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## Pipers At The Gates of Dawn: Psychedelic Script Design and Posters From Haight-Ashbury's Golden Age (1965-1969) How Artists From the Haight-Ashbury Psychedelic Community Created Wildly Avant Garde Art-Posters By Altering The Appearance And Function of Text

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**Pipers At The Gates of Dawn: Psychedelic Script Design and Posters From  
Haight-Ashbury's Golden Age (1965-1969)**

**How Artists From the Haight-Ashbury Psychedelic Community Created Wildly Avant  
Garde Art-Posters By Altering The Appearance And Function of Text**

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of the Arts  
of Bard College

by Erin Ikelheimer

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“Strange memories on this nervous night in Las Vegas. Five years later? Six? It seems like a lifetime, or at least a Main Era—the kind of peak that never comes again. San Francisco in the middle sixties was a very special time and place to be a part of. Maybe it meant something. Maybe not, in the long run . . . but no explanation, no mix of words or music or memories can touch that sense of knowing that you were there and alive in that corner of time and the world. Whatever it meant. . . .”

-Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*

“I do wish I hadn’t drunk quite so much!”

- Lewis Carol, *Alice in Wonderland*

“I began the meeting by making this statement, which I think needs to be made to the Nation: America's public enemy number one in the United States is drug abuse. In order to fight and defeat this enemy, it is necessary to wage a new, all-out offensive.”

-Richard Nixon, “*War on Drugs*” Speech

“The madman bum and angel beat in Time, unknown, yet putting down here what might be left to say in time come after death.”

-Allen Ginsberg, *Howl*





## Introduction. Words Like Drugs

The nineteen-sixties marked a clear break in tradition in both mainstream commercial advertising, the art world, and collective understanding surrounding image making and language. World wide social upheaval and the influx of information created a swelling sense of pregnancy for many living during this time; the feeling of being shot through a cannon. This inclusion of the art world into the “real” world impacted the look of commercial advertising. Moments like the sixties bred space of massive expansion technologically and ideologically, but were paired with heavy political undertones of war, a growing narcotic epidemic, and the threat of nuclear fallout. Beauty comes from struggle but ultimately struggle can snuff out such beauty.

The psychedelic poster movement of the late 1960s in the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood in San Francisco joined counter cultural aesthetic tradition, from beatniks to drug experimenters, and the growing amount of established, conceptually minimalist commercial graphic design. They combined these two seemingly opposite worlds into one, using the functionality of the poster model to sell tickets to rock shows and as a template for expression. Somehow just like the music, literature, and politics the counterculture touched, the counterculture added a psychedelic edge to graphic design and commercial advertising, which not only created lasting impressions on the broader commercial and cultural landscape of the United States and beyond, but still exquisitely expressed the essence of the hippie movement. The psychedelic experience, accessible through newly discovered hallucinogenic drugs, was the core of these posters and charged the imagery and style with avant-garde, revolutionary energy.

Impacting the trajectory of Haight-Ashbury poster design most were the artists Lee Conklin, Victor Moscoso, and Wes Wilson. Crazy with a vision of God in their ABCs, their psychedelic creativity poured into all elements of standard commercial advertisement from their color palette, lettering, composition, gesture. There was no visual element transfigured as completely as text, the anchor of a commercial advertisement that otherwise addressed the viewer directly. The text generally sought to leave the viewer more knowledgeable and at ease than when they began looking at the poster, and yet this is precisely what psychedelic calligraphy and lettering resisted. On the contrary, psychedelic calligraphy sought to mirror the psychedelic state: to leave the viewer in reverence and wonder, to confuse and disorient, and to try and simulate a sense of sublime power. This sense of sublime power is what pushed the artistic and aesthetic movement of the counterculture of Haight-Ashbury. Much like avant-garde movements of the past, this psychedelic movement, much like psychedelic drugs, brought idealists to the brink, a knife point before change. These movements open themselves up to death with a nihilistic and yet desperate expression, weaving imagery of birth, death, and a recycling of life.

The psychedelic poster designers during the Haight-Ashbury heyday understood the importance of text in relation to clear persuasion as well as pure artistic expression. These artists used typographical design to first distort the linear format of a customary advertisement and then broke the spatial illusion of their advertisement completely: letters and words became incoherent and abstracted, traveling around the space of the poster. These artists gave the text the authority to prescribe the overall form of the individual images that make up the poster as well as the greater form of the poster. This

is a radical break from tradition and reason, a mad hatter's attempt at public relation. These artists put emphasis into the form rather than the content of the work, even though this is a complete body of information. They looked at the various elements of a work of commercial design. This questioned the authority of modern conventions and playfully displayed their disdain for following the order of business.

This paper takes a dive into the rhythmic, disorienting and sublime nature of the lettering of these posters, which transforms in front of the viewer both visually and conceptually; the spectator sees the words bend, warp, swell, as if under some spell, outlining shapes, other words, faces even. More importantly, the handwritten script of posters by Lee Conklin, Wes Wilson, and Victor Moscoso manipulates the very function of the text in relation to the posters on a whole. Conventionally, the text works to embellish the overall message of the advertisement as well as provide important information in order to add clarity and harmony to the greater advertisement. In simpler terms the text no longer acts like text should act.

The text in psychedelic design elevates that regard to the images and meaning. The text now acts of its own accord and cares less and less about being helpful, intelligible, vehicles for information even. In a psychedelic sense the text frees itself from the constraints of mundane life and behaves differently, in a more nuanced and elusive manner. The text experiences a full ego-death: a loss of identity and with this loss of meaning, a new sense of being emerges: pure creativity, movement.

In this paper, through research into conventional practices of typography in advertising during the mid-century as well as post 60s analysis into the sharpening culture industry, I will lay my foundation for typography's impending departure from the

familiar. I will chart this within the early 60s, transitioning to the latter half of the decade, a period of time in which America experienced a difficult transition from World War II into Cold War with the Soviet union, and now also the war in Vietnam, invited psychedelic aesthetics into both the mass media culture machine and the high art world.

This marks an important turning point in art historical study of this time because these artists, knowingly or not, presented Postmodern notions of objects versus art objects, as well as challenging the roles assigned to advertisements, to illustrations, and to the written language itself. This reflects previous movements of this time that based a lot of their subject matter on these ideas of creation and communication. These posters make a highly avant garde statement that essentially living is only experience and the mind is capable of manipulation of meaning to create.

I argue these posters as both art objects and advertisements, attempting to highlight a period of time in which dazzling works came into creation. I use the psychedelic script to emphasize the artistic achievement of these artists as text proved to be the most impactful and transformative design element of the standard psychedelic band poster. I cite The Art Nouveau as an inspiration for the style of gesture making for psychedelic script. I draw parallels between The Art Nouveau's historical context and ideologies in order to further argue these posters as significant art objects. Finally this essay also analyzes the influence of the mass media and culture industry seen in psychedelic posters and text in order to encapsulate the grander cultural climate of mid-century America. These posters give a window into the highly complicated socio-political factors at play in a new and terrifying modern society.

The study of this period of time is vitally important for Art Historical scholarship. Postmodern art, beginning in the early 1950s and traveling into the 70s, was characterized by a snappy, smart confidence juxtaposed with the discomfort, uncertainty, and pain of the mid-century for American artists. This discomfort and pain lead these artists into widely new avenues of exploration to understand the nature of art making in a world that is no longer reflected in the art of the past. As the world rapidly changed around these artists they began questioning the nature of creativity, of imagination and through this expiration, expanded on the definition of Art and created a vast collection of conceptual and visual culture.

The art world finally made the leap into the future during the mid-century and through Postmodern art, creatives had the opportunity to express themselves with the ideas and techniques that most reflect their objective reality. Historical context will be important to show how there came a need for such groovy advertisements and how the culture progressed through the latter half of the 60s. I chart LSD's history from its initial popularity in the scientific field at Harvard as well as its subsequent journey across the United States. I open up the conception of the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood as a psychedelic pilgrimage spot, as rent prices dropped in San Francisco and artists came pouring in. Finally, I will highlight the death of the Haight-Ashbury hippie movement following the Summer of Love in 1967 as the visual culture of this community reached audiences that the radical anti-capitalist politics and cult-like LSD promotion could not. As creative beings, weaving through our world mostly with our eyes it is important to take time to reflect on our spiritual, physical journeys, how image making and

communication is so central to our cores but easily get caught up in the ego centered world.

## Chapter One. Psychedelic History and The Death of A Dream

The world of psychoactive compounds and altered states of consciousness is not new to people, only new to western society. Shamanic practices using various psychoactive chemicals began thousands of years ago across multiple cultures. As well, many coming-of-age rituals in indigenous South America and North America use psychoactive chemicals as the psychedelic experience can easily mirror the hero's journey. In South America, ancestral practices of medicine intertwine with spirituality and religion and therefore shamans are also culturally considered doctors, spiritual advisors, and wisdom holders: think of a therapist and a psychiatrist, confidant, professor, nutritionist and life coach as one role. Shamans are and were the true gatekeepers to the psychedelic world. Not only do they provide help and healing to people, they act as a cultural pillar for these communities. They keep old ways of life alive which adds strength for these communities.

Much of the work these Shamans perform despite the spiritual connotation, appears to be psychological and psychiatric rather than physical because their patients generally need psychological help or counseling. One goes to the shaman for a disease of their soul, to rid themselves of a demon or a bad energy surrounding them. Depending on the severity of their issues the shaman will work with them for up to months at a time, requiring a strict plant based diet to cleanse the body and an increasing medicine regimen of various healing plants as well as intense weekly or even daily hallucinogenic rituals guided by the shaman to create a spiritual transformation. Terrence Mckenna, a psychedelic chemist and philosopher spoke of the Shaman in the



most sacred terms. The Shaman for Mckenna, is a human appendage to the gods. He writes, in his book *Food for The Gods: The Search for The Original Tree of Knowledge*,

This is why the shaman is the remote ancestor of the poet and artist. Our need to feel part of the world seems to demand that we express ourselves through creative activity. The ultimate wellsprings of this creativity are hidden in the mystery of language. Shamanic ecstasy is an act of surrender that authenticates both the individual self and that which is surrendered to the mystery of being.<sup>1</sup>

The Shaman provides services and care to these indigenous communities unavailable to the Western World: counsel, medicine, spiritual guidance and protection. Shamans take on these sacred roles in order to both uplift and serve their communities as well as give back to the psychedelic compounds allowing the Shaman to transcend and travel into spiritual realms.

