III ibogaine trial in Harlem. Wahad was also keen to show the Black community the existing data on ibogaine that suggested that the drug had little or no potential for abuse.<sup>34</sup> Lotsof and Beal promoted ibogaine as a medical wonder that could cure one of the worst drug epidemics in the United States and purposefully shunned a Leary-type promotion of a psychedelic drug. Despite this attitude, there were resemblances between both movements. Beal prepared an Ibogaine workbook for a Harlem Hospital workshop on August 4, 1992. It contained extra-medical elements such as articles on Gabonese Bwiti ceremonies, as well as excerpts from the science-fiction writer Philip K. Dick's *Valis*, which he felt resembled the Bwiti cosmogony.<sup>35</sup> In a similar way, Leary had used Herman Hesse's literature, as well as elements of non-Western spirituality to express his psychedelic philosophy.

For the NYU professor of psychiatry and neurology Kenneth Alper, "[Lotsof's] greatest achievement was in inducing the National Institute on Drug Abuse to undertake a research project on ibogaine that produced scores of peer-reviewed publications and paved the way for F.D.A. approval of a clinical trial," even if the trial was never completed and ibogaine remains a federally banned substance.<sup>36</sup> Thus, observations regarding ibogaine treatment in the United States have remained mostly anecdotal and are missing controlled testing.

It is quite possible that ibogaine will become a useful adjunct to cure addiction in the coming years. Lotsof's efforts may be remembered as critical and inspirational for what is

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<sup>34</sup> Paul De Rienzo and Dana Beal, "Molliver's Travel," in *The Ibogaine Story: Report on the Staten Island Project*, page unavailable, <http://ibogaine.mindvox.com/articles/ibogaine-story-staten-island-project/> (accessed November 17, 2014).

<sup>35</sup> Paul De Rienzo and Dana Beal, "Bwiti," in *The Ibogaine Story: Report on the Staten Island Project*, page unavailable, <http://ibogaine.mindvox.com/articles/ibogaine-story-staten-island-project/> (accessed November 17, 2014).



now referred to as the “psychedelic renaissance” - a renewed interest in psychedelic science. The anthropologist and historian of science Nicolas Langlitz has chronicled this renaissance by undertaking an ethnography of psychedelic drug research in laboratories in California and Switzerland. His account shows how contemporary researchers are well aware of the turbulent history of LSD and psychedelics and are presenting their work as genuinely scientific (the popularization of neurosciences in the 1990s helped spark the comeback). Yet, despite these efforts, present-day psychedelic scientists are still faced with the perennial tension between the scientific and spiritual conceptions of psychedelic substances (as Novak has argued about early psychedelic research), which echoes the tension between Leary’s preaching and psychedelic psychiatrists’ hopes to find a ground-breaking treatment for mental illness.<sup>37</sup>

Still, Ed Rosenfeld is delighted to see this unfold in a more serene atmosphere than in the mid-Sixties, but nonetheless feels that psychedelics still have some subversive potential: “I think that the emphasis on research of some of the people who are involved in it, drug-policy advocates and things like that. Some of the conferences that go on. It’s in a sense, a counter-culture within the culture. And it seems to rest kind of easily in that way. I don’t have the same draconian sense. We always thought the police were going to close me down. So there was always a fear.”<sup>38</sup>

### **Psychedelic Art**

Psychedelic art seemed on the decline after the 1960s, not just because of people like Peter Max, but because of competing artistic movements. For Abrams, the psychedelic art scene

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<sup>36</sup> Dennis Hevesi, “Howard Lotsof Dies at 66; Saw Drug Cure in a Plant,” *New York Times*, February 17, 2010.

<sup>37</sup> Langlitz, *Neuropsychedelia*.