Pure chemical LSD came into the world by accident by a Swiss chemist, Dr. Albert Hoffman in 1938, who dropped a little on his finger in the process of synthesizing another chemical. He began experiencing hallucinations while in the lab and suspected that a little amount soaked into his fingertips but Dr. Hoffman truly 'broke on through to the other side' during his subsequent bicycle ride home. He can be quoted on this experience, saying "I was completely astonished by the beauty of nature. Our eyes see just a small fraction of the light in the world. It is a trick to make a colored world, which does not exist outside of human beings."<sup>2</sup> This psychedelic experience was profound for Dr. Hoffman, who studied its potential for the rest of his career. His reaction to the compound immediately sparked influence and he later conducted research by dosing himself and others. The process for LSD to make an impact in

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<sup>1</sup> Terrance McKenna, *Food of The Gods: The Search For The Original Tree of Knowledge*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1983).

<sup>2</sup> Albert Hofman. *LSD-My Problem Child* (New York, McGraw-Hill, 1980).

mid-century western culture and politics took twenty-five or so years, just as it took years for LSD to make any impact in the medical field. It only re-entered the lab in the 1950s after Gordon Wasson, an American author and later ethnomycology began a study of psilocybin, a fungus found primarily in cow dung, after completing a shamanic psilocybin ritual in Mexico on vacation. He experienced a profound spiritual transformation and dedicated years to studying the mushroom and its mind-altering effects on the brain. In his book *Persephone's Quest: Entheogens and The Origins*, Wasson touched on the almost sublime worship and fear this tribe of people participated in, believing that the mushrooms provided their community with spiritual guidance and sustenance. "The Indian (or more precisely Amerindian!) communities that knew the sacred mushrooms continued to treat them with awe and reverence and to believe in their gift of second sight..."<sup>3</sup> Gordon Wasson's western ears could only perk up after learning of such a 'second sight'. Oh if these researchers knew a fraction of what was ahead for them!

Following his trip, Wasson published an article in *Life* magazine in 1957 detailing both the mushrooms and the experience and for the first time a major news outlet in the United States gave attention to it. This began a ripple effect which led into the quite real psychedelic culture and communities which synthesize out of a new-found reverence for psychedelic compounds. This excited the Harvard psychology department in the early sixties which embarked on a series of trials using this compound in therapy for anxiety and depression. Dr. Timothy Leary and Dr. Richard Alpert, the two most famous and influential figures from this study, conducted hundreds of trials with LSD and psilocybin

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<sup>3</sup> R. Gordon Wasson et al., *Persephone's Quest: Entheogens and the Origins of Religion* (Yale U.P.: Yale University Press, 1992).

testing on Harvard students and compared their findings to a religious experience, as well as a profoundly healing psychological tool. Leary and Alpert both used LSD even before starting the research and both pushed through at first a difficult and an overall life altering experience. As Leary later recalled, "I learned more about... psychology in the five hours after taking these mushrooms than... in the preceding 15 years of studying and doing research in psychology."<sup>4</sup> LSD created a vibrant buzz on campus as more and more students signed up to participate in the trials. The administrative board in the department caught wind of the insane high achieved with LSD and shut the program down, as well as firing all involved. This did nothing to stop Leary and Alpert who spent many years of their lives following their firing living in an experimental LSD based commune, as well as traveling across the country educating the greater public on psychedelia.

Following their departure from Harvard, Leary and Alpert, along with their colleague Ralph Metzner, *The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual Based on The Tibetan Book of Dead*, a relatively short book with organized sections of each phase in the drug-induced trip. This book maps the different phases of a trip and gives advice for navigating this new world and the various headspaces available: "The underlying solution - repeated again and again - is to recognize that your brain is producing the visions. They do not exist. Nothing exists except as your consciousness gives it life."<sup>5</sup>

*The Psychedelic Experience* bases its structure on the *Tibetan Book of The Dead* because as these men delved deeper into the spirituality and mysticism of LSD through their study, key concepts found in Eastern spirituality such as ego death, life behind

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<sup>4</sup> Timothy Leary et al., *The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead* (New York: Citadel Press, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Leary et al.

thought, and an access to higher states of being, appeared to occur naturally during their LSD trips. This further validated the notion these men explored that a trip is not just a weird time full of silly thoughts and interesting visuals but a deeper, enriching practice important for personal development and growth.

According to a historical essay by Anthony Ashbolt, the psychedelic community in the Haight-Ashbury neighborhoods of San Francisco began because of cheap rent in the area and the migration of famous and influential counterculture figures and carved out a community of creatives and political minds. Artists flocked to San Francisco with the arrival of famous Beatniks and revolutionaries like Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, escaping the grungier, unforgiving art world of Lower Manhattan. The formation of the psychedelic counterculture occurred quickly, starting in 1965 and happened during a series of public events, multimedia dance concerts and theatrical performances that attempted to recreate the psychedelic experience in this realm of consciousness.

The first event to get the ball rolling was The San Francisco Mime Troupe Fundraiser held in November of 1965 at the Fillmore West by The Family Dog, a psychedelic art collective. Next, the first event explicitly dedicated to psychedelia was the Trips Festival (see fig. 1) held by Ken Kesey and The Family Dog in January 1966. The Trips Festival was advertised as a drug free, drug simulating event, although LSD usage ran rampant throughout the event. The Trips Festival holds great importance because it cemented the counterculture's psychedelic aesthetic as well as the overall culture which was characterized, according to Ashbolt, by "LSD, body paint, light shows, music, exotic costumes, strobe lights, sexual mayhem, freak outs and the

defecation of psychotic, eastern mysticism, and the rebirth of hair.<sup>6</sup> Following the Trips Festival, the counterculture scene in San Francisco became an easily recognizable body of people.

The next phase of the scene came with the erection of (semi) permanent sanctuaries: shops that acted as pillars of the counterculture's way of life. The first and most famous counterculture shop to open was the Psychedelic Shop (see fig. 2), a free book store where people congregated for information and organization around politics, alternative lifestyles and drug culture. This reading by Ashbolt, emphasizes the importance of location for the counter cultural movement because of hippies's philosophical attraction to these environments, but also argues that because of the visual nature of the hippies' distinct physical presentation as well as their love of objects (an influence from growing up during post war american consumerism, that much of the counterculture became more aesthetically, and image driven as the community grew. The idea of the marketplace, in this context the shop, or free store, not only gave people opportunities to amass items and clothing to further enhance their outward appearance, but the marketplace is central for idea sharing, many of these shops held community events and provided support and information for LSD users.

The peak of the Haight-Ashbury scene happened during The Summer of Love of 1967. The counterculture peaked in population during this summer, but suffered because of this and the heavy media attention it attracted. As messages of a wider movement based on new-found truths with the help of drugs, a new life for young Americans, opened the larger world on Haight-Ashbury. It began to overwhelm humble

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<sup>6</sup> Anthony Ashbolt, "'Go Ask Alice': Remembering The Summer of Love Forty Years On," *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 26, no. 2 (2007): 44.

acid heads now being met with international press, and the moniker of the wildest thing happening at the time. This rapid expansion ultimately weakened the strength of the ideologies behind the hippie movement. The community's sense of utopia began to fade and a darker, harder drug scene of amphetamine and narcotics entered the seemingly peaceful psychedelic community. San Francisco became known for drugs so all types of drug users poured into the streets in search of a high. As well, the music scene in Haight-Ashbury expanded well beyond the boundaries of the psychedelic revolution and eventually left the area as fame and success necessitated travel and an actual participation in society. Ashbury adds that by the end of the dream, many core hippies who held to their values, believing still in starting a new society, left San Francisco right before The Summer of Love even started in search of land in northern California to start communes. After The Summer of Love of 1967, the psychedelic movement took the rest of the sixties to truly fizzle out into a memory.

The failure of the psychedelic revolution started in San Francisco captures the beauty and the inspiration these hippies gained from the use of psychedelic drugs. The failure of the hippie movement further reflects the purity and naivety of a newly inspired people, coming out from the desert with glad tidings of prophecy and the salvation of humanity. These people truly believed that dosing the public would change life as we knew it. The psychedelic community was too delicate, too premature in organization and philosophy. Many of these hippies, disillusioned with modern life, carved out for themselves a new, more accepting normal life that proved to be far stranger and whimsical than a modern industrial society would have them think. LSD's spiritual beacon shined through the struggle and death of the hippie movement yet held on to its

own power and influence, still inspiring culture and scientific research as this search for understanding of the human mind.

## Chapter Two. Acceptable Letters

In the 1950s, theorists of design and communication began to analyze graphic image making, advertising, and their psychological effects. Books analyzing and dissecting design like Vance Packard's *The Hidden Persuaders* became widely popular and has been printed at least five times according to Ig Publishing since its debut in 1957. Every component of advertisement needed close dissection including typographical and letter design, which was an important means of sharpening text's intended message and the overall advertisement. Harold Kurschenka's essay *Typography and Communication* from 1961, is an excellent example of the state of thinking in graphic design, a close examination of language and visual design, in which he outlines rules for effective communication. This text appeared at the peak of postwar advertising design, just ahead of the psychedelic poster movement.

Kurschenka wrote that "typographical design is simply a vehicle for words, and it can emphasize or subdue, shout or whisper, the meaning of what it carries."<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, text is a tool the designer can use in order to heighten communication and deepen the thematic meaning of the text. Kurschenka argued, the most important rule in good design is that the text is both attractive and original. Moreover, to emphasize the necessity of originality, he argued that in order for a design to be of quality the word-crafter must be aware of the various characteristics of acceptable commercial advertising and through the act of rejecting or breaking just a few of these rules the designer can achieve this desired originality.

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<sup>7</sup> Harold Kurschenka, "Typography and Communication," (University of Toronto Press, 1961), 147-52.



Kurschenka began with the attractiveness of a design. He wrote "...it should be attractive as well as original. People may stop to look at advertising matters and read it just because it is attractively produced."<sup>8</sup> Without any sort of attraction it will be impossible for the designer to convey any message whatsoever. The typographical or visual designer needed to therefore understand subtle, visual cues and symbols in order to influence. An integral piece of an attractive design was the relationship between form and content. In a broad sense the commercial advertisement seeks to cultivate this relationship. There cannot be volumes of content with no sort of focal point or direction. The content and form had to relate to each other and complemented each other. As an example, Kurschenka discussed how typography was used. "While the design of commercial printing of scholarly books may seem worlds apart, the typographer for the University of Toronto press must maintain his footing in both worlds."<sup>9</sup> There must, he argued, be a seamlessness between the designs and the content of the book.

The lettering must be "fluid and original"<sup>10</sup>, according to Kurschenka yet needed to look like a conventional advertisement: Convention was as necessary, as it was original and "fluid." This broad, but clear requirement chose concise language to cater to a larger audience, open to a wide variety of contexts with the space and encouragement for experimentation. This requirement applied to all literary designs so these frameworks displayed differently in accordance with their content. Kurschenka agreed with this sentiment, that these two spheres of design needed to be in direct conversation, form and content. To Kurschenka, this relationship was one sided or

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<sup>8</sup> Kurschenka, 147-52.

<sup>9</sup> Kurschenka, 149.

<sup>10</sup> Kurschenka, 147-52.

transactional between the two, but with a set power imbalance; content dictated the form of the text, their use, and their limitations.

To do this, theoretically when thinking of greater visual advertising or simply publicly accepted advertisements, was not at this time considered a smart business practice to bewilder the potential consumer. However, because of the specific cultural and social circumstances of the mid century United States, there was a growing market for these elusive aesthetics. These psychedelic artists liberated the text, overthrowing the content and leading a philosophical revolution. This act reflects the anti-establishment rhetoric of Haight-Ashbury psychedelic community. The lettering of these posters are as much an extension of the sixties' counterculture philosophy as their rock concerts and happenings. This revolution's aim was to envelope all spheres of life in this new altered mindset and lifestyle, to live out the revelations made during a hallucinogenic journey.

According to Kurschenka, the second vital element of good typography was originality. Yet paradoxically, in order for a design to be original it must be made with a large population of viewers in mind in order to achieve both commercial and academic completion of their goals. He wrote " Since the purpose of the book is communication, it follows that communication will be more direct if it is in a customary form. The typographer seeks communication, not interpretation.<sup>11</sup>" It is therefore in the best interest of any visual designer to work with their projected audience. There is a greater visual language occurring in what we consume and how we interact with our capitalist culture through images, motifs, fonts, color schemes etc. and the most innovative of designers can use text in order to translate subtler messages into a format that the

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<sup>11</sup> Kurschenka, 147-52.

audience can read and interpret. These designs ping at the deepest yearnings and secrets of the human heart, and the development of a sophisticated design deepened advertisements communication through advertisements.

It will be helpful to translate Kurschenka's arguments into visual displays and analyze his own work, applying his rules to designs he created during his life. The perimeters in his case were clearly set by the content of the cover, and more importantly the content of the product he collaborated on. He never broke this rule or it would lessen the impact of the information or visually confuse the reader, creating a barrier between interior and exterior and disrupting the seamlessness and function of the blend of design and writing. Harold Kurschenka argued that design was only complementary and ornamental for any advertisement or graphic piece. The power it wielded to strengthen the designer's message was merely visual, and within his framework, limited and surface level. Typographical and graphic design equated to mere trimmings.

*1962: Typography* (see fig. 3) perfectly encapsulates both Harold Kurschenka's graphic and typographic design. This cover separates into two panels filled with blue on the left and gold on the right panel. The text displays the same colors flipped: gold with blue and blue with gold. The text is large and thin. The text does not overpower the areas of blank color. The style of the text is simple, with little to no embellishment on the lettering. It likely compliments the text on the interior of the book, showing cohesion and attention to detail and his audience.

What could be more different and a perfect example of the rejection of these rules than, Lee Conklin's BG-144 (see fig. 1) from 1968, made for Bill Graham, the

owner of The Fillmore and the business savvy, yet secretly groovy rock promoter who put the San Francisco style psychedelia on the map. This tantalizing multi-media spectacle showcased notable acts like Quicksilver Messenger Service and the Grateful Dead. BG-144 is profound and rich with mystery, delight, and a dark draw. The color palette is simple but experimental; he chooses flat grays and a neon red-orange that creates a striking, disorienting brightness. Like all the artistic choices in this poster, the design intends to overwhelm-and disorient as well as dazzle and delight. The images of this diptych are striking and strange, organic and looping, growing and transmuting from ever changing points of departure. The left panel displays a feminine, curvaceous, and nude tree like being, wrapped in the tentacles of a peculiar sneering octopus-like creature with a man's face, and growing their tree limb arms upward into text, which then organizes the remainder of the diptych and mimics mangled dead branches. To add emphasis, the dendriform being's hair grows into loose, weighty vines that hang off letters scripted above.

Echoing the motif of the tree form, The text on the left side of the diptych also grows like a tree, bending and snapping around corners while the right side's focal point, a bust of sorts, grows and plumes like a brain coral from the lower left-hand corner and expands in the foreground, wrapped evenly with flowing, gaseous and liquid text. The bust is a single face composed of creatures, humanoids and animals. Outlines the many forms inform the shape of each other, as well as the facial features of the greater motif. The diptych overall connects the two opposing posters with text trail lines that weave delicately throughout both halves. This piece's movement is hyper and enticing, explosive and intertwined.

What makes this an important work for exploring the essential detail of textual design is that the text and the gestures the artist plays with are deployed to warp and transmute the essential purpose of the text and of the poster itself. This piece is breathtaking and new, fusing textual information with the body and appearance of the figural illustration, rejecting deep space, and choosing a blank background to bring emphasis to the foreground. Yet the lettering of this piece still fits within Kurschenka's requirements of good typographical design: that the text is both attractive and original, following most conventions while breaking just a few in order to achieve "freshness and ...varying impact."<sup>12</sup> Conklin transcended these constraints, not throwing them out, but truly morphing them to fit this psychedelic community and doing so created a fascinating body of work that shares many arguments with other more famous Postmodern artists at this time.

Conklin's linework is so gestural: twisting and turning weaving through gaps between each letter and figure. The text is the focal point of both sides of the diptych but still complements and enhances the other images because of the presence of recognizable text juxtaposed from the blank background. The two elements of readable text, and a blank background work together to try and make some sense of the much less recognizable images accompanying the text. The text is visually stimulating due to the sheer amount of the lettering and its intricate style. The eye becomes agitated and disoriented because of the all-around nature of the line work put into the text. The movement of the text is hypnotic and sweeping. The text on the right side rises like gas and tumbles and floats around itself. The way the text cascades down while having the appearance of rising at the same time creates the water slide effect for the viewer.

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<sup>12</sup> Kurschenka, 147-52.

The lettering of this poster has achieved the first criteria that Kurschenka laid out; it must be attractive enough at first to invite further engagement. The text from both sides of the diptych matches the shadowy, mystic energy and intricate detail work included in the illustrations. The technically breathtaking line work and cross hatching also add to the charge of the concert: deafening loud music, heavy smoke, copious drug consumption, ecstatic dancing, mythic lyrics. Many of the acts that performed at this sacred psychedelic temple, The Fillmore were themselves members of the counterculture. Lee Conklin tapped into the aesthetic world and created an equally amazing and overwhelming experience of movement, rhythm, visuals.

The poster displays exciting originality in typography that Kurschenka laid out: it is inventive, yet it also follows western literary conventions like following linear and highly organized compositions, or reading from top to bottom. Conklin pushed the boundaries of what rules can be broken effectively. This act transformed the usability of the poster: no longer just a simple form of advertising, it has become an intelligent, challenging work. With his psychedelic illustration and stylized letter, the text is not completely illegible but *almost*; pushing the text's role in expression and communication and blurring the lines between accessibility and personal declaration. There are letters on the left panel that stand out but get pulled back into the tangle of form. On the right, full words appear while others dissolve into themselves. This deepens the communication of the poster. This is a call to a new artistic and collective paradigm. This poster itself is an example of re-envisioning creative practices and advertising tradition that better suited countercultural, social, and political sentiments of the Haight.

Scott B. Montgomery, the leading art historian historicizing and analyzing classic late sixties psychedelic posters, argued for this point: that the poster in colloquial terms of this era, was a signifier to “hip” people that they were in fact hip. He argued a similar thesis as Kurschenka when addressing form and content and image and text; that these posters broke sacred artistic laws, but did so masterfully. He wrote that these artists, specifically, Conklin “...incorporate text into the structure of the image, so that the two fuse in such a way as to abjure any perceptible division between word and picture.”<sup>13</sup> By combining these two seemingly disparate elements Conklin pulled away from separation of matter and thought and mixes reality up into a single oneness; always creating and altering.

Montgomery argued that the combination of form and content creates the most lasting visual effect and follows the philosophy behind the counter culture: a shift in consciousness, an expanded and nuanced set of values and beliefs and thus a critical view of greater American culture with an emphasis on organization to influence and change the culture. Montgomery wrote “There is no discernible priority placed on text, pattern, or figural illusion. All are formed in reform together in a perpetual state of becoming and the essentials of a style that is laden with psychedelic countercultural signification.”<sup>14</sup> This perpetual state of becoming captured in this diptych-and the viewer’s reaction to the poster reflects the psychedelic experience, which was essentially the heart center of Haight-Ashbury’s psychedelic community. Those who experienced an LSD or psilocybin trip read these posters differently than those who

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<sup>13</sup> Scott B. Montgomery, "Radical Trips: Exploring the Political Dimension and Context of the 1960s Psychedelic Poster," *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 13, no. 1 (2019): 121-54. Accessed February 7, 2021.

<sup>14</sup> Montgomery, 121-54.

were ignorant, opposed, ambivalent, inexperienced : “It is in their efforts to convey precise, specific information as well as more nebulous allusions to cultural identity that the artist of these posters expand the art of graphic poster design, exploding it into technicolor self – referential matrix of meanings often only legible to the initiated.<sup>15</sup>” The hippie, thanks to the psychedelic experience, was privy to the wily world and walked through the streets with lighter feet. Not to mention this mystique also proved worthwhile for initiating the masses as attendance to shows in San Francisco grew over the years. The psychedelic experience symbolically worked as the separation between psychonauts and everyone else and this separation echos in the poster.

This period in modern western culture experienced radical transformations in the art world starting in the fifties, right after the Second World War ended. Artists became disoluded with “Modernism” from heavy hitters like Mondrian, Picasso, and the schools of thought that eventually became routine and diluted. Artists began to look at the perimeters they needed to adhere to: from acceptable subjects, canonical allusions, to brush technique and even materials. They started peeling back theoretical layers of art and came to question what art was and what it looked like.