<sup>38</sup> Rosenfeld, interview.

became largely obscured by pop art in the 1970s: “And suddenly Andy Warhol became the artist of records. Pop art came in and big things painted by mechanical means. Then also photorealism. The idea was that artist wasn’t supposed to enter the picture at all. There was kind of a turn on it.” This meant that psychedelic artists remained on the fringes of the art scene and were never as financially sound as their pop art counterparts: “Economically and from my point of view, I couldn’t possibly compete with the whole pop art movement of the cultural establishment, which was much more comfortable with the pop art movement. Because essentially it enthroned American commercialism and my vision was somewhat different than that.”<sup>39</sup>

Yet, there were exceptions to this trend. In 1988 a gallery offered a retrospective psychedelic art exhibition called the Psychedelic Solution Gallery in Manhattan, run by Jacaeber Kastor. But rather than use classic canvas, this art was “blotter art,” a collection of sheets of small squares with drawings on them. The sheets were then soaked in LSD and blotters were sold separately – here, the LSD was chemically neutralized and the art works were not for sale. As Kastor pointed out, “One of the problems is that this art was consumed, so there’s not much to show.” As ever, the art could be considered spiritual: the blotter sheets were decorated with various symbols like “zodiac signs, whirling planets, silver bolts of lightning and purple half-moons.” For Max, this exhibition was a fine tribute to the psychedelic subculture: “The art of the period had a lot to do with consciousness-expansion, Eastern mysticism, euphoria, color, magic and the unknown. There was a private language. It was a rich and unusual decade in which the whole world exploded.” Another commentator, the graphic designer Milton Glaser, felt that considering blotter art as legitimate art was

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<sup>39</sup> Isaac Abrams, interview.

debatable, echoing the similar debate in the 1960s: “The images have cultural resonance. But to elevate them to art is to misunderstand their significance.”<sup>40</sup>

More recently the Whitney Museum hosted the *Summer of Love* art exhibition (initially organized by the Tate Liverpool), which featured the works of several New York psychedelic artists, including Abrams and Mati Klarwein. One of Abrams’ pieces “All Things Are One Things,” which had featured on the cover of Masters and Houston’s *Psychedelic Art*, was hung up on banners on Park Avenue - “almost like an icon.” Abrams called it “very complete.” He (only half-joking) praised the show for its absence of anything by Warhol and dismissed critics who felt that women were under-represented in the show: “there was not really a feminist movement at the beginning of the psychedelic movement. The psychedelic movement in terms of long-term movements studied had more to do with the environmentalist and ecological movement. [...] Gender issues came a little later.”<sup>41</sup> Gerd Stern was equally enthusiastic about the show, praising its “very complete catalogue of experiences by artists and other persona.”<sup>42</sup>

Abrams is far less charitable with the *New York Times* art critic Ken Johnson and his recent book on psychedelic art, calling it a “Perfectly horrible book.” He feels Johnson should have taken more psychedelics to better understand his topic, rather than remain “locked in New York City in the art world.” Additionally, Johnson “was putting all kinds of things in there that were ridiculous and that had nothing to do with all these experiences, but that were very supportive [of his thesis].” Many of the examples Johnson summons illustrate a post-modern, rather than a psychedelic sensibility: “I see pictures of people standing in front of

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<sup>40</sup> Patricia Leigh Brown, “Psychedelic-Art Show Is Reflection of its Era,” *New York Times*, January 28, 1988.

<sup>41</sup> Isaac Abrams, interview.

<sup>42</sup> Gerd Stern, interview .

museums in front of these things, always with their arms crossed. Like waiting for something to happen.”<sup>43</sup>

But perhaps the best proof that psychedelic art is alive and has retained a strong spiritual component is the visionary artist Alex Grey, whose personal history illustrates how beyond the 1960s LSD and psychedelics continued to elicit complex experiences. Grey and his family attended a Methodist church, until his parents became disillusioned with established religion and became agnostic-atheists, which in turn kick started Grey’s serious spiritual quest. When he was 21, he was invited to a party by his future wife Allyson and they both took a strong dose of LSD. This led to a life-changing experience: “Tripping that night I experienced going through a spiritual rebirth canal inside of my head. I was in the dark, going towards the light, spinning in this tunnel, a kind of an opalescent living mother-of-pearl tube. All paradoxes were resolved in this tunnel - dark and light, male and female, life and death.”