Through this process they completely tore art to shreds and revolutionized popular art, arguing that art and artistic beauty lived not only in the gallery space or in academic spaces but in mundane life, objects, and modern spaces like stores, city scapes, roads, parking lots. This artistic shift inspired the conceptual-artistic side of the poster movement of San Francisco and made its success and influence possible. The mid century was a renaissance of thought for post modern artists and idealists and

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<sup>15</sup> Montgomery, 121-54.



altered the path art takes. This period of time in San Francisco came to be known as a return to the essence of human imagination and creativity.

Lettering as a medium for expression goes through a transformative renaissance during the sixties as a new energy of excitement and creativity washes over San Francisco. Words became image, form, composition. Information disintegrated into pure intention, gesture, manifestations and symbols for the incomprehensible and indescribable. The genius behind these posters is their ability to bring the psychedelic into a conceptual space and perfectly assert the greater aim of the posters to create a new dimension.

### Chapter Three. The Art Nouveau and The All Important Line

Our artists, Moscoso, Wilson, and Conklin, overall drew their inspiration from British Romanticism, Baudelaire, Symbolist poets from Europe during the turn of the century. The Haight-Ashbury psychedelic community found these literary movements from their own poetical cannon. These movements, their words and motifs, triumphs and yearning, worked themselves into the minds and hearts of these new hybrid artists-trained and brought up like Enlightenment men, and engaging in the dirty, revolutionary work of the sans-culottes. According to the un-official history, laid out in an online article written for Clio, a graphic and commercial design awards program, titled *Wes Wilson: From The Art Nouveau to Psychedelic*,

He had been working as a layout designer for Contact Printing in San Francisco, where Graham had been printing fliers for his early shows. Wilson took a shine to the content, creating one of the first psychedelic rock posters by taking a classic Secessionist typeface by Alfred Roller and warping it<sup>16</sup>

The author, Angelina Lippert, cites two posters: *Secession 16 Ausstellung* (fig. 7) from 1902 by Alfred Roller, and Wes Wilson's *Otis Rush* (fig. 8) to show the psychedelic transformation of this font. He adheres to the overall font design and spacing of the lettering, this time warping and weaving them through the the trails of this profile. The Art Nouveau, a French art, music, literary, and decorative movement from the *fin de siècle*, made a lasting visual impression on the psychedelic poster makers. The psychedelic print artists retained a love for The Art Nouveau lettering and aesthetics I would like to cite also because of the result of a famous Aubrey Beardsley retrospective held in 1967. This retrospective of the late English, The Art Nouveau printmaker sparked international interest as the graphic edges to Beardsley's gestural illustrations

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<sup>16</sup> "The Aubrey Beardsley Influence," *Life Magazine* (1967).

began to influence the fashion of this time. Taken from a 1967 February edition of Life magazine, this blurb touches on influences changing the cleaner styles of 1960s fashion it said:

Through his ink drawings, the age has lived on-and suddenly it is fascinating this generation. A huge Beardsley show in London last year struck a responsive chord in mod England, where Beardsley motifs popped up everywhere-in clothes, furniture, decor. This month, a bigger show opens in New York's Gallery of Modern Art and U.S. fashion designers are evoking the super elegance Beardsley epitomized.<sup>17</sup>

Aubrey Beardsley's bold black and white interpretations of The Art Nouveau interested and delighted this modern population, raised on a hard black outline of forms. The mix of a graphic hardness paired with a surrealist sway and emotional power is reflected in the psychedelic posters to come. For lettering specifically, the harsh contrasts Beardsley used punctuated throughout the spaces between letters in works like *Otis Rush*.

To highlight the extent to which the script design of The Art Nouveau became reborn in Bacchic fire, a highly simplified, text driven and electric display of design by Wes Wilson masterfully displays this transformation. This poster is by West Wilson, created circa 1966-1968. Haight Ashbury saw the golden days during these two years and subsequently music and poster culture expanded. Styles of script increased in confidence, as artists played with form and meaning, as well as symbol and chromatic vibrancy. Quicksilver Messenger Services played the bill along with The Association, Grassroots, and other acts caught up in this blazing heat. The performance took place at the Fillmore on July 22-23rd. This show's energy exudes a fever, fit for the Summer of Love, but the exact year is unknown. This promise of an all night drug filled extravaganza of droning guitar riffs and sweaty, gyrating bodies fits the style Wes

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<sup>17</sup> "The Aubrey Beardsley Influence."

Wilson wields. The show's line-up is diverse in genres, which confuses and puts us off, but in the context of creating a woven blanket of sounds, textures, visuals, this wacky group of bands speaks to the total art of their work: their *Gesamtkunstwerk*. The script of this poster matches the direction and bursts of a realistic fire,

The Art Nouveau works to further punctuate the richness of these posters as art objects: band posters, taking inspiration from canonical sources like Roller, Beardsley and combining history with highly contemporary cultural signifiers in order to create a more self-embodied work. To show further parallels of ideology and historical narratives, I will cite Gyorgy Vajda, a mid-century scholar on Art Nouveau to first analyze this movement but also to gain a mid-century viewing of The Art Nouveau's history. In summarizing the energy this movement emitted, Vajda writes of "...motion, sway, dance, and emotional onrush..."<sup>18</sup> as the exact sort of energy The Art Nouveau wields. The Art Nouveau danced and twirled around the minds of Victor Miscoso, Lee Conklin, and Wes Wilson, as they connected themselves to this sense of movement and energy. Vajda added to this description, stating that "Robert Shmoltzer identified that outstanding characteristic as the long, dynamic, curved line."<sup>19</sup> It is this manifestation of movement of a beautiful line that drove the script of Haight-Ashbury psychedelia as well as The Art Nouveau. This simulated movement in a fixed plane is inherently psychedelic, mirroring the hallucinations of movement one experiences in the fits of an LSD trip. For The Art Nouveau, this simulated movement captures both a feeling of timelessness and a natural openness to experience, reflecting their love of life and love

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<sup>18</sup> György M Vajda, "Some Aspects of The Art Nouveau in Arts and Letters," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 14, no. 4 (1980).

<sup>19</sup> Vajda, 74.

of the moment. This beautiful traveling line leads the viewer's eyes through these gorgeous works, both through Art Nouveau and San Francisco's psychedelic posters.

The Art Nouveau differed from other European Modernist movements of this time because it began as a decorative art, in the homes of Parisian residents. According to Vajda, The Art Nouveau relied heavily on visuals and imagery which reflects in its domestic debut. He wrote: "...while naturalism and symbolism were originally literary styles, The Art Nouveau originated in the decorative and applied arts. It was primarily visual, dominated by the Sense of sight."<sup>20</sup> During the turn of the century, these decorative artists began rejecting the harshness of the metallic world in an attempt to hold on to any semblance of the old world, a return to wood, clay, and fabric. This created a population, much like the hippies, disillusioned with the lightning fast, chrome plated world around them.

A key conceptual element to The Art Nouveau that parallels 60s sentiments was the unconscious and the subconscious, a seemingly different space than psychedelic, altered space, but a similar sort of infinity. This movement began in the decorative arts but quickly moved into language arts and visual arts as. As the movement progressed darker themes and surrealist mysticism became a part of the language used in describing the world from The Art Nouveau's perspective. It is important to note that themes such as these never left deeply Earthen, and human senses of mortality, spirituality. The hippies, too, maintained a natural sense of flow to the images and poems they created, but an almost advanced-alien-like power of psychedelia turned the hippies towards the stars.

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<sup>20</sup> Vajda, 73

Vadja argued that The Art Nouveau formed because of an interest in the *scientific* natural world, their themes and images not traveling completely into the abstract. Vadja argued as well as specifically a "end of antiquity European malaise"<sup>21</sup>. This feeling of discomfort is what propelled the movement forward in order to satisfy and soothe their worried minds. The psychedelic community of San Francisco relished in this solution to their new world malaise and mirrored their visual culture and rhetoric accordingly. Psychedelic art and design as well as The Art Nouveau were active movements in creating their own little timeless worlds.

During the turn of the century in the western world, bourgeois cultures became fascinated with psychology and the idea of the subconscious because they knew they were on the brink of change, a new world rapidly expanding before them. People reflected and turned inward during the term of the century. They became fascinated with Nietzsche and The idea of messengers. The Art Nouveau movement, according to Vadja, argued that the artist was the closest thing that the modern world or the art world had to a shaman.

The Art Nouveau differed from other modernist movements such as futurism or even symbolism because The Art Nouveau retained a utopian idealism so pure in heart that it cannot be separated from the core of the movement. Because of this turning inward in the face of the coming century The Art Nouveau artists and crafters attempted to hold on to their natural spirit and love of life that was lost to other movements who delved into the world of the subconscious. The aggression of Italian futurism looked sacrilegious in the face of Gustav Klimt's *The Kiss*. The The Art Nouveau looked to antiquity for some of their inspiration and therefore would be sacrilegious to the Italian

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<sup>21</sup> Vadja.

futurists who, in the words of Filippo Marrionetti, in his 1913, *Italian Futurist Manifesto* "want to demolish museums and libraries, fight morality, feminism and all opportunist and utilitarian cowardice"<sup>22</sup>. A love of life for both The Art Nouveau, and psychedelic script makers necessitated an active role in their own lives. Vadja described these active artists, writing The artistic activity of the Masters of Art Nouveau was often "put into service" of something, it was meant to fulfill a function beyond the general function"<sup>23</sup>

The central theme in Art Noveau is natural beauty and through this pure experimentation, they created works unseen before. The Art Nouveau changed poster making and advertising because in simple terms, a modern advertisement suddenly looked like a Modern painting. Not only this, The Art Nouveau created a new calligraphy tradition and a specific script which is so famous today that even my engineer father can pick it out. Before The Art Nouveau, heavily stylized calligraphy and hand written script was dedicated to the literary world, not to mention not thought of in advertising. Because of the strength of the printing press and the subsequent industry it created, presses had the capability to print more elaborate designs. As well, The Art Nouveau caught the attention of the greater public in Europe and quickly became the fashion of the time and advertising, specifically for the arts, took on this aesthetic.

The Art Nouveau did not wish to start the end times or an absolute upheaval in society. This is reflective in the modernist ideals that they lean into such as poster making, hand written script on printed advertisements, as well as their long undulating melodic musical scores that place the intention not on a smart or particularly rigorous

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<sup>22</sup> Filippo Marinetti, "Manifesto of Futurism," (Paris: Le Figaro, 1909), 3.

<sup>23</sup> Vadja.

playing but on the emotion of the tones admitted. The Art Nouveau's music was modern for the time but became a classic and was well loved due to its overall melodic beauty. The Art Nouveau, Vajda argues, opened itself up greatly to eroticism and man's free will, New secular ideas brought up by the already emerged and strengthened intellectual middle class in Europe: "...eroticism, mysticism, symbolism, and art nouveau came together in the workshops of the turn of the century."<sup>24</sup> The convergence of these concepts helped strengthen Art Nouveau's breadth of thought. Art Nouveau as a movement moved past the visual delights of its conception and began tackling the true issues these artists faced.

Much like 60s West Coast sound, music from The Art Nouveau rejected conventional theoretical models in favor of creating a sort of space of sound in order to envelop the listener and transport them into this intentionally elaborately crafted world. The hippies wanted social change and shared this fervor of a complete change in society with other late 19th, early 20th century movements. The Art Nouveau argued that the artist was here to embellish life, that is exactly their intention, and therefore The Art Nouveau was a powerful force in Europe for good during a time that was so uneasy for so many.

It is important to reflect on the contradiction of priorities seemingly that the hippies have in light of analyzing the wants and needs of the The Art Nouveau; wanting a complete change in a new way of life for America in the world not reflecting capitalism not reflecting a technologically advanced society not reflecting a growing communication system yet wanting to bring all of humanity together enter all agree with the help of psychedelic substances that a new radically different economic system

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<sup>24</sup> Vajda. 80.



political system and cultural system is the only way to save humanity. This want necessitates the technological advancements already available to the hippies as well as communication avenues and means of expression. The poster format as well reflects this modern world because it draws on modernism from the past as well as their present. This is where we're beginning to see a disconnect between the ideology and the aesthetics of the hippie movement. The artists behind these posters were accepting of modern convention and wish to use it in order to further their art and these posters are central to the events that helped push the hippie movement further however as the visual culture of the hippie movement proves to be substantial the ideological culture is far more fleeting.

Vadja used the terms "decorative splendor"<sup>25</sup> and "stylized elegance"<sup>26</sup> when describing the lifestyle that the The Art Nouveau movement embodied. In order to combat the growing fear of the New World these people intentionally brought a natural beauty and elegance into all areas of life. Not only did their music reflect a sort of timeless ephemeral beauty with the works of Claude Debussy but the items they placed into their homes and their homes themselves begin to reflect this ideal. Art Nouveau artist creators retreated into or carved out an altered existence, one that gave spiritual, philosophical, and artistic substance.

This timelessness captured in a psychedelic poster from this era breathed the same life into the viewer as a poster from The Art Nouveau. These hippies differed in population from the The Art Nouveau due to the diverse groups: wealthy beats, teenage runaways, academic drop-outs within the movement in their art took on a more

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<sup>25</sup> Vadja. 74

<sup>26</sup> Vadja. 74

accessible format than that of the The Art Nouveau. Of course some of the music and the visuals that these hippies choose were wildly inaccessible to the untrained eye: according to the Clio article when Bill Graham told Wilson that one of his posters would be completely impossible to read therefore pointless to advertise, Wilson replied, “They’ll stop to read it because they can’t read it.”<sup>27</sup> Targeted marketing at its finest.” They saw the enduring charm and medium of a hand drawn advertisement from the The Art Nouveau They embodied this mystical and ephemeral space that the The Art Nouveau captured and just expanded on it this time, arguing of an even more tangible altered space through the use of drugs, as well the rock concert as a transcendent medium for artistic expression.

Movements like Art Nouveau oriented themselves towards the *gesamtkunstwerk* because a holistic art or creation for these artists was the most reflective of their spiritual needs. The The Art Nouveau dedicated their lives to bringing in art as much as they could and reflective of postmodern American artistic ideals yet to come the The The Art Nouveau wanted no separation between art and life which is the core reason why there is so much The Art Nouveau decorative arts as well as architecture. They took a 3-D approach to creating a beautiful space much like the hippies took a synthetic drug to bring on this space.

One last poster (see fig. 9) will show the direct inspiration psychedelic artists took from The Art Nouveau. This poster was not made in Haight-Ashbury and is actually from London taken in 1966 from a Pink Floyd concert at The Marquee. The Pink Floyd’s visuals and sounds aligned perfectly with San Francisco whimsy and showed the

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<sup>27</sup> Angelina Lippert, “Wes Wilson: From Art Nouveau to Psychedelic,” Poster House by Clio. 11, March, 2020.

progression of psychedelic influence. This poster is a psychedelic replica of an Art Nouveau print, a beautiful lady, compositionally emphasized by intricate borders. The colors are a little more vibrant than Art Nouveau's colors. There's more flow and undulation swelling to the words. This time as you can see Pink Floyd is coming out of her cup likely inferring that there's LSD in her glass. The elegant woman who is the focal point of this painting's hair is a little more messy than what you would find in a Mucha poster. The Art Nouveau in terms of script making embodied a beautiful bohemian And a sharp and exciting graphic edge that these Ness that these hippie artists like West Wilson Drew themselves to.

## Chapter Four. Culture Industry Infection.

The culture industry and mass media in America altered culture during the mid century. The culture industry is the meta-industry of cultural development and promotion: human activity and production that furthers society. The mass media is a working part of the culture industry, in charge of shaping and advertising information generated by the culture industry. Not only were advertisements controlling the outcomes of the consumer market, now advertisements were inspiring visual culture. In order to analyze the impact the American culture industry and mass media made across the United States is *Culture Industry Reconsidered* by Theodor W Adorno is a helpful resource as it was written in 1971, a time when academics knew even more about the culture industry. The culture industry is a terrifying concept that goes back to notions of dystopia in the end times. The amount of console that the American consumer market gained during the mid century shaped the way that media and culture has progressed to this point. as well the mass media itself as an entity refined during the mid century. The idea of mass media was not possible until this modern era with the technological advancement these people had at their disposal.

According to Adorno the culture industry was only made possible by the technological capabilities as well as the volume of work put into socio-economic theory. The culture industry in Adorno is a cold machine-like tool for the public despite how terrifying it is. One reason for panic is the rule of the population in the culture industry. The population of the culture industry is just another metric. Adorno wrote: “

Thus although the culture industry undeniably speculates on the conscious and unconscious state of millions towards which it is directed, the masses are not

primary, but secondary, they are an object of calculations; an appendage of the machinery.<sup>28</sup>

This objectification sucks all humanism out of culture creation which is intentional as analysts believed and saw that the automation in the streamlining of culture and the use of advertisements was the most profitable. Adorno argued that the relationship that the culture industry had with a given population was inherently exploited and one-sided.

The masses are not the measure but the ideology of the culture industry, even though the culture industry itself could scarcely exist without adapting to the masses. The cultural commodities of the industry are governed, by the principle of the realization as value, and not by their own specific content and harmonious formation.<sup>29</sup>

The culture industry has to formulate a care for the public and the actual automation has to be unrecognizable. The culture industry was designed to fool the public into believing that individuals had their best interest at heart which goes back to a greater capitalist and conservative ideals.

In order to strengthen the bond that the culture industry has with a group of people, they have to abuse this trust and reliance. The culture industry thus, mirroring a basic capitalist model, needs expansion and growth in order to keep a smooth, continual, maintenance of the public. "The culture industry misuses its concern for the masses in order to duplicate, reinforce and strengthen their mentality, which it presumes is given and unchangeable."<sup>30</sup> This presumed hold on the culture industry was backed by the growth of American consumerist society well into the 1980s. American culture became an international influence, slowly spreading conservative, capitalist agendas to the far reaches of the globe.

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<sup>28</sup> Theodor W. Adorno and Anson G. Rabinbach, "Culture Industry Reconsidered," *New German Critique*, no. 6 (1975).

<sup>29</sup> Adorno, 12.

<sup>30</sup> Adorno, 12.

Adorno argued the culture industry cheats the masses out of any actual achievement or consumption of goods as the culture industry places their intention on creating a continual projected better outcome. The masses sadly are still at the ironic heart center of the culture industry and a vital, easily manipulated factor. With the masses in mind only as a means to an end the culture industry puts the rest of its energy into PR and fake warm feelings. Adorno writes "brought to bear is a general uncritical Key census advertisement produced for the world so that each product of the culture industry becomes an advertisement."<sup>31</sup> Advertising culture therefore expanded monstrously during the influence of the culture industry entered everyday life: home television, the radio in the car, the radio on the kitchen table, the newspaper, catalogs, advertisements happening between shows that themselves might be advertising different products, new billboards paired with new superhighways, an automated system of alternating advertisements on a fixed position on the road, the letters and images stretched to be able to accommodate the speed of a car, now bombarding the consumer for me yet another sphere of life. This is insanity.

Another key factor in the working culture industry of this time is their aesthetics in the visual culture that they created. The coldness and the machine-like automation of the culture industry translated into the visual culture of advertisements. The culture industry and mass media thrives in this hellish world of coldness and detachment however man-made it is, and thrives on an unknown power and potential for influence. The culture industry, according to Adorno, combines streamlining as in the simplification of categorization of every detail involved in the creation of pieces of culture of advertisement combined with photographic hardness in order to simulate a sense of an

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<sup>31</sup> Adorno, 13.

objective reality as well as a human perspective of this reality. This is fine tuned and constantly being reevaluated as time changes in his sentiments change finally heavy precision cleanness and attention to detail is the icing on the cake for the culture industries communication style all of this being said Adorno ads that the culture industry simulates a sentimentality in a romance to the content it provides in order to further fool and influence a mystified population. The culture industry is the greatest ruse and yet through this culture is furthered through time. It is a harsh scientific approach to culture creation, however the end result for the culture industry isn't actually human activity and culture, it is only monetary gain and the expansion of influence. The culture industry is ultimately lacking because of the soul drive for money and power and this reflects how uneasy it makes the mess public even while they participate and benefit from the culture industry. Advertisements on television are uncanny for a reason and it's because of the presence of the culture industries influence on the communication style.

Just what can the consumer do? When thinking about what the human soul can do to combat this culture industry and mass marketing going to take a look at Taher Razik's 1963 essay *The Mass Media in American Culture* because it touches exactly on the inner struggle of a participating population in a culture that is only a reflection of an ideal and the projected future, all ephemeral and not actually real. Taher Razik argued that consumers had no escape, just options: "Yet advertisers seem to sell their goods, perhaps because one must buy either this or that brand or not. One wonders what would happen if all products ceased advertising simultaneously."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Taher A. Razik, "Media: The Mass Media in American Culture," *Audio-Visual Communication Review* 11, no. 4 (1963).