His use of LSD triggered visions that deeply influenced his art: “After acid trips, I started having visions of glowing bodies with the acupuncture meridians and points, chakras and auras all inter-relating.” His art is also influenced by his love relationship with his wife: “We have often tripped laying in bed, blindfolded or in a beautiful environment. Then, coming out of blindfolds, we write and draw.” As many 60s psychedelic artists contended, Grey defines psychedelic art as art that has been influenced by the use of psychedelics, rather than art produced while under the direct influence of a drug: “The results are interesting and remind me of the trip, but it’s not my most successful work. My work takes a steady mind, eye and hand to accomplish. The psychedelic helps me to access the infinitude of the imagination, allowing me to see countless interpenetrating dimensions.”

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<sup>43</sup> Isaac Abrams, interview. Another major artist Alex Grey was just as dismissive of the book, according to Abrams.

In 1979 Grey began the “Sacred Mirrors” series, which consisted of several paintings intended at exploring the human anatomy from a physical and metaphysical perspective (mind, body, and spirit). Each “Mirror” depicts a human-sized figure that allows the viewer to see a mirror image of herself. According to Grey, “People have reported that by using the paintings in this way, a resonance takes place between one's own body and the painted image, creating a sense of ‘seeing into’ oneself.” Grey even had the opportunity to take a psychedelic drug and experience the exhibition:

I felt like I was experiencing a new kind of subtle body work. When I was standing in front of the ‘Psychic Energy System’ my ‘vital essence’ was pulled out through my eyes, and into the painting, like a magnet. My vitality went into this glowing body, and like electrons zipping around a hard drive, I was being reformatted by the painted image of a perfect template. My vital essence was unkinked, purified and intensified. Then this essence oozed out of the painting and back into my body. The painting acted like a tool that catalyzed the evolution of my consciousness.<sup>44</sup>

The Sacred Mirrors ultimately became part of a far more ambitious project designed to blend art and spirituality in a unique setting. In 1984, Alex and Allyson Grey allegedly had a simultaneous vision of building a Chapel to host the Sacred Mirrors. After incorporating as a non-profit organization in 1996, the Chapel of Sacred Mirrors finally opened in 2004 in Chelsea. In 2009, it moved permanently to Wappingers Falls, New York. The Chapel of Sacred Mirrors embodied the syncretic and innovative character of psychedelic spirituality. Several prayer flags could be seen hanging from the ceiling and displaying a wide range of sources: Meister Eckart, the founder of Bahai spirituality Bahauallah, Lao-tzu, William Blake, Aldous Huxley, Jesus Christ, Mahatma Gandhi, and the Dalai Lama. Other cultural sources like Alcoholic Anonymous, Monty Python, or the heavy metal band Tool added to the eclectic atmosphere of the Chapel.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Alex Grey, Reflections on a Sacred Mirror, interview by David Jay Brown, 1995, <http://www.mavericksofthemind.com/grey-int.htm> (accessed December 28, 2014).

<sup>45</sup> Silke Tudor, “Going to the Chapel, *Village Voice*, September 5, 2006.

The Chapel fittingly illustrates how the Greys continue to ascribe a religious meaning to the psychedelic experience. In 2002, Alex accompanied tourists to the Brazilian rainforest to take ayahuasca and he and his wife took LSD together twice a year as part of their eclectic spiritual practices – they are affiliated to a synagogue and a Buddhist community and are also interested in Eastern spirituality and paganism. Allyson sees their psychedelic way of life as something close to an underground religious sect and has cautioned her daughter about disclosing too much about it: “I basically told her that it’s like the early Christians. It’s a secret society. It’s part of our spiritual life. You don’t talk to other people about it, you don’t talk to your friends about it because it’ll scare their parents. And you aren’t ready to do it.”<sup>46</sup>