It is pointless to argue that the American culture Industry gives people what they want because they fabricate the group of people, their needs as well as the products and resources to satisfy their needs. Razik writes: ``The free flow of information, commentary and fantasy available at the flick of a switch creates a pleasant cozy semi narcotic atmosphere which rarely enlist the active cooperation of the individual, but instead threatens to make him completely passive."<sup>33</sup>

Razik talks about the average American as the research and study model for the mass media. He goes through a narrative of an average day for an average American during the 1960s, describing the type of food the average American eats for breakfast and the television program and through this, shows different areas of manipulation and influence the mass media and culture industry can wield in order to target specific demographics of people, categorizing them into groups such as cereal enjoyers versus cereal haters. Adorno mirrors some of Razik's opinions about targeting demographics and summarizes the culture industry into a practice of highly resonated "conservative basic categories"<sup>34</sup>. Categorization is an administrator tool that the culture industry and mass media seems to fixate on, taking the practice of categorization to the furthest possible parameters. This volume of knowledge about populations is exactly what keeps the culture industry progressing. They seek out more information from a population therefore strengthening their relationship with the population as stated before as well as strengthening their influence over a population and hopefully, down the line, will be able to predict the outcomes of any given part of an operation. The culture industry is a way for already powerful figure heads and CEOs being able to play God.

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<sup>33</sup> Razik, 143.

<sup>34</sup> Adorno, 17.



This top down approach to creating the need creating the population creating a product to satisfy such need comes across objectively as quite militaristic and fascist stick however this practice of categorization and the studying of demographics according to Adorno during the 1960s was inspired by enlightenment ideals from England in the late 17th to early 18th century, a time in which great saw it was put into the role of man but as well as the role of the intellectual process separated from men. During the enlightenment a lot of humanism ideals and values began to get great popularity but analysis on industrial processes and machines also gained much popularity. Adorno argued that this industry of the culture is just a standardization of such a practice and this standardization is an inherently modern western idea. criticism of the The culture industry in their very real humanitarian issues apparently matters not after all because as Razik argued mass median culture industry backed advertisements and Content are succeeding in the economic market despite criticism. Again in the end the human factor is only as important as the other factors working together.

The culture industry and mass media too ,began to alter other parts of the greater culture, notably famous contemporary art under the influence of Pop. The speed in which information was transferred now dwarfed the advancements of the industrial revolution due to the television and radio. Information traveled at a faster rate than ever before during the mid century in the United States. The sheer volume of advertisement and media influence on American culture can be reflected in the psychedelic posters, from their text driven advertisement format to the flattening of the picture plane, reducing color palettes and motifs down to basic contrasting colors, symbolic icons and

choosing clean graphic mark making. Artists chose unconventional art forms for the art world but so normal for modern American society.

Since the turn of the century the contemporary artists of the 20th century used multiple unconventional forms of communication in order to express themselves such as manifestos, essays, art books, as well as stage performance, music, and dance. These artists altered the deeper meaning of their proclamations through the manipulation of these mediums, both commenting on a world in which convention ruled, and a self-awareness, still, of the limitations of artistic communication. During this period of time artists in various movements used forms like comic strips or mass produced product packaging, like Andy Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* from 1964. Artists explicitly rejected conventional, narrative, or even Modern painting and sculpture as the true acceptable form of art and instead made a statement as to what it was like to be an artist in mid century America.

During the 1950s and moving into the 1960s the contemporary art which gained the most popularity became increasingly flatter and more explicit due to the streamlining of communication. This inevitably changed so-called "high art" to be more relatable and accessible to the greater public. It is therefore not surprising to accept that these young artists like James Rosenquist and Robert Rauschenberg expressed themselves in this flat, vibrant style which they grew up consuming. They used the tool of advertisement in order to satisfy their artistic goals. Their audience retained a love for popular images and design motifs and these artists' attention to their audience translated into styles that complemented their tastes. The contemporary reality of Richard Hamilton's *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?* from 1956 or Rosalyn Drexler's

*Love and Violence* from 1965 came from the modern landscape: a world heavily saturated by the monstrous consumer market growing and growing throughout this time. A flat world, rich in color but heavily reduced. A world organized and yet disjointed, disconnected from the beauty of Antiquity and instead wired into a beauty so razor-sharp and smooth, comforting for this new generation. The psychedelic posters worked further to break even with this new beauty, to create a timeless space encapsulated in a mid-century mind. They transcend the mundane but the use of convention cannot help but also comment on life in The United States.

Victor Moscoso's *Chambers Brothers Band (Neon Rose #12)* (fig 9) will be used in order to show the influence on the culture industry and the mass media on these specific posters being art objects taken from the mid century in the United states. This poster bears a striking difference to other designs shown before in its content as well as its composition in regards to the relationship between text and the rest of the image. This poster shows the hallmarks of psychedelic poster characteristics discussed before, such as a striking and rich color palette, reduced down to a basic color combination in order to dazzle and show distinction. This poster argues strongly that it is an advertisement rather than alluding to the viewer and attempting to disguise content and form completely. The printing technique is reminiscent of pop artists from days before and the added portrait style reflects Andy Warhol's large volume of Pop portraiture . The use of Ben-Day dots as well as layering basic washes of color over each other give the poster recognizable signifiers of a mass media advertisement, a nod to Roy Lichtenstein. According to an article written for Cooper Hewitt, another un-official history tells of the process that Victor Moscoso went through for this flawless end product:

To create the image, Moscoso took a photograph of a model wearing sunglasses that he found in a fashion magazine, hand-sketched the intricate lettering inside the frames of the glasses, and then selected a color palette of pink, orange and blue that would produce the vibrating effect. The poster has since become an icon of the psychedelic movement and graphic design. It was one of roughly eighty posters that Moscoso designed in the 1960s.<sup>35</sup>

The influence of modern culture and mass media diversifies the sorts of image making by the psychedelic community celebrating not only their distinct revolutionary messages but it's well communicating to the audience that despite their shamanistic revelations and visions of worlds unknown, these artists were Americans living in a modern society in which culture industry in the mass media dominated spheres of influence. This gives San Franciscan psychedelia even deeper and more meaningful American sensibility to the art making and the thinking surrounding artistic communication.

This poster is attractive and comfortable to look at. The glow emitted from the rich oranges and pinks paired with the exciting electric blue does more to delight the reader or if you were rather than disoriented and confused. The woman could be a reference to the growing “hip culture” in America as the youth turned to themselves for style and stylistic direction. This portrait is reminiscent of this photograph (fig. 10) taken of Nico, one of these cultural figure heads, from a still of Andy Warhol's 1966 experimental film *Chelsea Girls*. As well she could be the embodiment of LSD, beautiful and intriguing, elusive and intent on grabbing the attention of the viewer. Such secret codes like Montgomery argued earlier, was a hallmark of a hidden, symbolic visual language hippies shouted through the dark to each other with

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<sup>35</sup> Caitlin Condell, *Good Vibrations*. 29, January 2013. Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum. <https://www.cooperhewitt.org/2013/01/29/good-vibrations/>.

The woman, her eyes hidden behind her glasses, appears intently at the viewer, instructed to leave them a message: read her eyes, literally. Unlike the posters shown before, Moscoso does nothing to try and break up the uniformity in the borders of the images and the text. The lettering fits within their parameters and their shape conforms to these greater shapes. In this they do not make an attempt to completely take over control over content and function yet there is still commentary. Clearly, the focal of the poster is on the silent, literal message that the woman conveys to the viewer. The concentration of hand written script into this vessel for the message implies psychedelia and implies a drug filled event as the answer to any question that the viewer has.

The woman through her eyes is directing the masses towards these rock concerts and posters. Simplified posters like this, catered to a much larger audience, were much more accessible to read, and worked as Pied Pipers for the psychedelic rock community in Haight-Ashbury. Victor Moscoso used some of the techniques discussed previously by Adorno, such as the simplification and streamlining of messages as well as adding a photographic hardness in order to add a more realistic and easily identifiable visual language. The style of the poster therefore, opened their audience into a much larger population This poster is a reflection of the culture industry in the mass media as well as the psychedelic communities of working cogs in their media and culture industry. holistically again this shows a 20th century approach to communication and expression and reflects as well the rapidly altering high art world during the mid century in the United States specifically.

The use of lettering in this poster enhances further embellishment is the true meaning behind the advertisement; an invitation into a transformative and mind altering

experience. The ratio of the greater image to the text adds an extra detail of seriousness to the overall message. Because the text and its beautiful free expression is only occupying a small area of the image it further emphasizes the text in relation to the rest of the poster. reminding the viewer of the exclusivity and extraordinarily rare circumstances to be able to carry such a transformative event. Victor Muscoso is trying to convey a sense of importance and magic of these concerts and the activities that go on and it translates so subtly yet so powerfully.

## Conclusion. Script as Prayer

It is first important to state that the ideological side of the Haight-Ashbury psychedelic community was not strong enough to transcend political, social, and cultural obstacles in front of them. This is due partly, to a lack of organization on the parts of psychedelic figureheads like Timothy Leary and Ken Kesey to actually stir up enough political backing. Except for hippie tourism, there is no history of a mass exodus to California or the heads of state holding hands as one at The Golden State Park. Except for the initial rock dance shows put on by the Family Dog, my research showed that rock shows in the following years were not nearly as ideologically impactful for their cause even during the Summer of Love.

As well, the Rock scene grew much larger than the humble psychedelic neighborhoods of San Francisco and this jet setted their visuals to the mainstream. This helped to cement and further elaborate on the visual and audible culture of the psychedelic movement from California as vibrant, psychedelic communities popped up in the United Kingdom for example. At the blink of an eye the Beatles of all people started singing about “Where rocking horse people eat marshmallow pies”<sup>36</sup>. The influence of San Francisco psychedelia on music from other communities was rapid and soon psychedelic music began to split off into further sub-genres. For example, the UK based band, Pink Floyd came out with baroque style psychedelic infused pop with whimsical lyrics like this from Syd Barrett 1967's *The Gnome*:

“And then one day

Hooray!

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<sup>36</sup> *Pink Floyd – The Gnome*, n.d., accessed May 4, 2022, <https://genius.com/Pink-floyd-the-gnome-lyrics>.

Another way for gnomes to say

Ooooooh my"<sup>37</sup>

Psychedelic music's jump into the mainstream by the musical side of San Francisco psychedelia did not in fact help the hippie community's anti-capitalist agendas.

Psychedelic Rock and Pop became the most popular music in the United States and beyond during Haight-Ashbury's heyday and therefore transcended the psychedelic community of Northern California in search of the dazzling lights of stardom and the success that this popularity brought them. At the end of the 60s, many of the songbirds who brought psychedelia to the masses, elevated themselves to such a high social status to Icon-dom, that their membership in the psychedelic community made up only one part of their story.

The United States as the 60s drew to an end it was becoming increasingly conservative and consumer minded as the rest of America voiced their dissent and disagreements with this marginally microscopic minority of the population in favor of an older . America during the 60s was still coming out of World War II era social conservatism while now dealing with the new Cold War with the Soviet Union as well as fighting overseas in Vietnam. across the population a question of the future drove both the hate Ashberry hippies and the conservative squares further into their own ideological corners. The greater conservative America couldn't seem to handle the amount of social upheaval that was happening around them and there was a sense that their world was falling apart and they wanted a return to cookie-cutter America.

The Nixon administration and the greater conservative climate sought to fight back the psychedelic revolution both culturally and politically. This was first done by

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<sup>37</sup> *Pink Floyd – The Gnome*, n.d., accessed May 4, 2022, <https://genius.com/Pink-floyd-the-gnome-lyrics>.



classifying LSD as a scheduled one controlled substance by the governor of California in May of 1966, already in the prime stages of the Haight-Ashbury movement. With LSD as an illegal classification, the widespread distribution of a controlled substance was no longer possible in the scale to which these psychedelic profits could offer. It's hard to get a psychedelic revolution going when you don't have any psychedelic substances to give people to bring on the revolution. In 1971, in a press conference Nixon made his intentions explicit stating that "America's public enemy number one, is drug abuse."<sup>38</sup> This mark shifts for the greater American population as conservative politics begin to infiltrate American culture on a large scale. Legality is an immediate taboo so it is not hard to understand why the psychedelic movement disjoined itself and split off into separate groups.

The hippie movement became more synonymous over time with the aesthetics of the psychedelic revolution rather than the ideals of politics. Because of the growing population and subsequent market for Haight-Ashbury goods the core of the movement began to disperse and soon it became hard to tell who was a hippie and who was wearing their hippie clothes. As the hippie movement expanded it frayed at the seams. hippie aesthetics were beginning to be seen in the greater American culture as people gravitated only towards the aesthetics and not towards their politics. This Pepsi advertisement, *James Brown, Bring It On Home* (fig. 11) reflects a new psychedelic American consumer market, acquiring psychedelic visuals in order to gain from the energy surrounding psychedelic script. One could argue that the beauty and purity of the visuals were corrupted by greater American and hippie society however psychedelic

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<sup>38</sup> "Public Enemy Number One: A Pragmatic Approach to America's Drug Problem », June 29, 2016, <https://www.nixonfoundation.org/2016/06/26404/>.

script's influence left an impact on advertising and therefore became a successful artistic movement, impacting the trajectory of design into the future.

This project has been years in the making:

I went to the Philadelphia Museum of art with my mother in the spring of 2018 to see a show being held that displayed design from throughout the 60s and specifically boasted a collection of classic psychedelic ephemera. I was intrigued to go because of a deep love of cascading guitar riffs and waves of cymbals from the essential selected discography: Jefferson Airplane, Steppenwolf, The Grateful Dead. I poured over images of Wes Wilson's letters online but could only imagine what the intensity of their hues could be in person. I am a frightfully visual person as well as a sybarite and a visual artist. Needless to say, I loved to get all tangled up in psychedelic script. Coincidentally as well, my mother and grandmother raised me on a healthy diet of Peter Max prints, so my eye was trained to look at such hypnotic mark making. I found myself fascinated with the visuals that accompanied the ever elusive "psychedelic experience", a specifically visual way of depicting subjective, almost completely cognitive hallucinations.

After leaving the show the only pieces that stuck in my mind were their collection of Haight-Ashbury posters. The initial shock of the saturation of color floored me and stayed with me. Next it was just the presence of these letters. They commanded such a high expectation from me as the viewer that at times, I had to look away to nurse new eye pain. Upon opening them, I found myself feeling lighter and somehow calm; almost resting in the blur of my unfocused gaze. I felt at peace within this hum as the blur lifted

me up. I felt myself leave my body as I slowly dissociated into the rafters of the room. My, this is odd. I felt like I was dead, mediating, and being reborn all at once. Nothing had actually happened yet.

I was experiencing a very subtle, almost mini psychedelic experience through the text alone. This imaginary space was a transitory dimension, combining my internal and external realities into a single infinity. The air around me was thick with a psychic fog; it was hard to breathe. As I closed my eyes to try to orient myself again, I heard a pin drop light years away; echoing back through the infinite.

A poem I wrote during my Studio Arts department career touches at the simulated rhythm of psychedelic script. This is in order to further reflect both the psychedelic experience being one of momentum as well as the rock concerts which also encapsulated a nauseating throbbing of dance and exaltation:

Tearing shit up in a Bacchan Stupor  
I lift my head above the gyrating mass  
And remember I am on earth

A white strip of paper  
This white strip turned red but just in the middle  
A target of sorts  
Radiating backward  
Inside out and back in again  
I lurch

Inside this infinity our ears become reverb knobs  
Inside this infinity tongues turn wooden  
Inside this infinity we are reborn in crimson floodlights

These works are true studies of a fervor for detailing in an obsessive compulsive perfection and embellishment. These posters space the letters of their texts out so evenly that the trained I couldn't tell who drew them, the letters themselves or the artist, which furthers the astonishment that the viewer has upon learning that these were hand

drawn before being printed . The posters contain realistic images of people and animals, of mystical vegetal and organic forms that are almost anatomically and proportionally perfect, overwhelming the viewer even further. Already they swirl and sweep through the page, as if the words themselves are dizzy from all of their movement and vibration. The composition of the pieces with an overall graphic edge gives a sense of balance to the mayhem that is the text. However the text does prevail the struggle in this end and maintains its position as the most impactful and memorable aspects of the design as well as the driving force in the movement throughout the rest of compositions.

This sense of unstoppable, organic movement is what pushed these psychedelic printmakers to the furthest reaches of their creativity. The psychedelic poster designers during the Haight-Ashbury heyday understood the importance of their own lettering in the timeline of history. Like Art Nouveau before, script never looked as fresh, inspiring, contemporary . These artists gave the text the authority to take on the brunt of both the visual makeup and conceptual body. Again, text worked to cradle the overall form of the individual images that make up the poster as well as the greater form of the poster. They looked at sources both from history and from the worlds around them. This questioned the authority of modern conventions and playfully displayed their disdain for following the order of business.

This project was an attempt at a dive into the disorienting and sublime world of humanities' innermost areas of thought and exploration. Psychedelic compounds are a precious gift to the human experience, holding insights so profound they must be coming from some sort of Godhead or spiritual truth-keeper. Lee Conklin, Wes Wilson,

and Victor Moscoso somehow took insights, visuals, and styles from this magic fairy world and brought them into the tangible world. Their works manipulated the very function of the text in relation to the posters on a whole while being able to advertise basic information. This Postmodern period of art in the United States saw leaps and bounds of progress in the realm of conceptually driven art. Postmodern art is a tool creatives can tap into in order to better understand themselves and their own art.

Fig.1. The Trips Festival, Haight-Ashbury, San Francisco. (Source:

<https://www.kqed.org/arts/11263131/ga-stewart-brand-revisits-the-trips-festival-50-years-later>)



Fig.2. The Psychedelic Shop circa 1965, Haight-Ashbury, San Francisco. (Source: <https://www.oregonhistoryproject.org/essays/>)

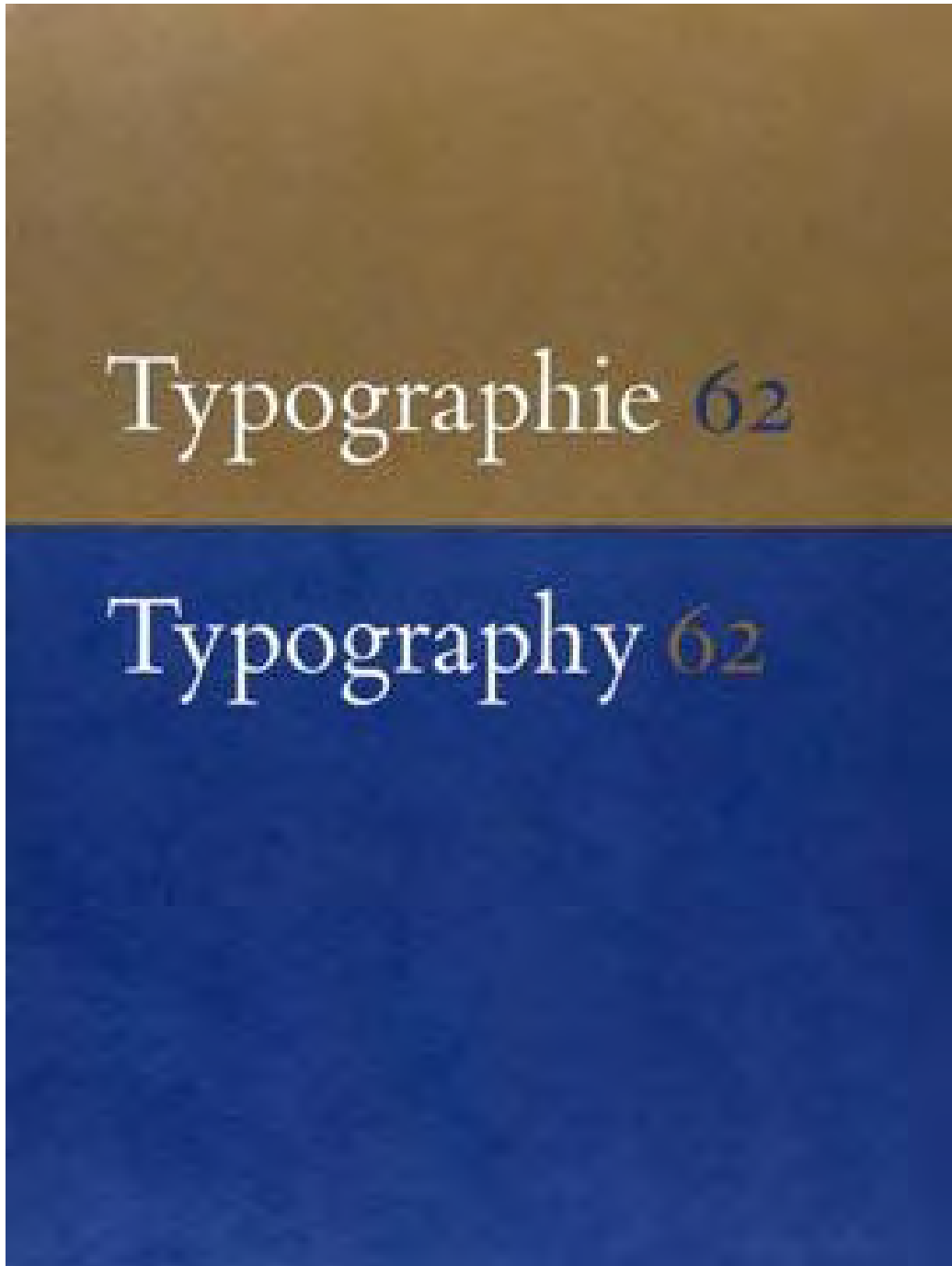


Fig 3. Harold Kurschenka. *Typography*, 62. (Source: [http://ccca.concordia.ca/artists/work\\_detail.html?languagePref=en&mkey=47152&title=Harold+Kurschenska&artist=Harold+Kurschenska&link\\_id=5220](http://ccca.concordia.ca/artists/work_detail.html?languagePref=en&mkey=47152&title=Harold+Kurschenska&artist=Harold+Kurschenska&link_id=5220))



Fig. 4. Lee Conklin, *BG-144*. (Source: <https://www.classicposters.com/poster/144-1/>)







Fig. 5. Left side of poster.