### **Cultural Legacy**

A final word from some of those who were involved in the 1960s psychedelic scene can help assess what kind of impact psychedelia had on culture. For Stanley Krippner, the psychedelic experience helped remove barriers of prejudice and foster an egalitarian sensibility: “On LSD, they could see the inequities and the injustice of the *status quo*.” Class, gender, ethnic, economic distinctions “tended to dissolve under the influence of psychedelics.”<sup>47</sup> While this claim is hard to assess, the way New York jet-setters mingled with Leary and his followers or the way some Whites and Blacks shared the drug suggests that LSD had a rallying power that transcended class and race distinctions.

For Ed Rosenfeld, psychedelic utopianism was overblown and ultimately waned, but left a long-lasting mark: “We were remaking culture. [...] So it seemed like that culture was going to take hold, first here in the East Village, then later in the Sixties in San Francisco. And

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<sup>46</sup> John Leland, “At Home with Alex and Allyson Grey,” *New York Times*, January 3, 2002.

it didn't take hold. I took hold in other ways." Today his enthusiasm for psychedelics is more moderate, but still suffused with some form of idealism:

I still think psychedelics are wonderful. I don't think they are for everybody. At the time, I was much more indiscriminate and I thought probably everybody could take them. Now I see that that may not be the case and be more judicious. But I don't try and turn people on anymore and then I was trying to turn people on. And I was doing some proselytizing. I wasn't banging on anybody's door saying "you must take these drugs." But if people showed any interest, then I was willing to help facilitate their quest for that. Now I wish there was quite a greater availability of psychedelics.<sup>48</sup>

Given the number of people who experimented with psychedelics, it is hard to imagine that these substances did not affect the American consciousness on a much broader cultural level. For Graboi, "More people than ever before have entered states of awareness that were formerly reserved to mystics, saints, and the rare inspired artist. [...] a bridge to the divine has been built."<sup>49</sup> Isaac Abrams was one of them: "I feel some of the experiences really were direct experiences that were very unifying. They may have laid dormant in me, waiting for something to awaken them. But I definitely think they were awakened with some of these experiences spiritually. The sense of unification and creation. Such as the unity of the planet, the unity of the biosphere, and the actual consciousness of the biosphere – the sense that the biosphere has consciousness."<sup>50</sup>

Other users, on the other hand, had mixed feelings about their experimentation in the 1960s and had regrets. Amelie Edwards feels that instead of becoming a so-called "flower child" around the age of fifteen and living on the streets, she could have gone to college and had a better career, but at the same time she feels that these experiences made her somewhat

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<sup>47</sup> Krippner, interview.

<sup>48</sup> Rosenfeld, interview.

<sup>49</sup> Graboi, *One Foot in the Future*, 248.

<sup>50</sup> Isaac Abrams, interview.

bolder in the face of adversity.<sup>51</sup> Graboi also admitted that there had been casualties and was deeply distressed about the negative powers of psychedelics.<sup>52</sup>

LSD and psychedelics have a rich and lengthy legacy in various areas, but these drugs were also significant in other less obvious ways. As Paul Krassner put it, “LSD was influencing music, painting, spirituality – and the stock market. Tim Leary once let me listen in on a call from a Wall Street broker thanking him for turning him on to acid because it gave him the courage to sell short.”<sup>53</sup> In many ways, this amusing anecdote sums up what this study has tried to achieve: to show how diverse and complex New York’s psychedelic moment was, while moving away from some of the canonical narratives that have focused on the sensational, rather than the obvious.

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<sup>51</sup> Edwards, interview.

<sup>52</sup> Graboi, *One Foot in the Future*, 248.

<sup>53</sup> Paul Krassner, “My Acid Trip with Groucho Marx,” in *Psychedelic Trips for the Mind*, ed. Paul Krassner (New York: Trans-High Corp., 2001), 175.



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