Fig. 6. Ride Side of the Poster.



Fig. 7. Alfred Roller. *Secession 16*

*Ausstellung.* (Source: [https://www.moma.org/collection/works/133908?artist\\_id=37919age=1&sov\\_referrer=](https://www.moma.org/collection/works/133908?artist_id=37919age=1&sov_referrer=) )



Fig. 8. Wes Wilson. *Otish Rush*. (Source: <https://www.wolfgangs.com/posters/grateful-dead/poster/BG051.html>)



Fig. 9. Wes Wilson, *The Association*. (Source: [95.630](#))

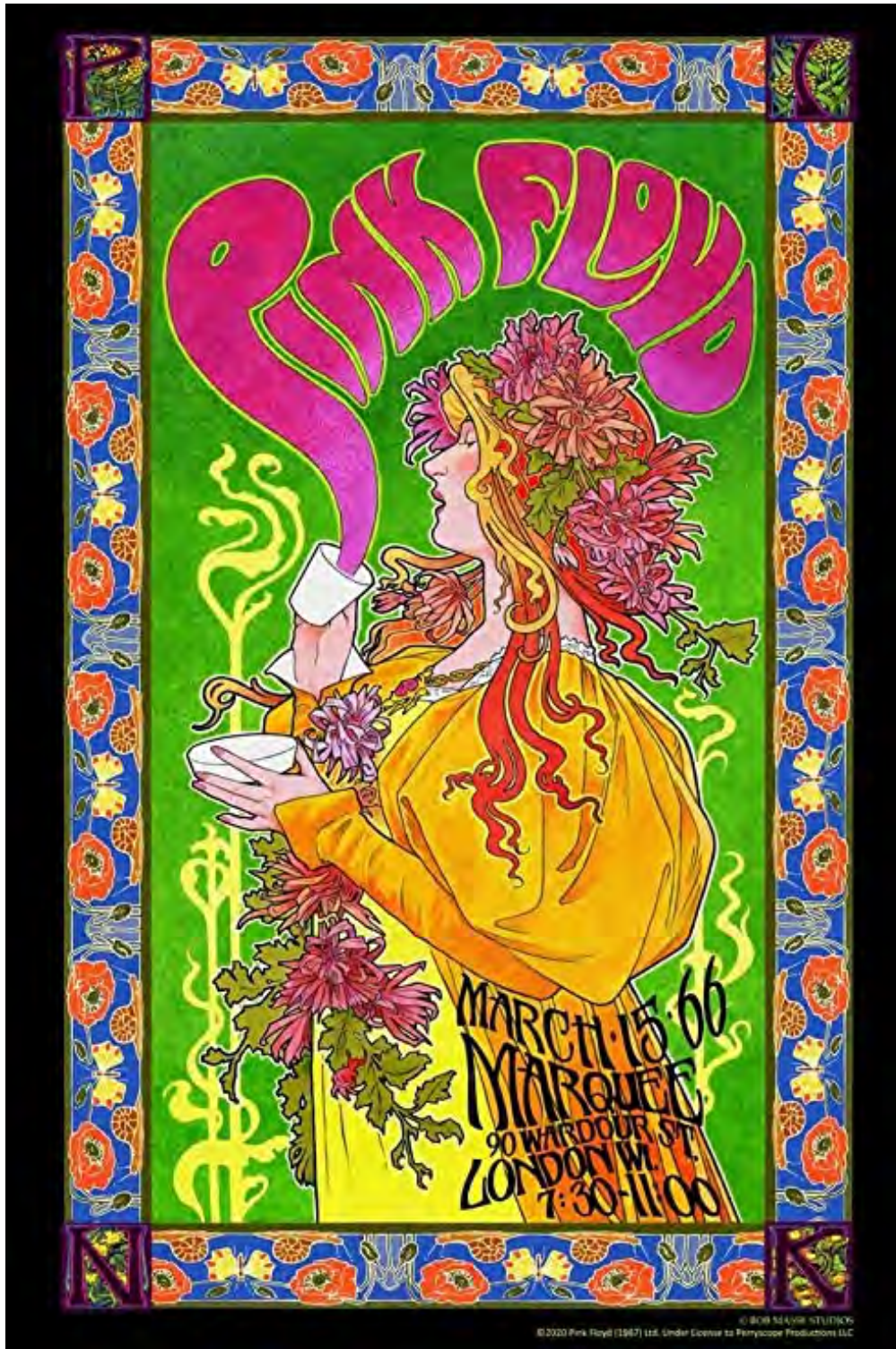


Fig. 10. Bob Masse. Pink Floyd Commemorative Poster.(Source:

<https://www.steffichfineart.com/products/neil-young-and-crazy-horse-with-lucinda-williams-july-4-2003-saratoga-performing-art-centre-saratoga-springs-ny>)

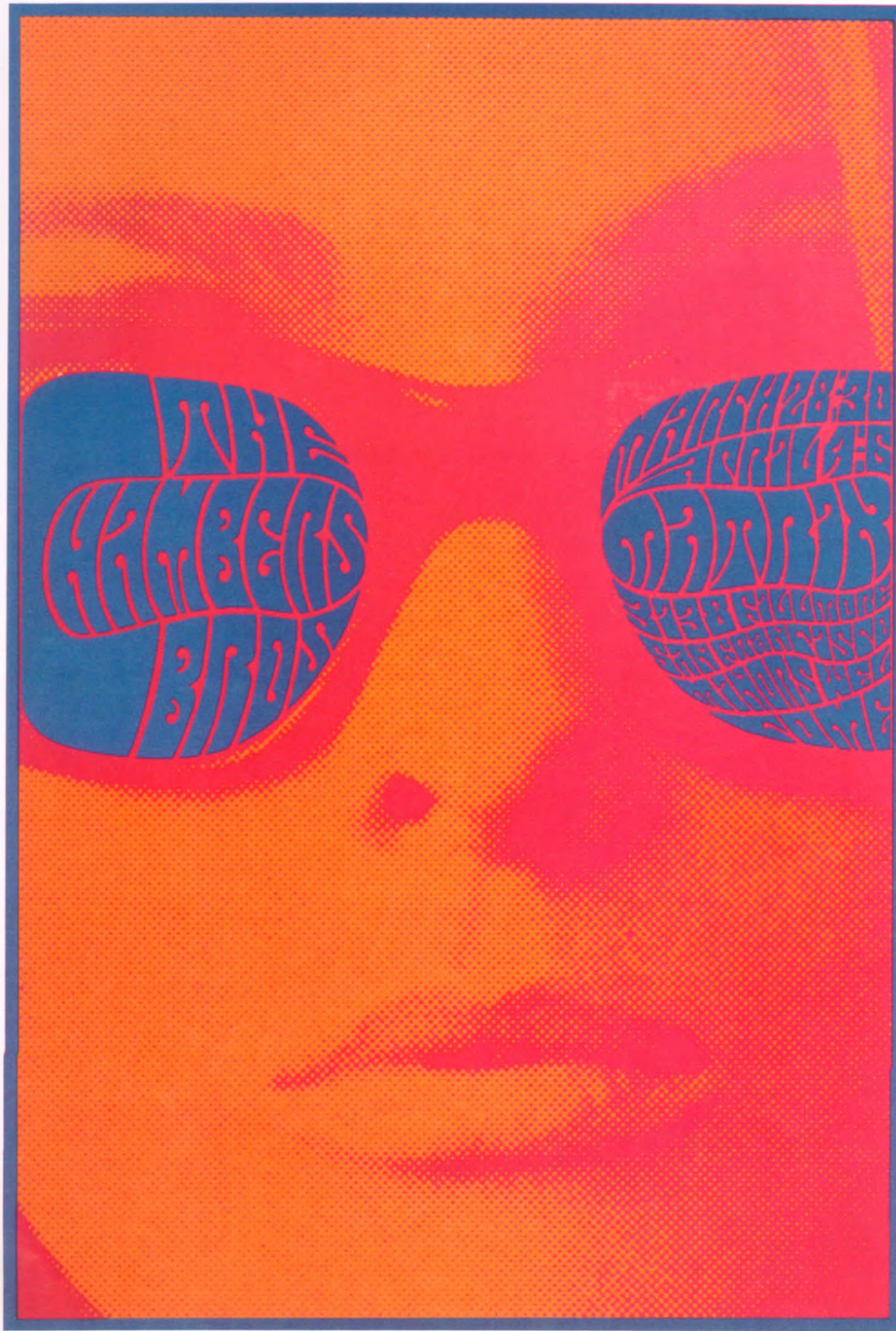


Fig. 9. Victor Moscoso. *Chambers Brothers Band* (Neon Rose #12). (Source:

<https://www.cooperhewitt.org/2013/01/29/good-vibrations/>)





Fig. 10. And Warhol. Nico, Chelsea Girls.

(Source:[https://www.allposters.com/-sp/Chelsea-Girls-Nico-1966-Posters\\_i9343359\\_.htm](https://www.allposters.com/-sp/Chelsea-Girls-Nico-1966-Posters_i9343359_.htm))



Fig. 11. Unknown Artist. *James Brown: Bring It on Home*. (Source: <https://scalar.usc.edu/works/counter-cola/the-real-thing>)

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